Title: Englefield Grange; or, Mary Armstrong's Troubles

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Release Date: December 30, 2010 [EBook #34794]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Malcolm Farmer, Mary Meehan and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at https://www.pgdp.net

ENGLEFIELD GRANGE

OR, *MARY ARMSTRONG'S TROUBLES*

BY MRS. H. B. PAULL

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Warne's Star Series

LONDON:
FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.
AND NEW YORK

"The love of money is the root of all evil."—1 Tim. vi. 10

CONTENTS.

ENGLEFIELD GRANGE

CHAPTER I.

BY THE SEA.

The afternoon sun of early summer shone brightly on the arm of the sea which joins the Solent at West Cowes, in the Isle of Wight. A few boats were moored alongside the landing-place, but as the season had not yet commenced, the boatmen were standing about idle, scarcely hoping for a fare.

Presently three ladies and a little boy were observed descending the steps, and one of the men, with whom the ladies seemed acquainted, hastily advanced, and touching his cap, exclaimed—

"Want a boat, ma'am, to-day? splendid tide!"

The lady was about to reply, when her youngest daughter, a beautiful girl of about eighteen, touched her on the arm, and exclaimed—

"Oh, mamma, look at the waves; is not the sea very rough to-day?"

"Lor', no, Miss," replied the man, "that's only a little ripple, caused by the fresh breeze; the boat 'ill sail beautiful if you're going up the Solent, for she'll have wind and tide in her favour."

Maria St. Clair looked above and around her as the man spoke, and truly the sea presented a charming aspect of crested, tiny waves, rippling in the breeze, and sparkling beneath the sun, shining in a sky of brilliant blue.

Her fears almost gave way at the sight, yet her sister's remark, although it shamed her into silence, did not complete the cure.

"Why, Maria, how can you be so foolish? If you had sailed to India and back, as I have done, you would laugh at your fears of a sea like this."

"You shall not venture, my dear," said her mother, who wore a widow's costume, "unless you feel quite willing to do so."

"Oh, thank you, mamma, but I would rather go with you. I want to conquer this nervousness on the water; why, even on a steamer I always feel afraid."

While they talked the men were launching a prettily-rigged pleasure boat, the colours of green and gold with which it was painted gleaming in pleasant contrast with the rippling water; and over the seats in the stern an awning was stretched to protect the ladies from the sun's rays.

Mrs. St. Clair and her elder daughter, Mrs. Herbert, with her little boy of four, were, however, safely seated in the boat before Maria could make up her mind to follow them.

At a part of West Cowes near this landing-place stood a row of private houses, the back windows overlooking the sea, and the gardens reaching down to it protected by a sea wall. As in Devonshire, the foliage of this beautiful island in some part stretches down to the water's edge, and gardens near the sea are often well filled with roses and other summer flowers in profusion.

In one of these gardens, and very near the boundary wall against which the high tide dashed pleasantly, stood a gentleman earnestly watching the embarkation of the party in the pleasure-boat.

His dress was more like that of the yeoman of those days than the seaside costume of a gentleman. The thick shoes and drab gaiters, part of the customary garb of a farmer, were, however, concealed by the garden wall, and when for a moment he took off the white, low-crowned beaver hat, and rubbed his fingers through his hair, the face and head were those of a handsome man of the intellectual type. Regular features, clear olive skin, dark sparkling eyes, hair, eyebrows, and whiskers of almost raven blackness, and a certain air of refinement, were certainly not quite in character with his homely attire.

"Where have I seen that face?" he said to himself, as Maria St. Clair paused irresolutely with one foot on the prow of the boat. "It is very beautiful."

And the gentleman's reflections were not far wrong. Plainly, but tastefully dressed, the lithe figure slightly bent forward in a shrinking, yet graceful attitude, and the outstretched tiny foot were attractive enough to excite notice. But the face truly deserved the epithet bestowed upon it by the lounger in the garden. Fair at this moment, even to paleness, the delicately-chiselled features, the half-opened lips, expressive of fear, and exposing the pearly teeth, and the long fair ringlets that fell on her shoulders made up a picture which when once seen was not easily forgotten. Such a face is often supposed to belong to a woman devoid of character or insipid, but from this appearance it was saved by marked eyebrows darker than the hair and violet eyes shaded by long dark lashes.

While thus Edward Armstrong stood making a photograph of the young girl on his memory, he recalled the fact that he had seen her at church on the previous Sunday as one of the pupils of a ladies' school, and had been attracted to notice her by her retiring timid manner, which to him formed her greatest charm.

He remained to watch till he saw her safely seated in the boat with the other ladies, and then, as the rowers turned in the direction of the Solent, he found himself observed by the ladies. At once, but not abruptly, he left his post of observation, saying to himself, "I'll find out the name of that fair lassie from my landlady; she has lived here many years and knows everybody." At the garden door he met the very person of whom he thought, and she at once opened the subject without requiring him to "beat about the bush" for that purpose.

"You've been watching the ladies embark, sir," she said; "it's a lovely day for a row or even a sail, if they like. Mrs. St. Clair and her daughter, Mrs. Herbert, often hires that boat for themselves, but it's the first time I've ever seen Miss Maria on the sea, except in a steamboat; she's very much afraid of the water."

"Is Mrs. St. Clair a visitor?" he asked.

"Well, sir, in one way she is, for she's visiting her daughter, Mrs. Herbert, who resides here with her little boy. Her husband, Captain Herbert, is in India, and she came over about twelve months ago, on account of her health.

"Mrs. St. Clair has a house near London, and she's a real lady, sir," continued the old woman, glad to have for once an interested listener. "She's one of the Elliots; they're a Warwickshire family, and she married the Honourable Mr. St. Clair, a grandson of Lord Selmore's. He wasn't very well off, sir—you know those younger sons seldom are—and when he died, about five years ago, he left his widow a very small income, and nothing for his three daughters."

"And is Mrs. Herbert the eldest?" he asked.

"No, sir; Miss St. Clair, when she was only twenty, married a rich admiral fifty years of age, and now she's Lady Elston. But for my part I can't understand how a woman can marry a man so much older than herself, just for money and a title. Miss Helen, that's Mrs. Herbert, made the best match. Captain Herbert's not much older than she is, and he's got private property besides his pay. She was very high-spirited and independent, and would go and be a governess, and I think Miss Maria, that's the youngest, wants to do the same now she's left school, but her mamma wont hear of it because she's so timid; all the young ladies are very clever and accomplished. But I beg your pardon, sir, I'm keeping you standing to listen to my gossip, and I daresay you want your tea."

"Yes, if you please, Mrs. Lake, as soon as you like," and Edward Armstrong turned into his parlour, forming a resolution in his mind that by some means or other he would prevent the possibility of Maria St. Clair ever becoming a governess.

It had cost the timid girl a strong effort to enter the boat; she tottered, and would have fallen more from fear than from the rocking of the boat, had not the man held her firmly, and even when first seated, she held on with both hands while the rowers brought the boat round, and could not feel secure till they were rowing gently with the tide.

After awhile her sister remarked, "This is pleasant now, is it not, Minnie?"

"Oh, yes, delightful," she replied, "and I'm so glad you and mamma persuaded me to come, for I'm tired of being laughed at, and called a coward; why, even little Charlie does not seem afraid!"

"Not he, are you, my pet?" continued his mother, addressing her boy.

"No, mamma, not a bit; I like it better than riding in a coach or a train."

For some distance they continued their course towards Ryde, till Mrs. St. Clair, looking at her

watch, and finding they had been out more than an hour, expressed a wish to return. She had noticed also that the breeze stiffened as the sun approached the west, and although no thought of danger entered her mind, she was unwilling to wait for a rough sea to alarm her timid daughter. The tide had turned, and therefore the return would, she knew, be as free from difficulty on that score as on the way out, but the wind would be against them, and create, of course, an uneasy motion of the boat.

It was as she expected. The removal of the awning became necessary, and the rocking of the little craft during this performance so alarmed poor Maria that she became completely unnerved, nor could all the efforts of her friends and the boatmen reassure her. However, at times they were sheltered, and although Maria felt a motion which thrilled through the boat as it battled with the waves roughened by the wind, she was becoming more at ease, and by the time they passed Osborne House, not then a royal residence, and came in sight of the houses of West Cowes, she was positively beginning to enjoy her trip, and could talk pleasantly to her mother and sister.

Meanwhile Edward Armstrong sat at his solitary tea-table wrapped up in his own thoughts. Mrs. Lake came in to fetch the tea-things, but he did not speak. She roused him, however, by one remark—

"The ladies have got a beautiful evening for their trip, sir," she said; "they generally stay out two hours, but they started later than usual this evening—I suppose because the days are getting longer, and they're not back yet."

"It is a beautiful evening," replied the young man, rising and going to the open window; "I may as well have a stroll by the sea as sit here."

"So I thought, sir," was the reply, "and that's why I mentioned it."

Edward Armstrong smiled as he left the room, unprepared for the events of an evening which for his whole life would never be obliterated from his memory.

When he reached the village street, and turned down by the landing-place to the beach, the change from the costume of the afternoon to a suit of black, and a black hat with a crape band, made his appearance entirely that of a gentleman; there was nothing of the farmer's slouch in the tall, well-built, erect figure, and manly carriage.

He wandered on the beach for some time, enjoying the sweet freshness of the sea-breeze and watching the rippling waves, over which the approach of sunset threw a glow of crimson and gold; now and then, however, casting glances in the direction of Ryde, with a hope of once more beholding the face that had so completely enthralled him. The church clock struck seven, and presently, as he stood at a point a little beyond the battery from which royal salutes are now fired, he saw the Southampton steamer coming round a point of land at a little distance. He, with others, walked quietly on towards the landing-place, actuated by the curiosity as to new arrivals which generally besets occasional residents at the seaside.

But his attention was quickly withdrawn from the steamer. In the direction of Ryde he could see the green and gold of the pleasure-boat as it approached, struggling against the wind, which made her progress difficult and uneasy.

The rowers were evidently making for the point from which the boat had started, not very far from the spot where the steamer now lay, blowing off her steam, yet easily reached without danger of being run down, even if she moved before they could do so.

But the steamer had already created a difficulty, for when the boat entered the point where the waters unite, she encountered also the swell made by the paddle-wheels. Steadily the men plied their oars, while the boat, dancing and rolling on the surge, caused by the united effects of the wind, the steamer, and the double currents, attracted the attention of others besides Edward Armstrong. He could distinguish the ladies clearly as the men neared the shore. He saw the pale face and the violet eyes of Maria St. Clair fixed upon the steamer with painful intenseness; he saw the little gloved hands clasped on her lap, as if by that violent pressure she could prevent the steamer from moving. The men were bending all their strength to the oars, as with rapid strokes they made for the landing-place. Nearer and nearer came the boat till within fifty yards of the shore. The spectators scarcely breathed as it passed under the stern of the steamer, no one on deck seeming to notice it. Would they reach the shore before it moved?

"Is there any danger?" was eagerly asked.

"No; boats like that would ride the wave safely—besides, the men are becoming used to steamers now, and sailors can always avoid danger."

Alas! not always. At this critical moment the steamer moved from the pier, its paddle-wheels backing slowly to make the turn towards Ryde more easily; from beneath them the foaming water rolled in eddying, agitating circles, swelling the already disturbed waves. Upon one of these the boat was lifted, and then to the terrified occupants appeared to be sinking headlong into the trough of the sea.

Edward Armstrong stretched out his arms as if to avert the impending danger. He had seen the young girl rise from her seat, and as she tottered from the consequences of this almost always fatal act, she caught at her little nephew's arm, and the next moment they were both struggling together in the surging water.

There were screams on the shore—running to and fro—a cry for ropes—the stoppage of the steamer, from which a boat was quickly lowered; but unexpected help was nearer at hand.

A gentleman on the beach was seen to throw off his coat and hat, and plunge into the boiling waves. In a few moments he returned with the little boy in his arms, for whom many hands were eagerly held out. He paused not a moment, but struck out again towards the spot at which he had seen the young girl fall overboard.

The rowers had hastened on to the shore, in order to land the alarmed mother and sister in safety, they then quickly proceeded to the spot where the boat from the steamer had already arrived with ropes.

Amongst the anxious spectators on shore stood Mrs. Lake, who, the instant she saw Mrs. St. Clair and her daughter, rushed towards them, exclaiming, "Oh pray, ladies, do not stay here, the gentleman is sure to save Miss Maria, he's my lodger, and——"

At this moment Mrs. Herbert started forward, she had seen her boy carried from the water and ran to meet him.

"Take the little boy to my house, Mrs. Herbert, pray do," cried the excited landlady; "it's close by, and he'll want attention directly."

Too bewildered to refuse, and anxious also to remove her mother from the scene of excitement, for Mrs. St. Clair seemed ready to faint as she stood, Mrs. Herbert took her arm, and together they followed the man who carried little Charlie.

"You know where it is, Tom," said Mrs. Lake to the man; "take the ladies, I'll be there directly; I must stay and see if Mr. Armstrong saves that dear young lady," she added to herself, as she turned back to the shore.

Meanwhile the men had cheered the stranger as he plunged a second time into the waves, but he remained more than once so long under water when diving, that fears were entertained for his own fate. There was a pause. At last, amid the shouts of the spectators, he rose to the surface, but so faint and exhausted that he had only sufficient strength to give up the apparently lifeless body of Maria St. Clair to the men in one of the boats. He would himself have sunk after doing so, had he not been quickly seized by ready hands and dragged into the boat.

A few moments brought them to shore, amid the cheers of the spectators, who were, however, hushed to silence when Maria St. Clair and her deliverer, both to all appearance dead, were lifted out of the boat.

"Oh dear! oh, sir! Mr. Armstrong, and Miss Maria too!—oh, that I should live to see this day!"

"Hush! that outcry will do no good," and the voice of the doctor stayed the useless complaints of Mrs. Lake. "Is there any house near to which this lady can be taken?"

"Oh yes, sir," she replied, "mine is close by; Mrs. Herbert's there now with the little boy, and the gentleman's own apartments are at my house."

But Edward Armstrong had by this time so far recovered, that with assistance he was able to leave the boat and follow on foot the bearers of that lifeless form to his own apartments, with trembling steps and a sinking at his heart.

He was met at the door by Mrs. St. Clair and Mrs. Herbert. The former in dismay at her daughter's appearance, could not utter a word, but Mrs. Herbert, as he entered, held out her hand, and clasping that of her child's deliverer, she exclaimed, "God bless you, sir, I can never repay you for what you have done." He had no heart to reply, but he pressed the hand he held, and turned towards his own bedroom with the painful thought that all his efforts, even at the risk of his own life, had been unsuccessful in the case of Maria St. Clair.

CHAPTER II.

WHO SAVED HER?

The question which heads this chapter was asked by many on that memorable evening, long after it became known that the remedies and prompt measures adopted by the doctors had been successful in restoring Maria St. Clair to consciousness after hours of anxious suspense.

The same question will occur to the reader, to whom, perhaps, the answer may prove a disappointment.

In a street near the most fashionable part of the West End of London, stood a large and well-built house, the lower part of which bore the appearance of a place of business, half-shop, half-office. Above it, in large letters, appeared the words, "Edward Armstrong, Corn Factor."

The handsome, intellectual-looking man who had so courageously distinguished himself on the beach at West Cowes, could boast of no higher position than that of a London tradesman, nor of any ancestors more honourable than England's yeomen. For nearly two hundred years the

Armstrongs had been known as farmers in the neighbourhood of Basingstoke. Only one direct branch of the family now remained, an aged farmer still occupying Meadow Farm, and Edward Armstrong, his only child.

The boy early gave evidence that he possessed tastes very different to those required in agricultural pursuits. On this account his mother, who, like many mothers, wished her son to be more educated than his parents, strongly encouraged the proposal that he should be sent to boarding-school. That her boy should become what the country folks call a "fine scholar," was her greatest ambition.

Whether he obtained that title or not, it is certain that at school he quickly developed intellectual tastes, and acquired a certain degree of refinement, which made him quite unfit for association, except in the corn market, with farmers who talked of their "'ay and their whoats, and whate." For a few years, however, he remained at home, and acquired sufficient knowledge of these said "whoats and whate" to be very useful to him in his present position. After awhile, his father consented to his going to London and establishing a business.

Notwithstanding Edward Armstrong's taste for reading and other literary pursuits, he was still a thorough man of business, and had succeeded so well in his London undertaking, that at the age of thirty-three he found himself master of a splendid business, a well-furnished house, known and respected on the Corn Exchange, and still unmarried.

Yet with all his literary and scientific knowledge—which was not a little—with all his industry, energy, and business habits, he had strong prejudices consequent upon early education; peculiar notions on various subjects, and a will, as well as opinions, that would brook no contradiction.

Much of all this might have been softened down and removed by an early and suitable marriage.

But one of Edward Armstrong's peculiarities was shown in his determination, when he did marry, to have a real lady for his wife—in those days not a very easy matter for a man in trade.

His appearance in the Isle of Wight was caused by having had to attend the funeral of his mother, and he had been spending a fortnight at his old home, and making arrangements for a cousin and his wife to manage the farm, under his father's guidance, when business matters brought him from Meadow Farm to the Isle of Wight. He had been detained at Cowes for nearly a week when the alarming events described in the last chapter made a hero of him, almost against his will.

On reaching his bedroom on that eventful evening, he found doctors and nurses ready to prescribe and attend to him. He was quickly stripped of his wet clothes, hurried to bed, and made to take proper remedies in spite of a great deal of self-willed opposition. Mrs. Lake had secured the attendance of her own doctor, who divided his time between her best room, occupied by Maria St. Clair, and that of her deliverer. Mrs. St. Clair's medical attendant was also present during that terrible time, in which the gentle spirit of her daughter, Maria, fluttered on the confines of eternity.

Edward Armstrong, however, could not compose himself to sleep; indeed he openly refused to take a draught which the doctor had sent to enable him to do so. Mrs. Lake, therefore, ventured to send for Dr. Freeman, hoping that he might be better able to influence the refractory patient.

"Doctor," said Edward, as the former entered the room, fully intending to exert his professional authority, "I cannot and will not sleep till I hear more favourable accounts of Miss St. Clair. Tell me at once if there is any hope."

"Hey-day, my friend, your energy gives me strong hopes for your own complete recovery at all events, but you know well that we are not the arbiters of life and death; we can only use all the means and trust to a Higher Power for the result."

"But *is* there any hope?" persisted Edward.

"Certainly, I cannot deny there is hope," he replied. "Dr. Anson also is very sanguine respecting the result of our efforts; but, my friend, if you will not take the sleeping draught, I must insist on your keeping yourself warm and quiet, or the consequences of your sea-bath will be more serious than you anticipate; and now I must return to Miss St. Clair, who at the present moment requires all the attention we can give her."

"Send me word directly a change for the better takes place," said the patient anxiously, as Dr. Freeman turned to go.

"I will come myself," he replied, "on condition that you keep quiet and try to sleep."

"Well," thought the doctor, as with cautious steps he proceeded to the young lady's room, "the man has not been in this place much more than a week, his landlady tells me, or I should suppose he was Miss St. Clair's lover by the way he goes on."

Could he have been aware of Edward Armstrong's thoughts, as he lay with closed eyes, but mentally awake, he would more readily have understood the cause of his restless and wakeful anxiety.

He had tried to save the life of a girl to whom he had been strangely attracted, and after all, though he might mourn over the untimely death which could blight such a lovely flower, still he had not even a right to sympathise with her relatives, to whom he was a stranger. They might

certainly appreciate his sympathy, and be grateful for his efforts to save her, but they could not know anything of the hopes which he had within the last few days encouraged and fostered.

And what were these hopes? he asked himself. Were they not founded on impossibilities? Even if Miss Maria St. Clair recovered, and owed her life to his energy, could he still hope to win her? Would the Honourable Mrs. St. Clair consider a London tradesman, who owned a shop, a suitable husband for the descendant of an Earl? for such her youngest daughter truly was. Would saving her life create a debt of gratitude sufficiently strong to break down the barriers of social prejudices and social distinctions? Would the fact of his being able to support a wife in comfort and luxury tempt the mother to give him her portionless daughter? He found himself unable to answer these mental queries, and as he turned from side to side in restless anxiety, poor Mrs. Lake longed for good news from the best bedroom, as much for the sake of her lodger as for the friends of the young lady themselves.

When Dr. Freeman entered the bedroom from which he had been called to Edward Armstrong, he saw at a glance that his colleague, Dr. Anson, was more hopeful than ever. Every remedy used in cases of drowning had been tried, but Dr. Anson evidently considered that the continued state of unconsciousness, in which Maria St. Clair lay, was attributable to another cause. To conquer the effects of this cause was now his aim; yet half an hour passed before his efforts were rewarded with even a shadow of success. Maria St. Clair lay still and nerveless on the bed. From her pale face the golden curls had been pushed back, and lay scattered in disordered profusion on the pillow.

Although the summer twilight still lingered, the gas had been lighted to assist the medical men in their efforts to restore life. Dr. Anson stood with his fingers on the delicate wrist, and as his colleague entered he made a sign for him to draw near the bed.

On the opposite side near the head sat Mrs. St. Clair, holding the hand of her daughter, Helen, in a convulsive grasp. The crisis had come, and the mother and daughter were awaiting with painful intentness the result of the doctor's efforts. Minutes passed, but they did not relax these efforts. Presently Dr. Anson looked up suddenly; his sensitive fingers had detected a slight vibration at the wrist. For a few moments there was a pause, a breathless stillness had seemed to foreshadow the approach of death. It was but the intensity of suspense—every eye rested on the fair, pale face. Was it fancy? Did the eyelids really quiver, and the lips tremble? Yes; for as the eyes languidly opened, the lips parted and a breath like a sigh gave evidence of returning life. Mrs. St. Clair rose hastily and clung to her married daughter, while the doctor quickly administered a stimulant which, to his great joy, the patient was able to swallow. Gradually the feeble breath became more regular, the eyes more intelligent, and a faint colour overspread the cheek. Again the doctor offered the stimulant, and this time it was taken more easily, and the patient made an effort to speak.

"Mamma, are you here?" were the faint, feeble words.

"Yes, darling," said Mrs. St. Clair, coming round to the other side of the bed with Mrs. Herbert, "and Helen is here too."

"Where is little Charlie?"

"Safe in bed and asleep," was the reply.

"Mamma, who saved us?" she asked, after a pause.

"You and Charlie owe your lives, under God, to a stranger who is lodging here with Mrs. Lake," replied her mother.

"Mamma, let me thank him. Where is he?"

"In bed, and I hope asleep," exclaimed Dr. Freeman; "and, my dear young lady, we must get you to sleep quickly, too, or there is no answering for the consequences. You shall see our friend to-morrow and thank him yourself."

Maria St. Clair closed her eyes in token of obedience; readily she took what the medical men prescribed, and after awhile, with many cautions to the anxious mother, the gentlemen took their leave. On the way downstairs Dr. Freeman remarked, "That poor girl was not long enough in the water to so completely deprive her of consciousness. I believe she fainted from terror when she found herself falling."

"I have no doubt of it," replied Dr. Anson. "I know that Maria has always had a natural dread of the water, and it was injudicious to persuade her to enter a boat under any but absolute necessity. Had she not recovered, her death would have been mainly attributable to the shock received by the nervous system. Are you going to remain here longer?" he asked, as Dr. Freeman stopped and held out his hand.

"Only to see my other patient."

"Is he all right?" was the next question.

"I hope he will be after the draught I am going to give him," replied Dr. Freeman; "he has had a narrow escape with life, but it is a mercy he was there at all. No one could have acted more promptly and courageously than he did."

"I shall look in again on my patient this evening," said Dr. Anson as they shook hands. "If no feverish symptoms supervene we shall soon have the young lady quite well."

"There is more danger of fever in this case," thought the doctor, as he stood by Edward Armstrong's bed with his fingers on his pulse a few minutes later, describing what had occurred, and telling him of Miss St. Clair's hopeful condition.

The effect, however, of this information, and the remedy which he did not now refuse, were so beneficial that in less than half an hour after the doctor left him to the care of Mrs. Lake, he was sleeping calmly.

Yet potent as the medicine might be, it was not powerful enough to keep Edward Armstrong asleep all night. More than once he awoke, and finding Mrs. Lake watching in his room on the last occasion, he anxiously inquired for Miss St. Clair.

"Sleeping sweetly, sir, thank God," was the reply. "I've just been into the room, and glad enough I am that the ladies are able to take some rest. I only came in here to see if you were all right; and now I'm going to take my place in Miss St. Clair's room, while they go and lie down. Oh, sir, they're both so thankful to you for what you did last night. But I'm not going to have you waking up and losing your rest; whatever am I about, chattering like this?" And she cautiously drew the curtains closer to shut out the early summer daylight.

But Edward was too much under the effects of his draught to keep awake long. He had understood sufficiently from Mrs. Lake's speech that Miss St. Clair was in no danger, and even before she had ceased talking he fell asleep.

The morning sun, however, roused him, as he supposed, at his usual hour, and he rose quite refreshed, and feeling very little the worse for his exploits of the preceding evening.

Dressing quickly, he descended to his sitting-room and found to his surprise that the clock had struck nine.

On the mantelpiece lay his watch, which had stopped as he plunged into the water, and the hands pointed to half-past seven. Taking it up to set it to the right time, he walked to the window and looked out across the garden to the spot which had so nearly proved fatal to himself as well as to another, and shuddered as he thought of what might have been if his efforts had proved unsuccessful.

While thus reflecting, Mrs. Lake entered with his breakfast.

"Good morning, sir," she said, as he turned to greet her; "I'm that glad to see you downstairs again, and all right, I hardly know what to say. But do you really feel quite well, sir?" she added hastily, "for you're looking pale."

"I'm all right," he replied, smiling, "or at least I shall be after breakfast, I hope, for that physic stuff has made my head ache."

"I daresay it has, sir; them sleeping draughts always do, but you'll be quite well after a cup of coffee."

Edward Armstrong seated himself, nothing loth, while his landlady continued to remain in the room by waiting upon him or dusting here and there, or rearranging different articles on the table, in hopes of being questioned. Her hopes were soon realised, for her lodger asked, "How is the young lady this morning, Mrs. Lake?"

"Oh! doing nicely, sir, and so is Master Charlie; he slept in my room last night, and he's been awake I can't tell how long, asking heaps of questions about the kind gentleman that took him and dear aunty out of the water—and the ladies, sir, they've been asking for you, and they do say Miss Maria is quite herself again this morning, and that she's going to get up presently."

Mrs. Lake was interrupted by a tap at the door, and without waiting for a reply, it was opened, and Dr. Anson, the medical attendant of Mrs. St. Clair, entered the room.

"Yes, it is my friend Edward Armstrong," he exclaimed, as the gentleman he addressed rose with surprise to receive his visitor. "I only learnt the name of our hero from Dr. Freeman this morning; I had no idea that the gentleman whose intrepidity and courage is the talk of the place was the son of my good friend, Farmer Armstrong."

Edward smiled as he shook hands with the friend whom he had known from a boy, but there was a languor in his movements, and a pallor on the cheeks, very unusual in the active man of business, which the doctor's quick eye soon detected.

"Are you feeling any ill effects from your exertions last evening?" he asked.

"No," was the reply; "unless a feeling of laziness and disinclination to move may be ranked among ill effects."

"Well, not exactly," said Dr. Anson, "although what you complain of is no doubt caused by exhaustion and excitement. At all events, you must extend your holiday and rest here for a day or two longer; such a sea-bath as yours produces effects which are not so easily got over."

At this moment the door was pushed open slightly, and through the opening appeared a rosy

face, brown curls, and a pair of dark eyes which looked with curiosity at the two gentlemen.

"Ah, Charlie," said the doctor, "is that you? Come in and say how d'ye do to the gentleman that fished you out of the water yesterday."

Little Charlie Herbert boldly advanced, and standing before Mr. Armstrong held out his chubby hand and said, "Thank 'oo for saving me from being drowned."

Edward lifted the boy on his knee and kissed him, while the doctor asked—

"Who sent you here, Charlie?"

"Mrs. Lake," he replied, "and I've said what she told me to say to the gentleman."

The doctor smiled as he rose, and shaking hands with his friend he said—

"I must leave you now to pay my visit upstairs. Edward, keep the boy here for awhile; you cannot have better company."

CHAPTER III.

A SOCIAL DILEMMA.

While Edward Armstrong was becoming better acquainted with the little nephew of Maria St. Clair, Dr. Anson was attempting the cure of a disease far more difficult to subdue than any in the whole catalogue of the various "ills which flesh is heir to"—a mental disease called pride.

He found his patient in a fair way for complete recovery. Her restless anxiety to thank the strange gentleman who had saved her, had made her mother give way to her wish to be dressed, and she now sat in an easy-chair, looking pale certainly, but apparently suffering only from exhaustion.

"Up and dressed? upon my word!" said Dr. Anson. "I was not prepared for such a speedy recovery as this."

"I feel almost as well as ever, doctor," she said, "only a little weak and tired; but I cannot rest till mamma and all of us have thanked the gentleman who saved me and little Charlie. Mrs. Lake says he is quite well this morning, and talks of going back to London to-morrow, so if we are to see him and thank him personally, it must be to-day."

"All right, my dear," said the doctor; "there will be no difficulty in asking my friend Mr. Edward Armstrong to visit you."

"Your friend, Dr. Anson?" exclaimed Mrs. St. Clair, in surprise; "have you known him long?"

"Almost from his boyhood, and a more intelligent, well-informed man I have seldom met with. I was not, however, aware till now that he possessed courage and daring in addition to his other good qualities."

"But who is he?" was the next question.

"The son, indeed the only child, of Farmer Armstrong, who owns Meadow Farm, about two miles from Basingstoke. The farm has belonged to Armstrong's ancestors for nearly two hundred years. The old gentleman has recently lost his wife, and the son came from London a few weeks ago to be present at his mother's funeral."

"Young Mr. Armstrong resides in London, then, I suppose?" remarked Mrs. Herbert.

"Yes; his tastes for intellectual pursuits and his education made him dislike farming, and at last his father, with great reluctance, allowed him to commence business in London as a corn-dealer."

Mrs. St. Clair had listened to this plain straightforward description of her daughter's and grandson's deliverer and his antecedents with very conflicting sensations. She had hoped to be able personally to show her deep sense of gratitude to this gentleman, who had risked his own life for her child; but now, how could she do so? She had been brought up to consider persons in trade far inferior to herself, and the doctor's account seemed to place this stranger at such an immeasurable distance, and yet how could she relieve herself from such a debt of gratitude?

During the pause that ensued, Dr. Anson examined and questioned his patient, and having received satisfactory answers, was about to take his leave, when Mrs. St. Clair's voice arrested his movements.

"Dr. Anson, we can never really repay this person the debt of gratitude we owe him, but as he is in trade, do you think he would accept a sum of money; something handsome, I mean! I am sure my son-in-law, Sir James Elston, would readily advance it in such a case."

"Mamma!"

"Madam!"

The words burst forth almost simultaneously from Mrs. Herbert and the doctor. The former gave up her right to speak to the doctor, who exclaimed—

"My friend Mr. Edward Armstrong is not only a man of large property, but of refined and intellectual tastes, and can boast of an education far beyond the generality of farmers' sons. I could not——"

"Oh, pray pardon me!" interrupted Mrs. St. Clair, greatly surprised at the doctor's vehemence, "but when you spoke of your friend as a man of business, I supposed him to be what a tradesman generally is."

"Mrs. St. Clair," said the doctor, "England is becoming proud of her commerce, and the young people of the present age may live to see the time when, like the ancients of old, 'her princes will be merchants,' as well as men of intellect, refinement, and education. At all events, my dear madam, give your daughters an opportunity to thank this gentleman for risking his life on their behalf; personally, I am quite sure, he will expect this, and consider it cancels all obligations. If you see him you can judge for yourselves. Good morning, ladies. Don't excite yourself, my dear," he continued, more gently, as he shook hands with his patient; "your constitution has received a shock, and you must be careful."

"I will, doctor, I promise you," she said, "but I may go into the drawing-room with mamma and Helen to receive the visitor?"

"Of course—of course," he replied, "but remember, you are not to talk too much."

For some minutes after Dr. Anson left the room silence reigned supreme: Mrs. St. Clair could not at once recover from the surprise at being thus set down by her own medical man; indeed, she looked so disconcerted that Helen could not resist the merry laugh that broke the silence.

"Mamma, don't look so uncomfortable," she said; "of course you could not be expected to know what would be the best means of showing our gratitude to this stranger, for indeed we ought to be grateful——"

"I know it, my dear," said Mrs. St. Clair, whose pride had received a severe blow; "and now what are we to do?"

"We have simply to adjourn to the drawing-room, ring the bell, and send down our cards, with our compliments, and a request that Mr. Armstrong will favour us with a visit."

This advice was at once acted upon, and in a few minutes Maria found herself comfortably seated in an arm-chair in Mrs. Lake's pretty drawing-room, while her mother and sister awaited the appearance of their visitor in formal state on the sofa. Even to Maria, Edward Armstrong was an entire stranger, for although she had modestly shrunk from his earnest gaze at church on the previous Sunday, and had seen his face twice on the day of the accident, it was still unknown to her.

They had not waited long when footsteps on the stairs announced his approach; not alone, however, for as Mrs. Lake opened the door Edward Armstrong entered, leading by the hand little Charlie Herbert.

"Your little son has paid me a visit this morning, Mrs. Herbert," he said, as he bowed to the ladies who rose to welcome him, "and I have brought him upstairs with me to place him safely in your care."

Mrs. Herbert gave him a grateful look as she placed a chair for their guest. Then seating herself, she said—

"I hope Charlie has not been troublesome?"

"Not in the least," he replied; "indeed, his childish prattle has done me good."

Mrs. St. Clair's surprise at the appearance of her visitor, who wore his mourning suit, increased for a time the confusion of ideas produced by the doctor's farewell speech. She was, however, a true English gentlewoman, and before Edward could take the chair placed for him she advanced, and holding out her hand, said with a warmth of manner not to be mistaken for mere politeness—

"Mr. Armstrong, I have taken the liberty of asking you to visit us, because I wish to join with my daughters in expressing my gratitude for your kind and prompt energy yesterday, which saved the lives of my daughter and little grandson. It is not possible to say all we feel on the subject. I only hope you will believe in our sincere and grateful appreciation."

"Madam," replied Edward, to whom all this was really painful, "I am only too happy to remember that I was on the spot, and able to be of service to you."

"A service we can never repay," said Mrs. Herbert; "but for your exertions I should have lost my darling boy."

"And I," exclaimed a gentle voice, "should have lost my life, Mr. Armstrong, but for you; my best thanks are but a poor return to offer you."

"Ladies," said Edward Armstrong, "you do me too much honour. I am only too thankful to have been made the instrument, in God's hands, to save you from great sorrow, and the consciousness

of this is all the reward I ask. But allow me, Miss St. Clair," he said, hurriedly changing the subject, "I hope you do not feel any serious effects from the great danger to which you were exposed yesterday?"

"Oh, no," she replied; "except a slight feeling of exhaustion, I am otherwise as well as usual."

The blush that tinted the pale cheek of Maria St. Clair, who, while she spoke, was conscious of the earnest eyes so closely watching her, added additional beauty to the fair face which Edward Armstrong so greatly admired. With ready tact he turned to Mrs. St. Clair, and introduced another subject of conversation.

So pleasantly did an hour pass as they talked, that when the visitor rose to go, the elder ladies each expressed a wish that he should visit them at their own residences. But he unhesitatingly stated his anxiety to return to business, promising, however, to call upon Mrs. St. Clair at Richmond; and naming his own address in Dover Street, Piccadilly.

Edward Armstrong's peculiar notions and obstinate prejudices, which we shall hear more of by-and-by, were kept under violent restraint while in the company of these ladies. Hitherto he had encouraged himself in a kind of contempt for all social distinctions, but now that he had made acquaintance with a family whose position, socially speaking, was above his own, he crushed down the feeling, and when writing his address for Mrs. St. Clair, he omitted the words "corn-dealer."

Perhaps his radical notions would not have been restrained by any motive less powerful than a growing attachment for the daughter of a lady who could rank with England's aristocracy. And with the lady herself there is little doubt that Edward Armstrong's apparent refinement in manner and dress would have failed to make such an impression had not his handsome face, manly carriage, and reputation for wealth been thrown into the scale of opinion.

CHAPTER IV.

DIFFICULTIES TO BE OVERCOME.

Edward Armstrong had parted from the family of Mrs. St. Clair without even the slightest hint of those intentions which a more intimate association had strengthened. But the three days during which he stayed at West Cowes were not lost time. He had seen Maria St. Clair daily, and made himself so truly agreeable a companion and escort, that the ladies willingly accepted his invitation to accompany him for a drive more than once in an open carriage which he hired for the occasion.

They bade him farewell at last with regret, and influenced by her daughters, Mrs. St. Clair expressed a hope that they should see him at Richmond after their return home, which she expected would be in about a fortnight.

Edward Armstrong returned to London with his mind fully made up. He possessed a determined will, and in spite of the misgivings which had tormented him after the exciting evening at Cowes, he had too much self-esteem to dread failure.

The girl he loved might be the daughter of the Honourable Mrs. St. Clair, and the great-granddaughter of an earl, and he knew that, in his eyes at least, she was beautiful, but she was penniless; and the gratitude she felt towards him for having saved her life was fast growing into love. Added to this he had the money she lacked, and the power to surround her with all the pleasant comforts and luxuries which money can procure. He determined, however, notwithstanding this confidence in himself, to wait until he had visited Mrs. St. Clair at her own home, and become more acquainted with the real position of the family to whom he wished to ally himself.

Mr. Edward Armstrong's house in Dover Street, Piccadilly, had been originally the London residence of a nobleman's family who during the early part of the present century had made that part of London, then called May Fair, their head-quarters.

He had let the upper part of his house at a good rental, keeping only for himself a bachelor's parlour behind the office, and a bedroom.

On the first evening after his return from the Isle of Wight, these said bachelor apartments wore a very meagre and desolate aspect.

Hitherto business and money-making had so absorbed his thoughts that the rooms he occupied had scarcely any interest in his eyes. So long as his housekeeper prepared his meals regularly, and kept his apartments clean and comfortable, he was satisfied.

Now, however, he looked with a critical eye upon his domestic arrangements, and on this evening of his arrival, while leaning back after supper in his easy-chair, some such thoughts as these passed through his mind—

"I could not expect any wife to be satisfied with such a dingy little place as this for a sitting-room,

and to think of bringing that fairy girl, Maria St. Clair, to such a home is absurd. If I mean to win her I must get rid of these people upstairs, and furnish my house in a fit style to receive her. However, I must not give them notice to leave till I am sure of success. Sure of success! what am I thinking about? 'Faint heart ne'er won fair lady!' and Edward Armstrong is not the man to fail when he once makes up his mind."

Three weeks passed away, and on a warm, sultry morning in July, Maria St. Clair stood at the window of a pretty drawing-room at Richmond, looking out over the beautiful park upon a scene that has not its rival in any suburb at the same distance from London. The noble trees that are scattered over the greensward from the brow of Richmond Hill to the silvery stream of the Thames, which flows at its foot, were luxurious in summer foliage. Chestnut and oak, elm and birch, reared their noble forms at varied distances, casting their broad shadows on the undulating velvet turf, while the gentle deer browsed in safety beneath the sheltering branches.

Mrs. St. Clair sat at work near the open window, now and then glancing at the fair face of her young daughter, which wore a thoughtful, pensive look, in spite of its radiant loveliness.

Maria had quite recovered the effects of her dangerous sea-bath, and the word radiant is not too exaggerated a term to apply to the appearance of the young girl as she stands gracefully, yet carelessly, leaning against the window-frame.

"Have you quite finished practising, Maria?" said her mother, at last.

"No, mamma; but I could not resist another look at the dear old park. After all, I don't think there is a prettier place than Richmond Hill, even in the Isle of Wight; and although I have lived here ever since my childhood, I declare it seems more beautiful to me every year."

"That is because you are older, and more able to appreciate beautiful scenery."

"I suppose that is the reason," replied Maria—and yet while she spoke arose a consciousness that this new appreciation of Nature at Richmond owed its origin to a romantic and vivid description of the feelings the scene had excited in the heart of one who now monopolised all her thoughts. "He promised to come and see us," she said to herself, "and we have been home a week and yet he has not made his appearance. Perhaps he wont come, after all;" and then, feeling that she must throw off the sad thoughts which were attracting her mother's notice, she suddenly rushed to the piano, and struck the first chords of a piece with variations on the air of "The Lass of Richmond Hill."

But the composer's efforts were destined to come to a sudden end. The young housemaid opened the drawing-room door, and as she ushered a gentleman into the room, startled the ladies by exclaiming—

"Mr. Edward Armstrong, ma'am," at the same time placing that gentleman's card in the hands of her mistress.

Maria rose from the piano in hasty confusion. Much as she had thought upon the gentleman, whom she called her deliverer, his appearance at this moment was so totally unexpected that she was relieved to see him advance first to her mother, who sat at a distance from the piano. She had scarcely time to recover her self possession, however, before her mother's words in reply to Mr. Armstrong's inquiries for her daughter caused him to turn and approach her.

As Maria St. Clair came forward to meet this man, to whom she owed, as she thought, such a debt of gratitude, Edward Armstrong, in spite of his own good opinion of himself, was conscious of a feeling of inferiority.

The young girl before him in the simple white morning dress, had a manner and bearing which seemed to place him at an immeasurable distance.

True, there was a modest timidity and a blushing confusion, which added a charm to the beautiful face, as she held out her hand and answered his inquiries for her health with lady-like ease. Yet Edward Armstrong was some minutes before he could feel himself quite at home in the company of these ladies.

We are all liable to be influenced by externals, and therefore when Edward Armstrong met Mrs. St. Clair and her daughter at their own residence, the impression produced on his mind differed greatly from what he had felt in the Isle of Wight.

There he had been introduced to them in the sombre and old-fashioned drawing-room of a lodging-house, but here everything spoke of refinement and elegance. There was nothing pretensive or ostentatious about the house or the noble entrance, even the drawing-room in which they sat had a low ceiling, and the furniture was neither luxurious nor new. But it bore the impress of refined taste, and like all articles bought for their intrinsic value rather than for show, bid fair to last for many years longer in good condition.

Yet not even the antique cabinets, the curiously-wrought worktables, and other valuable ornaments would have been sufficient to produce in Edward Armstrong the impression referred to. It was the *toute ensemble,*—the old-fashioned red brick house, the broad oaken stairs, with the centre covered with Brussels carpet; the long, low drawing-room, its windows opening to the ground on a balcony; the delicate chintz covering to chairs and couches; the flowers, the music, the lace curtains, and the presence of two gentle, lady-like women, one in her widow's dress

contrasting to her daughter's simple white, all intermixed with the perfume of flowers, and finished by the glorious prospect stretched out before the windows, made up a picture which Edward Armstrong never forgot.

"You must stay to luncheon, Mr. Armstrong," remarked Mrs. St. Clair, after they had talked for more than half an hour over the still absorbing topic of the boat accident at West Cowes.

"I fear I shall not be able to remain," he replied, "as I have business in Richmond which will detain me for some time to-day; but if it would be agreeable, Mrs. St. Clair, I will spend an afternoon with you next week on any day you may find it convenient."

Mr. Armstrong's scruples about staying to lunch were, however, quickly overcome by the promise that he should leave as soon as he pleased afterwards; and the visitor departed that afternoon, more than ever fascinated by Maria St. Clair, and fully determined to obtain her as his wife. "Where there's a will there's a way," is an old adage which few were more likely to carry out than Edward Armstrong.

From this visit an intimacy arose between Edward Armstrong and Maria St. Clair, which her mother found herself unable to prevent. She saw in her daughter a growing preference for the man who had saved her life. She perceived on his part plain indications, that the greatest reward he could ask as a return for his courage and bravery, would be the hand of Maria St. Clair; and yet she could do nothing to avert such a result without ingratitude to the wooer, and perhaps pain to her daughter.

"I suppose I ought to consult my sister Louisa," she said to herself, "and Sir James, or wait till Herbert comes home from India. Helen is too grateful about little Charlie to make any objection, I am quite sure, but perhaps the colonel may disapprove;"—and then, as Mrs. St. Clair recalled the character of her soldier son-in-law, and reflected on what his gratitude would be towards the man who had saved his only son from drowning, she felt how impossible it was for her to interfere.

She could not forbid him the house, and all she could do was to wait for him to explain his intentions, and then if Maria's affections were really won, she must place the matter before Sir James and take his advice.

Mrs. St. Clair had not long to wait.

One afternoon, towards the end of October, Edward Armstrong had accompanied the ladies in a walk through the park, then glorious in its colouring of red and golden brown, with which autumn had tinted the noble trees.

They were joined by a middle-aged gentleman of martial appearance, whom Mrs. St. Clair greeted with pleased surprise.

"Why, Colonel Elliot, is it possible," she exclaimed, as she shook hands, "when did you arrive?"

"The day before yesterday," he replied. "My wife sent me over to-day to pay my respects, and as soon as I found you were here, I followed you."

"And we are very glad to see you," replied Mrs St. Clair. Then turning to her daughter, she said, "You remember little Maria, colonel? I suppose you find her grown?"

"Grown indeed! what a change six years have made," he replied, glancing at her companion.

"Mr. Armstrong—Colonel Elliot"—and Mrs. St. Clair observing the glance, introduced the gentleman, adding, "We owe the life of Maria and her little nephew, Charles, to this gentleman's bravery when they were in danger of drowning."

"I have heard the whole account from my wife," said the colonel, quickly; and as Edward Armstrong raised his hat on the introduction, he held out his hand, and added, "Mr. Armstrong, I am indeed happy to make your acquaintance."

"You must accompany us home to dinner," said Mrs. St. Clair, after a few minutes of explanations respecting his arrival in England, and then they turned towards home, the colonel walking by Mrs. St. Clair, and the young people falling behind. The evening passed pleasantly, for Edward Armstrong was always seen to greater advantage in the company of men, with whom he could converse on almost any subject.

He had the tact to conceal a certain want of that *something* which marks the man accustomed from childhood to refined society, and in this he was assisted by a vast amount of self-sufficiency. Be this as it may, when Colonel Elliot rose to go early, on account of his distance from home, he cordially expressed his regret at leaving such a pleasant companion.

Mrs. St. Clair had remarked during dinner the deepened colour on the cheeks and the bright look in the eyes of her daughter, but she was scarcely prepared for Edward Armstrong's words when after tea in the drawing-room Maria rose and left her mother alone with him.

"Mrs. St. Clair," he said—and for once the voice of the self-possessed Edward Armstrong trembled—"I could not venture to ask you such a favour as I am about to crave, but for your kindness during the last few months. You once requested me to tell you in what way you could show your gratitude to me for what was after all a mere act of common humanity." He paused, but Mrs. St. Clair did not speak, so he went on—"There is no recompense on earth that could be to me a fraction of the value of the gift which you can bestow in giving me your daughter. Even in

my efforts to save her life I was actuated by a growing love for her, which has increased since you so kindly allowed us to become better acquainted."

He paused again, for his words had been hurried, and were at last almost breathless. Too well he knew the social barrier existing between a farmer's son and the great-granddaughter of an earl, and while he spoke that barrier had arisen grimly before the mental vision of Mrs. St. Clair. How could it be overcome? At last she broke the silence, which was becoming oppressive—

"Mr. Armstrong, I feel honoured by your preference for my daughter. I can never be sufficiently grateful for the courage which saved her life. I believe you have won her love, and on my own part I would readily give her to you without a moment's hesitation, but I must consider my family, my sons-in-law, and my husband's relatives. What will they say if I allow her to marry a——"

"Do not hesitate, Mrs. St. Clair," exclaimed Edward, whose pride had been roused by her words; "I know I am asking Miss Maria St. Clair to marry a tradesman, but I can offer her a home with more of the comforts, luxuries, and refinements than are often found among many persons who are far above me in rank."

His vehemence troubled Mrs. St. Clair; but after a few minutes' reflection she said, "Mr. Armstrong, I am quite aware that in a money point of view your proposal for my daughter is worthy of consideration, but I cannot give my consent till I have consulted my relatives. Give me a few days to lay the matter before them, and to ascertain the sentiments of Maria, that is all I ask."

"Madam," said Edward Armstrong, rising, "if your dear daughter's wishes are duly considered in this matter, I have no fear as to the result. I will wait a week for your decision."

Mrs. St. Clair could scarcely restrain a smile at the self-appreciation displayed in this speech, but she shook hands pleasantly and promised that in less than a week he should hear from her. The result, however, of Mrs. St. Clair's application to her relatives was in every case but one favourable to Edward Armstrong. Her daughter Helen was ready to ignore everything about him, but that he was respectably connected, able to give Maria a superior home, and in himself handsome, well educated, well informed, and without doubt brave and courageous, for had he not saved her sister and her little son from death?

Colonel Elliot stood out strongly in favour of the man who had made himself so agreeable on that evening at Richmond; indeed all Mrs. St. Clair's relatives who had heard the romantic story so well known in the Isle of Wight were on the side of Edward Armstrong—more especially when his increasing wealth was confirmed by men of business to whom he had referred Mrs. St. Clair.

Only from an old maiden aunt was the information received that "she must not be expected to associate with people who kept a shop." Mrs. St. Clair had very little trouble in discovering her daughter's real sentiments respecting Edward Armstrong, and Sir James Elston's opinions settled the matter. After hearing all the particulars respecting the man who had asked his wife's mother for her portionless daughter, the bluff old Admiral had remarked, "Ah, well, if Mrs. St. Clair marries her daughter to a respectable tradesman who can support her in comfort, instead of looking out for a sprig of nobility without a shilling in his pocket, she will be a very wise woman."

Some little of Edward Armstrong's character showed itself before the wedding. Mrs. St. Clair wished her daughter to be married from Sir James Elston's house in Portland Place, and at a fashionable London church—but the bridegroom elect preferred the quiet of her own house, and the seclusion of Richmond.

Finding she could not succeed in having her own way with a gentleman possessing such a determined will, Mrs. St. Clair appealed to her daughter. But Maria, naturally gentle and yielding, was too anxious to agree with the wishes of her future husband to become an ally with her mother against him. So the gentleman had his way, and in the prettily situated old church, Maria St. Clair plighted her troth to the man who had been the means of saving her life.

In the heart of this young girl there was no doubt too much of the worship of the instrument and too little recognition of the Hand to whose merciful Providence she owed her life. She had yet to learn that in times of sadness, trial, and death, "vain is the help of man" without the aid He alone can give. We shall find also as the story proceeds that Edward Armstrong was not so willing to give up his prejudices for the sake of his *own* daughter, as he had been to oblige Mrs. St. Clair to give up hers when he wished to obtain Maria St. Clair as his wife.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE REVIEW.

"Miss Mary, dear, wake up," said a pleasant middle-aged woman, as she gently shook the sleeper to whom she spoke; "it wants twenty minutes to eight, and Rowland will be here with the ponies presently."

A pair of large blue eyes opened languidly and stared at the speaker. "What's the matter, nurse?"

"Aren't you going to ride this morning, Miss Mary? you'll have to be quick if——"

But Mary's senses were roused now, and the young girl of thirteen sprung out of bed, interrupting her nurse's speech.

"I'll be ready, nurse, don't fear," she cried, as she began to dress with her usual quickness. "What did you say was the time?"

"Twenty minutes to eight," was the reply, "so you've twenty-five minutes. Rowland is allowed to wait five minutes, I know."

"Ah, yes," cried Mary, "but I wont keep him waiting at all, nurse," she added, "you need not stay. I laid out my habit and all I wanted in readiness last night."

"To be sure, Miss Mary, you can be quick, I know, and no mistake; so I'll get out of your way if you don't want me."

True to her word, the little lady appeared at the door in a few minutes after the groom arrived, and she was very soon cantering round the Regent's Park in the full enjoyment of this healthful exercise. Drawing rein as usual before crossing the New Road on her return towards home, she walked her pony through the Crescent, intending to enjoy a good canter up the broad thoroughfare of Portland Place.

Scarcely had she reached the turning leading through private streets to Piccadilly, when the sound of horse's hoofs coming rapidly behind her caused her to turn her head, and the next moment pull up suddenly as a large black horse trotted quickly to her side.

"Why, Mary," exclaimed the owner of the horse, "I had no idea you were such a capital rider. I saw a little lady cantering in front of me, but I should not have known who it was had not Rowland touched his hat as I passed; and what a clever little pony," he added, as he stooped low to pat the smooth black head and long flowing mane. "How long have you had him?"

"Six months, uncle," she replied. "Papa bought him of Sir Henry Turner; his boys all learnt to ride on Boosey, but they have grown too old and too tall for such a small pony, so now he is mine."

"What is the pony's name, Mary? It sounds peculiar."

"Oh, Boosey, uncle," she replied, laughing. "Sir Henry's boys named him after Alexander's horse Bucephalus; the groom shortened it to Boosey, and we still keep up the name."

"So he is a classical pony, eh?" said Colonel Herbert; "I suppose the name was too much of a jaw-breaker for the stablemen. Boosey, however, is rather a degradation for the bearer of such a title."

"He's a military pony, too," laughed Mary, "for he can stand fire, uncle. One morning the soldiers were at drill and firing in the Park as I rode past, and Boosey walked by as quietly as possible. I did feel half afraid till I remembered that Sir Henry was a field-officer and his sons were often with him at reviews, one of them always riding the pony."

"Well, then, my dear, if Boosey is so well trained, would you like to go with me to-day? There is to be a review at Hyde Park, and you can be with me near the flagstaff—opposite the firing, you know. Are you sure you have no fear?"

"Not a bit, uncle, and indeed I should like it so much if papa will allow me to go."

"Suppose we ride home and ask him."

The horses had been walking while they talked, and the colonel putting his horse into a trot as he spoke, Boosey started off at full speed, cantering as fast as his little legs would carry him to keep pace with the colonel's tall black horse.

They reached Dover Street in a very short time, and Mr. Armstrong, seeing them approach, came out to welcome the colonel. The request for Mary was soon made, yet she almost feared that the answer would be unfavourable when her father said,—"Mary had not breakfasted yet, colonel; and you know I object to my daughter being seen on horseback in the neighbourhood of my business after nine o'clock."

"Then let her ride home now to our house and breakfast with us," said the colonel, quickly.

To this there appeared no objection, and Mr. Armstrong readily gave his consent, but Mary had not forgotten her mother's fears.

"Oh, father," she exclaimed, "do you think mamma will mind my going? you know how anxious she always is even when I ride quietly before breakfast."

Mr. Armstrong was about to say that his wife was not likely to oppose his wishes, when the colonel exclaimed,—"I will go up and quiet her fears about Mary's safety."

He was not absent many minutes, but as he remounted his horse Mary knew he had succeeded, for on looking up she saw her mother at the window nodding and smiling at her as she rode off with her uncle.

Rowland, who remained behind, stood for a few moments watching his young mistress as she and

her uncle rode towards Piccadilly. Then as he turned to take his horse to the stables he said to himself,—"Master wont get his way with that young lady, I can see, with all his queer rules about what she is to do."

Mary breakfasted with her aunt and uncle in Park Lane, and in less than an hour after started to be present at the review. She certainly felt a little nervous at first when she found herself among a group of officers and ladies on horseback, or in carriages near the flagstaff, especially when the soldiers were preparing for the first volley.

But Boosey stood firm, and that gave her courage to sit and calmly watch the varied performances of the men so easily seen from such an advantageous point of view.

Many questions were asked the colonel respecting the little equestrian, who looked very attractive in her riding attire. The long curls falling to the waist over the dark blue riding-habit would have been called golden in these days; and a black beaver hat, with a drooping feather and a broad brim, did not quite conceal the fair complexion and delicate features of the really pretty child. When asked, "Who is your little friend?" the colonel would merely reply, "My niece." No mention was made of her name, or of the fact of her being a tradesman's daughter, for in those days of exclusiveness it would have created a feeling of surprise.

More than fourteen years have passed since Edward Armstrong became the husband of the young girl who owed her life to his energy and courage.

A marriage under such circumstances was not unlikely to be accompanied with real affection on both sides, although a union of those who occupy different positions socially is seldom truly happy.

Notwithstanding the love that made Edward Armstrong gentle and indulgent to his wife, there yet existed certain phases in his character which jarred upon her love of refinement, and caused her great annoyance. His eccentricities, his prejudices, and, at times when angry, a certain coarseness of manner, were actual pain to his sensitive wife. But she possessed a natural sweetness of temper that could "turn away wrath" by a "soft answer" or silence. She had quickly discovered that his will was law, and brooked no contradiction; and her love of peace as well as her wifely love very soon taught her to give way to her husband in every point.

Besides, she had all the comforts and luxuries of a refined home, equal in many respects to the homes of her sisters, although considered so inferior in position; a loving and indulgent husband, and four children, of whom Mary was the eldest and only girl.

Her relatives had not cast her off because of her marriage; the occasion of their first meeting, when Edward Armstrong had been the means of saving their sister's life, rendered such an idea impossible. Added to this, Maria's husband was unmistakably a man of intellectual tastes as well as education, notwithstanding his eccentricities and peculiar notions. Association with his wife, and mixing in the society he sometimes met with at the houses of her sisters, had already increased his refinement of manner, although nothing could as yet entirely overcome the effects of narrow minded prejudices.

The custom now so prevalent which enables a man of business to take a house for his wife and children at a distance from London, was at the time of which we write a novelty. Railways and omnibuses, by which London is now filled in the morning and deserted in the evening, were in a state of progression. Yet Mr. Armstrong could not be persuaded to take a house out of town; it was a new-fangled notion, he would say, and quite out of place in a man of business. Mrs. Armstrong's family, therefore, could only get over the fact of her living above a shop with her children by ascribing it to her husband's eccentricities.

"My brother-in-law keeps horses, and he could easily ride or drive into town every day if he chose, but we cannot persuade him to do so," said Mrs. Herbert to a visitor on one occasion; "but I hope he will give way at last, especially when his daughter is old enough to be introduced into society."

But if all these little matters troubled Mrs. Armstrong's family, her husband felt himself also aggrieved on one point in which she was the unfortunate cause.

He had quickly discovered after his marriage that his loving and accomplished wife was totally ignorant of domestic duties or of the management of a household.

She soon also became conscious of her deficiencies, and tried to acquire the necessary knowledge by every effort in her power, but in vain; and her husband, accustomed to the perfect order and regularity of his mother's house, never appeared satisfied.

This circumstance produced after a time, as their family increased, new plans on the part of Mr. Armstrong. He engaged a suitable housekeeper, to regulate the domestic arrangements of his home, and placed the education of Mary in the hands of her mother, knowing well that no one could be found more fit for that office.

Gladly Mrs. Armstrong gave up the duties she felt so irksome, and divided her time between the nursery and the schoolroom. In this way, notwithstanding the fact that her drawing-room and dining-room were on the floor above her husband's business, and in spite also of various annoyances which his eccentric doings in the household often caused, the years passed away in comfort and happiness, bringing the time in which this chapter commences.

Mr. Armstrong's next proposition, however, was by no means so satisfactory to his wife.

About six months before the meeting of Mary with her uncle Herbert during her morning ride, Mr. Armstrong made his appearance in the schoolroom, and finding his wife alone, he said apparently with an effort,—"Maria, my dear, I want to make some little change in Mary's educational duties; I suppose you have no objection?"

"In what way?" she asked, with a dread in her heart of what her eccentric husband might be about to propose.

"Why, my dear," he replied, seating himself, "you know your own deficiencies in domestic knowledge, but I am determined my daughter shall never fail in that important part of a woman's education; you may make her as accomplished as you please, I will take care that she is made domestic."

Mrs. Armstrong had been trained in those days when to stoop to domestic duties, or to understand how to make a pie or pudding, was considered a degradation to an accomplished young lady; and to her ultra refinement there was something repulsive in the idea of her daughter learning the duties of a cook or a housemaid. But when her husband expressed himself in such a firm decided manner, she knew it was useless to offer any opposition, so she merely said faintly,—"What do you wish Mary to do?"

"Send for her, my dear," he replied, "there will be no objections on her part, I am quite sure."

In a few minutes Mary made her appearance, and listened to her father's proposition, the subject of which will appear in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

BUCEPHALUS.

"Mamma, oh, do come to the window, there is such a dear little pony standing at the door, and father is talking to the groom."

Mrs. Armstrong advanced to the drawing-room window at her daughter's request, and joined with her in admiration of the shiny black coat, and long mane and tail of Bucephalus, whose purchase had on that morning been completed.

Some idea of the truth occurred to both mother and daughter when Rowland appeared and led the pony away. In a very few minutes Mr. Armstrong himself entered the room, startling Mary by the question,—"Well, my daughter, how do like your new pony?"

"Mine, father?" (one of Mr. Armstrong's peculiar fancies made him object to be called "papa," considering it another form of "aping the gentry"). How the blue eyes glittered and the face lighted up with pleasure and astonishment as Mary spoke.

"Yes, my dear, it is yours on the conditions I spoke of yesterday," replied her father, seating himself and drawing his daughter to his side; "will you be able to fulfil them?"

"I will try, father," she replied, glancing at her mother.

"Your mother will not object, I know," he said, noticing the glance; "but now listen, and I will tell you more clearly what I expect you to do, and your reward will be riding lessons for three months at the Riding School, Albany Street, and the attendance of Rowland while you canter round the Parks, any morning you like, before breakfast—hear me out, Mary," he continued, interrupting her expressions of delight—"Rowland will have orders from me to be here at seven in summer, and eight in winter, and if you are not ready for your ride within five minutes of the time, he is to take the ponies back to the stable, and you will lose your ride."

"Oh, I don't think that will ever happen, dear father," she replied. "I am so delighted I hardly know how to thank you enough."

"I don't want thanks, my child, if my gift make you an early riser, which I am very anxious you should be; and you will not forget that I wish you to spend two hours every morning in learning domestic duties."

"Mary has done this already, Edward," Mrs. Armstrong ventured to remark.

"I know it, my dear," he replied, "but not to the extent I wish. Although she may never be in a position to require such knowledge, excepting as the mistress of a house, yet those women make the best mistresses who know the time, the labour, and the skill required in every form of domestic work."

"I think you degrade your daughter by this strange request," said Mrs. Armstrong, whose opinions of what a lady might do without compromising her dignity and refinement were thoroughly shocked.

"Nothing done by a *lady*," replied Mr. Armstrong, with an emphasis on the word, "will ever

degrade her, if it can be done by a *woman* without *disgrace*."

In spite of what were called his singular notions, there was no doubt perfect truth in this remark. We are reminded by it of George Herbert's lines:—

> "Who sweeps a room, as in God's laws,
> Makes that and the action fine."

Mary seemed to have the same impression; for after a pause she said,—"Father, I am quite willing to do as you wish, only——"

"Only what, my child?"

"I was going to say, it would take away the time from my studies, but I must work all the harder, I suppose, and I don't mind if mamma does not."

And so in this, at that period unusual association of domestic duties with refined studies, and the fashionable accomplishment of riding, Mary Armstrong passed the next two years of her life. Then occurred another phase in her father's opinion of what his daughter's education should be.

During the two years to which we have referred, partly as an additional reward for her efforts to please him, he had provided her with masters for French and music, and partly to relieve her mother, whose health had lately been rather uncertain. Mary's young brothers were high-spirited boys, and soon proved themselves too much for their mother's management.

The two elder were sent to school early, and the youngest, now five years old, was to accompany them after Midsummer. This was the opportunity for which Mr. Armstrong waited. He at once put a stop to the domestic duties, and took his daughter into his counting-house for two hours daily to act as his clerk; her love of arithmetic he knew would make this a pleasure to her.

But now worldly opinion interfered. One or two business men connected with the Corn Exchange, started with surprise at the appearance of a young girl writing at the desk when introduced to Mr. Armstrong's counting-house, and when alone with him spoke plainly on the subject.

Not all the domestic work, nor it must be confessed, the occasional coarseness of her father when angry, could counteract the influence of her mother on Mary's manner and appearance.

She was growing daily more like her, and the gentle graceful girl was in every respect a lady, and far superior in manners and appearance to the daughters of tradesmen in her father's position. Indeed, she knew nothing of any society but that of her mother's relations. The words which at last startled Mr. Armstrong were really needed to show him his error.

"Who is that young lady writing at the desk in your counting-house, Armstrong?"

"My daughter," he replied, proudly. "I wish her to acquire business habits, and this is the only plan I can adopt for the purpose."

"Then the sooner you discontinue it the better; nothing can be more unwise. Do your clerks have access to your counting-house?"

Mr. Armstrong was not without a certain degree of pride in his wife's connexions, and he flushed high as he replied—"Mrs. Armstrong's daughter is not likely to notice one of her father's clerks."

His friend shrugged his shoulders as he said,—"Well, Armstrong, you know best; but if I had such a beautiful girl for my daughter, I would not degrade her by placing her in a position on a level with those whom I considered her inferiors."

Half offended as he was, Mr. Armstrong yet took the hint. He returned to his counting-house and furtively examined the beautiful profile as Mary, *con amore*, leaned over her task. Her auburn hair hung in massive curls to her waist, and though braided on her forehead and thrown behind her ears, the curls drooped over the lower part of her face even to the paper on which she wrote.

"She's growing more like her mother than ever," was the father's thought. "I believe it is that profusion of hair which makes her so attractive; suppose it were cut off or rolled up in some way, I could insist——" He paused. "No; I should have mother, and aunts, and uncles all against me. I've had my way in most things, I suppose I must give up now and put a stop to this."

And so ended Mary's days in the counting-house. The time came when also for this short insight into business matters she could thank her father's peculiarities.

Mrs. Armstrong's sisters were, of course, duly informed of all these eccentric arrangements on the part of her husband, but they knew it was useless to interfere. They knew also that his influence over his daughter was too great for them to attempt to counteract it.

"Fancy, Helen," said Mrs. Armstrong one day to her sister, "Mary has not only to make beds and dust rooms, but actually spends an hour in the kitchen every morning learning to make pies and puddings, and even how to roast and boil meat!"

Mrs. Herbert shrugged her shoulders as she replied,—"Well, if all this nonsense about teaching her the duties of servants and such degrading employment does not eventually destroy all refinement of feeling and manners in Mary I shall be very much surprised."

But the two years passed, and the relatives of Mrs. Armstrong were obliged to own that no such

terrible result had happened to their niece. She appeared at their social gatherings, she rode with her uncle and cousin Charles on horseback, and drove round the Park with her aunts in an open carriage, showing plainly both in person, dress, and manners, that the study of domestic duties had not unfitted her for good society.

Charles Herbert, the colonel's only child, was not only fond of his cousin Mary, but also a great admirer of his uncle Armstrong. Although scarcely old enough to retain a correct remembrance of the time when this uncle had snatched him from a watery grave, yet his mother had spoken of it to him so often that the impression made on his mind at four years of age had never been effaced. He once encountered Mary coming from the kitchen department with her curls tucked up beneath a white handkerchief, a large coarse apron before her, and her hands covered with flour.

"Why, Mary," exclaimed the youth of nineteen, "what ever will you do? there is mamma at the door in her carriage wailing to take you for a drive!"

"Come to the drawing-room, Charles, and wait for me," she said; "I will be ready to go with you and aunt in five minutes."

"Then you must be Cinderella," he replied, as he followed her upstairs as far as the drawing-room, "and have a fairy to help you!"

"So I have, and more than one," she replied, laughing, as she continued her flight upward.

Mary's fairies were Neatness, Quickness, Order, and Method. Therefore in very few minutes more than the time she had named she presented herself in the drawing-room ready for her drive.

All fear that domestic duties would make Mrs. Armstrong's daughter coarse or unrefined must have vanished at her appearance. She was simply attired in a pale violet silk dress and cape, with close-fitting gloves, lace collar and cuffs, and a broad-brimmed hat partly concealing her face, but not the profusion of auburn ringlets that fell around her shoulders.

"How like you grow to your mother, my dear," said her aunt, as Mary, with the softness and refinement of that mother's manner, advanced to welcome her. And as she rose to accompany her niece to the carriage she said to herself, "Well, perhaps after all Edward is right—a woman is none the worse for understanding the management of household duties."

One evening Mary was present at a family dinner-party at her uncle Sir James Elston's house in Portland Place. Very little had been said to the old sailor about what Mrs. Armstrong's sisters called the peculiar manner in which Edward Armstrong was educating his daughter, but that little had been met by him with a remark that silenced them—

"Making his girl domestic, is he? Wise man, wise man; that's all I can say."

On this family gathering, Mary, who was now in her sixteenth year, gave sufficient proof that learning to be domestic had not prevented her from becoming accomplished. A young French lady was present with whom Mary conversed with ease in her own tongue.

"You speak with a pure accent, mademoiselle," said the young lady; "have you resided in France?"

"No," was the reply; "but mamma was at school in Paris for years, and she has spoken French to me from my infancy."

In the course of the evening Mary was called upon to accompany her aunt Herbert in a duet for the harp and piano, and in this she succeeded so well as to gain approbation from every one present.

Another unexpected success awaited her. She had attempted to copy on ivory a miniature of her mother painted by Sir George Hayter. It was in truth only the effort of a learner, and by no means so deserving of praise as her studies of heads and landscapes; yet when Mr. Armstrong produced it, framed and reposing in a velvet-lined morocco case, it obtained for her great commendation.

"Oh, papa," said Mary, blushing deeply when she saw it in his hand, "my painting is not worth all that expense."

"I have had it done to show my approval of your conduct, Mary," said her father, in a low voice.

The flush on her face deepened at the words. Mary Armstrong sought for no greater reward than her father's approving smile.

"Well, brother Armstrong," said Colonel Herbert an hour afterwards, when the party were about to separate, "I must congratulate you on the success of your plans. If you are as much satisfied with Mary's exploits in the domestic line as we are with her in other respects, you have no reason to complain of failure."

And thus armed at all points but *one* for contact with the world, Mary Armstrong passed from girlhood to womanhood without a care for the future.

CHAPTER VII.

FREDDY'S NEW SCHOOL.

More than three years have passed since Mary's probation ended so pleasantly, and they have very much changed her father.

Perhaps we ought to say that the gentle influence of his wife and close association with her family, had to a certain extent softened down the rugged points of his character, and made him more amenable to the usages of the society in which he moved. The very fact of his choosing for a wife a woman of education and refinement proved that his tastes were above his position, for in the days of which we write, the idea of refinement in the wife of a tradesman would have been treated with incredulity, if not contempt.

During this period the death of Mrs. Armstrong's mother, Mrs. St. Clair, was the only change that occurred in his wife's family. The house at Richmond was given up, and Mary greatly missed the society of her dear grandmamma, and the pleasant visits to her house; but she still constantly associated with her aunts and uncles.

Among the changes of opinion which had by degrees crushed down Mr. Armstrong's prejudices and crotchets, were two important ones, not perhaps in themselves, but in their results. He took a house for his family at Kilburn, which was then a really rural suburb of London.

Sometimes he would ride into town to his business, or take the newly established omnibus which left that locality in time for business hours.

This arrangement led to the less important change from an early to a late dinner, and also to the choice of a school for his youngest boy, Freddy, now in his eighth year. The child's health had always suffered in London, and as, since their residence in the country, he appeared so much better, Mrs Armstrong wished him to remain at home and go daily to a school in the neighbourhood.

It was not long before a circular found its way from Englefield Grange School to Lime Grove, as Mr. Armstrong's residence was named, from two magnificent lime-trees which stood as sentinels on each side the entrance gate, in summer filling the air with their sweet fragrance.

Mrs. Armstrong decided to call upon the principal, Dr. Halford, herself, and with all a mother's anxiety talk to him about her boy.

Her own health had wonderfully improved during the six months of her residence at Kilburn. The open country—for houses then were few and far between—the sweet fresh air, the pleasant walks, gave her, as it were, new life, and last, but not least, the six o'clock dinner suited her better than a late supper. Mr. Armstrong would sometimes tell her she was growing young again, and it may be understood well how her relatives rejoiced over the change in her husband's opinions which had brought about such pleasant results. This improved state of health enabled Mrs. Armstrong to array herself fearlessly in warm winter clothing, and venture out in the cold frosty air a few weeks after Christmas, to call upon Dr. Halford. The distance along the country road was very trifling, and she had more than once noticed the large old-fashioned house which stood back from the road, surrounded by playgrounds, orchards, and a farmyard, all visible to the passer-by.

The vacation was nearly at an end, and the house, with its large dormitories and schoolrooms, in perfect readiness for the return of Dr. Halford's pupils. Its clean and well-furnished appearance satisfied the rather fastidious lady, although she had no intention of sending her boy as a boarder. She had been conducted to a pleasant drawing-room overlooking a beautiful prospect at the back of the house, and instead of taking the chair placed for her she advanced to the window to admire the view. While thus standing, she almost started as the door opened and the doctor entered.

A mildly speaking man, above the middle height, with silvery hair and keen intellectual eyes, advanced to greet the visitor, who quickly discerned that the schoolmaster, of whose erudition she had heard so much, was truly a gentleman of the old school. The cavalier deference in his manner to women, the old-fashioned courtesy with which he requested Mrs. Armstrong to be seated, and addressed her as "Madam," were essentially pleasing to that lady. They were soon quite at home on the subject of education, and Dr. Halford added no little to the prepossession he had created by listening to her anxieties respecting Freddy's health with courteous interest.

"You have children of your own, Dr. Halford?" said Mrs. Armstrong, in a tone of inquiry.

"I have two living, madam; a son and a daughter. My son is being educated for the Church, but at present he assists me in my school."

"And your daughter in the domestic arrangements, I presume," said the lady, with a kind of wish to know whether other men were as anxious over that point as her husband.

"She was accustomed to do so before her marriage," he replied, "but she has resided for several years with her husband in Australia. My son is much younger than his sister. She is the eldest of seven, and he the youngest."

Mrs. Armstrong mentally reflected on the sorrowful loss of five children, which must have caused such a terrible gap between the only surviving son and daughter, for there had been a sadness in his tone when he last spoke. Her own sympathies were too strong, and the memory of the loss of two children since Freddy, too painful still to allow her to continue the subject, so she said—

"When do you commence school again, Dr. Halford?"

"On Monday, madam," was the reply. "Would you like to see the schoolrooms and dining-rooms?" he added, "as your little boy is to dine with us."

Mrs. Armstrong gladly assented, and on her way to these apartments met Mrs. Halford, with whom she was equally pleased to make acquaintance. After a stay of nearly an hour, she at last took her leave of the doctor and his wife, saying—

"I shall send my little boy on Monday week, Dr. Halford, not before, and I feel sure he will make progress under your care, and be quite happy."

The terms for so young a pupil were not of such great importance as to justify Dr. Halford's pleasure at this addition to his numbers, but he had been as quick to detect a gentlewoman in Mrs. Armstrong as she had been respecting himself. Besides, he had heard rumours already of the wealth and good connexions of the family at Lime Grove, and the latter fact was more especially agreeable to him.

A clergyman who is a schoolmaster and his wife are both often well born and well connected though poor, and naturally they prefer to teach boys who learn refinement and good breeding at home, to those who are perhaps better paid for by parents who think everything, even intellect and good manners, can be obtained for money.

Mrs. Armstrong returned home at a quick pace; the pleasure she felt at being able to place her delicate Freddy with such nice people, and the fresh bracing air of the cold morning, invigorated her so greatly that Mary, who met her in the hall, exclaimed—

"Why, mamma, you look quite young and blooming, and as happy as if you had heard pleasant news!"

"Well, dear, I think I have, for Dr. Halford is one of the nicest schoolmasters I ever met with, rather of the old school in manners, but not in the least pedantic, and I like Mrs. Halford exceedingly, there is such a kind, motherly way about her, and they are both really well bred."

"So I suppose you intend Freddy to go there to school, mamma?" said Mary.

"Yes, indeed I do, my dear; and I am so pleased with the house and the arrangements, that if the Grange were not too near home, I should like to send Arthur and Edward as boarders. But I begin to feel rather tired, darling," she added, throwing herself into an easy-chair, "although the fresh bracing air seems to have given me new life."

"Ah, yes, so it may," cried Mary, "but, mamma, I can see you are tired; all the bright colour on your checks is beginning to fade already, so you must sit quite still in that chair till luncheon time; it will soon be ready, and I will take off your things and carry them upstairs while you rest."

The fairies of old are still Mary's attendants; gently and quickly she removed her mother's bonnet and wraps, and running upstairs with them, returned in a very few minutes with her head-dress, which she arranged tastefully on the pale brown hair, still worn in side curls as in the days of her youth.

Mrs. Armstrong has not yet reached the age of forty, and the delicate health of the last few years has only rendered her fair complexion more delicate and her physical powers weaker, without adding age to her appearance or a single grey hair to the shining curls which hang on each side of her face.

As Mary Armstrong stands by her mother, smoothing the soft ringlets, it is plainly to be seen that the pretty child of twelve has developed into a very beautiful woman. At the age of eighteen she resembles her mother only in complexion, eyes, and hair. Her features, though as regular, are not so delicately chiselled, they are larger and more marked; and in this, as in an expression of calm decision, the resemblance to her father is very striking. It is when she smiles, and her blue eyes light up with pleasure and interest, that strangers often exclaim, "How like you are to your mother, Miss Armstrong!" Mary has grown very little since the time when her cousin named her "Cinderella," but she looks taller, partly on account of her figure having fully developed into rounded proportions, but principally because the curls have disappeared. They have been tortured into plaits and massive coils at the back of her head, but true to Nature they often rebel, and escape here and there in the form of ringlets—often unnoticed by their owner, but when pointed out to her they are unceremoniously pushed back.

Mary is still influenced by the words of her father; he once said to her, "Mary, can you not arrange your hair as other girls do? those long curls are too childish at your age."

From this moment, to her mother's great regret, she, as it was then called, "turned up her hair" in the way we have described.

Her aunts approved, because this arrangement was less singular and more fashionable, which latter fact would have greatly surprised Mr. Armstrong. At all events, they differed from him in

one respect still. When the rebellious hair would escape from the plaits in stray ringlets while in the company of her aunts, Mary had at first attempted to reduce them to submission, but she was quickly interrupted. "Leave your hair alone, Mary," her aunt Herbert exclaimed; "why, those stray ringlets are most effective, and quite an improvement to the appearance of your head. Surely your father will not object to what is natural; if you curled it in paper every night to produce an effect, then he might complain or disapprove."

Mary laughed, but when visiting at her aunt's she allowed Nature to act as she pleased. Yet at home there seemed no happier task to the young girl than to give way to every wish of her father, whether openly expressed or slightly hinted at, no matter to what it referred. It was a kind of hero-worship in the girl's heart. Her father was her hero, and the fact that she did not love him with the same clinging fondness as she loved her mother was quite unknown to herself.

Mary Armstrong certainly obeyed the command, "Honour thy father and thy mother;" yet in the family at Lime Grove there was still one thing wanting, "the perfect love that casteth out fear."

The principles of honour, rectitude, truthfulness, generosity, and other moral virtues were cultivated in Mary's home, but the "charity, or love," without which, St. Paul tells us, all our doings are as "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals," was wanting. Love to God and love to man, on which "hang all the law and the commandments," were known only in theory.

Mary Armstrong had yet to learn that to her Father in heaven she must turn in trouble and sorrow, and in future days she might have said almost in the words of Wolsey, "Had I but served my Father in heaven as diligently as I studied to please my father on earth, He would not have forsaken me now in my hour of sorrow." And yet for these days of trial Mary at last could feel thankful. Christianity in her home had been an acknowledged fact. Its outward duties, its moral principles, were all inculcated; but when our daily life passes smoothly, untroubled, by sorrow or poverty, which is, perhaps, the hardest trial of all to bear, especially when accompanied by sickness and pain, we are apt to forget the sweet principle of love to God and love to man which, St. Paul tells us, "is the fulfilling of the law;" and Mary Armstrong's life hitherto had known no trials more painful than those caused by her father's eccentricities.

CHAPTER VIII.

ENGLEFIELD GRANGE.

More than thirty-five years before the period of which we write, James Halford, who had been travelling tutor to the son of a nobleman, commenced a school at Bayswater, then a pretty rural village. His father, a country surgeon in good practice, had given his only son a superior education, but the young man had no liking for his father's profession. To send James to the university Mr. Halford felt would be beyond his means, and the young man's wish to enter the Church was therefore set aside, causing him great disappointment. Ultimately he was engaged as tutor to the youth already spoken of, and while with him in that capacity became acquainted with the governess of his sisters, Clara Marston, whom he afterwards married. At the death of his father a small but unexpected amount of money fell into his hands. He almost immediately relinquished his engagement with the son of Lord Rivers, and took a house at Bayswater. Trifling as the sum was, it still formed a sufficient capital upon which to commence a school, and so well had he performed his duty with his pupil that the high recommendation of the young man's relatives soon gained him several pupils. Six months after his father's death Clara Marston became his wife. For ten years they continued to carry on their school most successfully, till bricks and mortar had completely destroyed the countrified character of the place, and obliged them at last to seek a home elsewhere.

Armies of builders were already invading the beautiful fields and meadows in the neighbourhood; long rows of small semi-detached cottages, at rentals varying from 20*l.* to 50*l.* a year, sprung up as if by magic. Worse still, when the long leases of many old red brick mansions expired they were quickly demolished, and not only on their sites, but in the midst of the beautiful gardens and pleasure-grounds belonging to them arose piles of inferior buildings, bringing to their owners a quick return for the capital expended. The same spoliation of Nature is still going on around us, and in these days of utilitarianism how can it be avoided?

The loveliest of Nature's landscapes—the bright flowers of a well-kept garden—the glorious old trees, from the tops of which is heard the musical cawing of rooks—the red brick mansion with its many windows glittering in the setting sun, and its colour contrasting picturesquely with the green foliage—the stream of limpid water with the graceful swans gliding on its shadowed surface,—all this is very lovely to see, and belongs to the beautiful, but "will it pay?" is the question asked now; and the practical man of business knows that *money* not "*knowledge* is power," in these days of mammon-worship. So the beautiful is sacrificed without regret if it can be replaced by something that "pays better."

This brick-building mania, however, hastened Mr. Halford's removal from a house already too small for his increased number of pupils and rising family. His gentle firmness with the former, and his wife's clever domestic management, had made them very successful, and when they removed to their present commodious residence all their pupils followed them, and others were

quickly added to their number.

Many sorrows, however, had overtaken them during the twenty-five years at Englefield Grange. Of their seven children two only survived, the eldest and the youngest.

Fanny Halford at the age of twenty had married, and accompanied her husband to Melbourne about fourteen years before the time of which we write. The youngest, Henry, a studious reading boy, was therefore the only hope of his parents. Dr. Halford, remembering his own disappointment about entering the Church, watched his boy anxiously, and as he grew from childhood to youth discovered with satisfaction that his wish to become a clergyman was as strong as his own had been.

Indeed, the youth's tastes all tended to such a result. At eight years old he commenced Greek; Cæsar, Horace, and Virgil were the companions of his play-hours, history an amusement, and poetry a delight. When these talents developed themselves Mr. Halford could not control his regret at a lost opportunity. Henry had not reached his seventh year when a friend obtained for him a presentation to Christ's Hospital; but the mother, who had followed so many children to the grave, could not spare her youngest boy. Mr. Halford hesitated to press it, and so the opportunity was lost. Now, however, she was ready to make any possible sacrifice to help in carrying out his own and his father's wishes.

When Henry Halford reached the age of sixteen it became necessary to make some decision as to his future. He had his faults, as all young people have, and they had been to a certain extent fostered by the indulgence of his loving mother and sister. Fanny was twelve years older than her brother, and knowing how he hated the restrictions of order and neatness, she would, during his early boyhood, quietly set to rights untidy rooms, carefully replace scattered books, and forgive his seeming indifference to her kind attention. Even a certain irritation of temper was passed over by mother and sister, for if he was hasty, was he not quick to forgive? and who so penitent as Henry Halford after uttering an angry or unjust word? Besides, they reasoned, studious and imaginative people were often very irritable. After his sister's marriage, he had another to spoil him in her place, of whom we shall hear more by-and-by. And so the time passed on till his father felt it necessary to obtain for his son suitable preparation for the university.

One evening he broached the subject to his wife. "My dear," he said, "there is no one to whom I could send Henry with so much confidence as to Dr. Mason; he is a man of high standing, and his pupils scarcely ever fail in passing for the professions in which he prepares them. He took a first class at Oxford, and has had many years' experience."

"Are not his terms a hundred a year?" asked Mrs. Halford.

"Yes," was the reply, "but I have thought the matter over seriously; Henry must be with Dr. Mason two years at least, and we can spare the 200*l.*, Clara dear, don't you think so?"

"Indeed, I do," she replied; "I would make any sacrifice rather than interfere with the dear boy's prospects."

"There will be no sacrifice," said her husband, "even if it should cost the whole of the thousand pounds I have saved for him, to send him to the university. Fanny has had her share, and if Henry is willing for his portion to be spent on preparation for the Church we cannot object to his wishes."

"And is he willing?" asked the mother, who was ready to give up double the sum named by her husband if by so doing she could gratify her son.

"More than willing, he is most anxious. I never saw the boy look so eager and delighted as when he found I could spare the money I had set aside for him without inconvenience to myself. I explained to him the whole cost—200*l.* for two years with Dr. Mason,—and, at the lowest estimate, 600*l.* while at Oxford. Altogether, with coaching, private tutor, ordination fees, and other expenses, a thousand pounds will just about cover it."

"You have set my mind at ease, James, about the boy," said Mrs. Halford. "In six or seven years he will be ordained, and by that time, if our school continues to be successful, we may still have something to leave to our children after all."

"And you forget, my dear, that if I should be laid up or unable to work, Henry as a clergyman will be much more suitable to carry on the school than myself, although I have a foreign degree. And after my death there will be an income for him to fall back upon if he does not speedily obtain a living."

"Don't anticipate evil," said the hopefully proud mother. "God grant we may both live to see our son a useful minister in the Church before we die, whether as curate or rector."

And in this happy prospect Henry Halford, at the age of seventeen, had been placed with Dr. Mason to prepare for matriculation at Oxford.

The breakfast parlour at the Grange was situated at the back of the house, looking over the prospect so admired by Mrs. Armstrong. The sun shining upon the front of the house during the summer afternoon made this apartment cool and pleasant for tea, which was now prepared on a table near the window.

Close to it sat a lady past middle age, yet most attractive in appearance. On her white silky hair

rested a lace cap tastefully trimmed; beneath the white hair and strongly contrasted with it were dark eyes, eyebrows, and lashes, still reminding those who knew her in youth of the bright and lively Clara Marston. The soft, patient face has now lost its vivacity, but it is not the less pleasing on that account. Her hand held a stocking, but it rested on her lap, her thoughts were evidently far away.

The door opened and Dr. Halford entered, followed by his niece, who exclaimed—

"Aunt, I declare you have been mending stockings, but I mean to hide that stocking-basket out of your sight; and now you are to make yourself comfortable in your easy-chair while I pour out the tea."

Mrs. Halford smiled, but she submitted quietly to her niece's injunctions, gave up the stocking which she took from her passive hand, and then drew her aunt's chair nearer to the table.

Happy as they appeared, Mrs. Halford could scarcely, even after the lapse of ten years, repress a sigh as she saw her niece take her absent daughter's place.

Perhaps she felt thankful at not being able to trace a likeness in her brother's daughter to her own Fanny, who in features, eyes, and hair so much resembled herself. But in truth Kate Marston was a great comfort to her aunt and uncle. Plain and homely, with a fair skin and rosy cheeks that betokened her north-country origin, she was yet active, methodical, and industrious—a daughter in loving attention to her aunt and uncle, and at all times good-tempered and cheerful.

"Uncle," she said presently, "you need not hide your letter, I saw the postman give you one this afternoon."

Mrs. Halford looked up quickly. "Is it from Dr. Mason?" she asked.

"Well, yes, it is," he replied. "I wanted to wait till we had finished tea, but Katey is impatient, so I suppose I must read it at once."

"Yes, uncle, of course you must; I saw the postmark when you took it in, so no wonder I am impatient."

We also need not wonder, for the orphan daughter of Mrs. Halford's only brother had no hopes or interests beyond those of Englefield Grange; and although she had long passed the ominous age of thirty she had no thought of marriage.

Dr. Halford took the letter from his pocket, and not even the mother's eyes could be brighter with interest as she listened while her husband read than those of Kate Marston. And this is what Dr. Mason wrote respecting the dearly loved son and cousin:—

> "My dear Sir,—When you requested me to send you my opinion respecting the abilities and character of your son Henry at the end of one month, I feared it would be too soon to enable me to form a correct judgment.
>
> "I might, however, have done so safely, for as I found him during the first month he still continues; to even a superficial observer his character and tendencies are plainly distinguishable. I never met with a youth less reticent or more transparent,—too much so indeed for contact with the world; he is fearless of consequences, and careless of concealment.
>
> "I have been led to form this opinion from mere trifling matters which have come under my notice. A want of order and neatness, and a reckless disregard to rules, have made him break them openly, and as if unconscious that by so doing he was deserving of blame. I am inclined to think that Master Henry's mamma and cousin are answerable for all this, for the boy acts as if he had been accustomed to be waited upon hand and foot.
>
> "He has a high proud spirit which will brook no insult; yet, quick as he is to resent, he is equally quick to forgive, and when he has given offence by a hasty or unjust remark he is ready to acknowledge it and to apologise in a moment. He is warm-hearted and generous to a fault, and a great favourite with some of my best pupils, all older than himself.
>
> "Perhaps one great cause for this may arise from their admiration of his talents. My dear friend, you did not prepare me for such a genius as your boy. You have, no doubt, instructed him well, but there is in him a natural love for the acquirement of knowledge for its own sake, and indeed talents, which if cultivated will one day make of him a great man.
>
> "Do not hesitate to send him to the university; and if he still wishes to become a clergyman, encourage him by all means to work for that end.
>
> "The power over his own language which he displays in his translations of the Greek and Latin poets is wonderful in a youth of his age. He never seems at a loss for a word to express the true meaning of the original, and his English themes are superior in many respects to those of my oldest pupils.
>
> "The style wants training and pruning, like a plant of luxurious growth, till it reaches

perfection and beauty. Time and experience will do this, and I have no fear for the result.

"In mathematical studies, however, he is rather deficient, but for these he appears to have no predilection. I shall not allow him to give them up entirely, although I have no hopes of making him a mathematician. My epistle is extending itself beyond all reasonable limits, but I was most anxious to give you my candid opinion of your son's character and abilities, and I trust I have complied with your request in a satisfactory manner.

"With kind regards to Mrs. Halford and your niece, believe me to be

"Most faithfully yours,

"M. MASON."

CHAPTER IX.

LOOKING BACK.

A few miles from Meadow Farm, the birthplace of Edward Armstrong, stood a nobleman's mansion, which in spite of modern alterations and adornments, gave numerous proofs of its antiquity. The building formed three sides of a square, the fourth enclosed by iron railings and a curiously carved gate, gilded escutcheons and coats of arms forming its chief ornaments. The house stood on the brow of a hill, looking across the town of Basingstoke, which lay beneath it at a distance of a few miles.

A streamlet, issuing in little rills from springs on the summit of the ascent, fell in tiny cascades through woody glens and artificial grottoes till it approached the house. Here it formed a miniature lake on which the majestic swans sailed in stately pride. Continuing its course, it passed under a rustic bridge, a limpid stream, in which the speckled trout sported, fearless of the angler's line, beneath the shadow of lofty elms or gracefully bending willows.

Within, the house was equally attractive. A large hall occupied the centre of the building, its lofty dimensions reaching to the roof, and lighted by tall narrow windows which faced the entrance gates. From this hall, doors and a noble staircase led to other apartments, the dining-room and drawing-room occupying a similar space at the back. In the former room, a few days after the marriage of Arthur Franklyn to Fanny Halford, a family party were assembled at breakfast. From a deep oriel window, with its lattice and diamond panes open to the sweet perfumed air of spring, could be seen, not only gardens, shrubberies, and a richly wooded park, but a distant prospect of hill and valley, field and meadow, equalled, no doubt, but not often surpassed in our fertile island.

The furniture of the room, though suited to its antique architecture, wore an appearance of brightness which the light though simple morning attire of some of its occupants greatly increased.

The party consisted of three ladies, a gentleman in the prime of life, and a youth of sixteen. The eldest of the ladies, though pale and delicate, appeared almost too youthful to be the mother of the two girls of seventeen and nineteen who sat at the table by her side.

The younger of them had the *Times* newspaper in her hand, and appeared to be deeply engaged in examining its first column. The elder presided at the breakfast-table.

"Well, Dora," said her father, "what have you found in the paper interesting enough to make you oblivious to the fact that your breakfast is getting cold?"

"Why, papa," she replied, laughing, "I am not particularly interested, but puzzled with the advertisement of a wedding. The house of the bride's father has the same name as ours,—at least, not exactly; but listen, papa.

"'On the 6th instant, at the parish church, Kilburn, Arthur Leigh Franklyn, Esq., solicitor, of Clement's Inn, London, and Brook House, Clapton, to Frances Clara, only daughter of Dr. Halford, Englefield Grange, Kilburn.'"

"Halford's daughter married!" exclaimed the earl, for such he was; "truly indeed time flies: it seems but the other day that he and I were travelling together on the Continent, and studying men and manners."

"Oh, papa, I remember now. Dr. Halford was your tutor. I thought I had heard the name; but how came his house to be called Englefield Grange?"

"A liberty rather, I should say," remarked the young heir to the title and estate, Lord Robert, Viscount Woodville.

"My *friend* James Halford," said Earl Rivers, with a stress upon the word, "intended it as a compliment, Robert, yet he waited for my father's permission before he named his house Englefield Grange. My conscience smites me for having neglected him so long. I must pay them a

visit this season while we are in London."

"I have heard your mother speak of Dr. Halford," said Lady Rivers; "did he not marry your sister's governess?"

"Yes, Clara Marston. Why, it must be two or three and twenty years ago. They lived at Bayswater for some time after their marriage, but I have seen nothing of them since they removed to Kilburn."

"And this daughter, papa," said Lady Dora, "did you ever see her?"

"Well, my dear, I have some recollection of a little dark-eyed girl named Fanny, to whom I was introduced in one of my visits at Bayswater. She was then, I should say, about eight years old, and the Halfords have resided nearly eleven years at Kilburn."

"If the little girl was named Fanny, papa, she must be the same who has just married, for the name in the paper is Frances. Oh yes," added Lady Dora, after another glance at the *Times*, "and it says only daughter, so this must be the bride."

"You appear greatly interested in this young married lady, my dear," said her father.

Lady Dora blushed. Her interest was only that of girls of seventeen in all ranks of society about brides in general, and one in particular if her age, parentage, and antecedents are known. "I think I am interested now," replied the young lady, "because you knew the bride when she was a little girl, and her father was your tutor; but the name of Englefield first attracted me in the newspaper. Papa," she continued after a slight pause, during which no one spoke, "Englefield is a strange title for any house, especially such a beautiful estate as this. Do you know how it originated?"

"From nothing very mysterious or romantic," said her father, laughing,—"at least, none that I ever heard of. According to the etymology of the word, however, we ought to be descended from the gipsies, for Engle is evidently derived from the old Saxon word Ingle, which signifies a hearth or chimney corner. Ingle or Engle in a field, as the name of this estate implies, must denote a cosy, homelike fireplace, in a meadow or on a common, such as only gipsies can invent. But you must decide upon this matter yourself, Dora," continued the earl, as he rose and looked at his watch; "I have no time for farther discussion upon the origin of a name which belonged to this estate more than four hundred years ago."

"How very absurd you are, Dora!" said her elder sister, when the earl had left the room, "just as if it mattered to us what originated the name of an estate which has descended to papa through so many generations. And why you should be interested about the marriage of a schoolmaster's daughter I cannot imagine."

"A schoolmaster's daughter!" repeated Lady Dora, "I did not know Dr. Halford kept a school."

"He does, my dear," said Lady Rivers, gently, "but Dr. Halford and his wife are truly well-bred people, and their profession has never lessened the respect and kind interest with which both your father and grandfather have always treated them."

Lady Mary Woodville shrugged her shoulders; she had been a frequent visitor at her grandmother's, the Dowager Lady Rivers, and this lady's influence and opinions had fostered in the heart of Lady Mary her natural pride of birth, and a foolish contempt for those who had to work for their living.

"You have not much to boast of, Mary," said her brother, laughing, as he rose from his seat and approached the window, "if, as papa suggests, we are descended from the gipsies."

"What nonsense you talk, Robert!" replied his sister.

"Well, perhaps I ought to have addressed you, Dora, instead of Mary, for with your brown face and your flashing black eyes you are an out-and-out little gipsy;" but as the youth spoke, his glance of affection too plainly proved that the "little gipsy" was a favourite sister.

"I am like papa, Robert," she replied, good-naturedly.

"Of course you are, my dear," said Lady Rivers, "and he has nothing of the gipsy about him; but do not waste time in talking nonsense.—Robert, I thought you asked Dora to ride with you this morning, and the sooner you order the horses the better, for this bright April weather may not continue all day."

Lord Robert hastened to follow his mother's advice, while Lady Dora gladly escaped from the room to prepare for her ride.

This little peep into the domestic habits and manners of the family at Englefield will give our readers some idea of the pleasant home in which James Halford met his future wife, Clara Marston, in the years gone by.

The present Earl Rivers, who had been Dr. Halford's pupil for three years from the age of twenty-one, had reached his forty-fifth year at the time of which we write. Well might Lady Rivers assert that there was nothing of the gipsy in his appearance, in spite of the dark eyes and hair in which, as well as in features, his youngest daughter so strongly resembled him. Lord Rivers' tall, commanding figure, noble bearing, and marked features belonged to the class which an

Englishman designates aristocratic. Yet he had no proud assumption of superiority on this account. Although polished and refined, and a true English gentleman of the olden times, his manners were simple and unobtrusive; and now, as he rides his horse slowly through the park and along the road to the station, he recalls with pain the fact that he has neglected his friend Dr. Halford long enough for his little daughter Fanny, whose marriage is in the *Times*, to grow to womanhood and become a bride.

"I will pay them a visit next week," was his decision at length, as he put his horse into a canter.

April had fulfilled its proverbial destiny. It had passed away in "showers" and sunshine, leaving behind as its trophies the "May flowers" which were to gladden the earth with their beauty and fragrance in this the first summer month of the year.

One morning, while Kate Marston was busy in one of the rooms overlooking the road, she saw a gentleman on horseback stop at the gate and alight. She heard the peal of the gate bell, and then the question to the man-servant who answered it—

"Is Dr. Halford at home?"

The next moment the tall figure of a stranger to Kate approached the house, and she could hear the footsteps ascending the stairs to the drawing-room.

"Some gentleman about pupils," said Kate to herself, as she returned to her occupation. Yet she could not get rid of the idea that the visitor was not exactly of the same stamp as those who generally presented themselves at Englefield Grange.

Meanwhile Dr. Halford's man-servant had placed a card in his master's hand which made him rise hastily from his desk, leave the schoolroom to the care of the assistants, and hasten upstairs to welcome his visitor.

As the two gentlemen shook hands, so many recollections of the past thronged to their memories that neither for a moment could utter a word. Lord Rivers recovered himself first.

"Doctor," he said, the old familiar title coming naturally to his lips, "I am positively ashamed to meet you again after so many years of neglect, but here I am at last, to plead for myself, and ask you and your wife to forgive me."

"Lord Rivers," replied Dr. Halford, "there is nothing to forgive. I know too well what the demands upon the time of a man in your position must be, and my old pupil will always be welcome at Englefield Grange;" and as the gentleman spoke he placed a chair for his visitor and begged him to be seated.

"And this is the house you have named after Englefield," said the earl. "Well, it is a charming spot; and what a splendid prospect from that window!" he added, rising and approaching to obtain a more extended view. "I feel myself honoured by your choice of a name for such a residence."

"It can scarcely be called an honour," said the doctor, "but this house is a great improvement upon the one at Bayswater; do you remember it, Lord Rivers?"

"Indeed I do, to my regret. My last visit there must be nearly ten years ago, and that reminds me —I will make my confession at once—I saw in the *Times* of last week a notice of the marriage of your only daughter. I suppose the little Fanny I met at my last visit. The name of Englefield Grange attracted my youngest daughter's notice, and when she pointed it out to me I felt inclined to say, like the chief butler in Pharaoh's court, 'I do remember my faults this day.'"

"My dear Lord Rivers," began Dr. Halford, but the visitor stopped him.

"I will not say another word on the subject, doctor. And now tell me all about your daughter; whom she has married, and how many sons you have. And one question I should have asked first —how is Mrs. Halford? I must not go away without seeing her."

Dr. Halford was at this time fourteen years younger than on the day when Mrs. Armstrong called upon him to arrange about her little boy; a man still in the prime of life, scarcely ten years older than his late pupil, yet the parting with his only daughter had sprinkled the first grey streaks in his dark hair, and already aged him in appearance. Lord Rivers had brought to his memory the occasion to which his lordship had referred. On that last visit at Bayswater, Fanny, the eldest, had not been the *only* girl: his family consisted then of five children; four of these he had lost during a few succeeding years, and of the two boys born since, his son Henry alone survived.

The bereaved father felt that while the loss of his daughter Fanny was such a recent event he must nerve himself before he could call up old memories to enlighten his kind visitor.

Lord Rivers, he knew, was actuated by the kindest interest in questioning him on the past, and the earl's present ideas about Fanny's marriage were formed on the supposition that it was a matter for congratulation, and a time of joyful hopes. All this was evident to Dr. Halford, and he gladly seized upon the opportunity offered by the mention of Mrs. Halford's name to say—

"Lord Rivers, you will stay and lunch with us in our plain simple way; you must not refuse, indeed you must not, for the sake of olden times," he added quickly, as he noticed a look of hesitation in his friend's face.

"I do not mean to refuse," said his lordship, "but I was thinking about the horses and my groom; if he could be told to take them to the inn for an hour or so, and get provender for them and himself, I will gladly remain with you to lunch."

Glad of an excuse to leave the room and tell Mrs. Halford of the arrival, Dr. Halford, with a hasty apology and a promise to send the order of Lord Rivers to the groom, left the gentleman to himself.

But Mrs. Halford, the Clara Marston of olden times, was more calm and self-possessed in cases of emergency than her erudite husband. She had heard from Kate of the arrival of a gentleman on horseback, and from Thomas the name on the card.

Giving orders at once for lunch to be prepared in the private dining-room, she made some trifling addition to her dress, and waited for a summons from her husband.

As he left the drawing-room she met him on the stairs.

"Lord Rivers is here, Clara," was his flurried remark.

"I know it, my dear; everything is ready. Whither are you going?"

"To send Thomas out to the groom about the horses. You go up to the visitor; he is going to lunch with us."

"Do not be long," she said, as she continued her way upstairs and entered the room.

Lord Rivers started forward with pleasure to receive her, and in a very few minutes they were talking eagerly of old times at Englefield, when the earl, then Lord Woodville, a youth in his teens, had been sometimes a troublesome intruder on the school hours or music and drawing lessons of his two young sisters, Miss Marston's pupils.

Presently Dr. Halford joined them; he was more able to touch upon family sorrows with his wife for an ally, and a great amount of the sad part of the details was got over before the summons to lunch.

In one point, however, Lord Rivers did some real good.

Dr. Halford was expressing a kind of mournful regret that his daughter's marriage should take her so far away from home, when Lord Rivers interrupted him.

"My dear doctor, you are not keeping pace with the times. In the present day a voyage to Australia is not more distant as regards time than America or even the Mediterranean in years gone by. And the wonderful facility of communication by post unites friends personally separated by thousands of miles as closely in these days of rapid travelling as those who a hundred years ago merely occupied different parts of our own little island."

"Very true," replied Dr. Halford, "yet, still——" and he paused.

"Not satisfied yet?" exclaimed Lord Rivers, cheeringly, as they descended to the dining-room. "Are you more hopeful about your daughter, Mrs. Halford?"

"I am getting more reconciled to her loss," was the reply, "and perhaps in time the interchange of letters and news of Fanny's happiness will complete the cure."

During luncheon the conversation became more cheerful, and Lord Rivers was about to express his regret that he must leave such pleasant society, when the door opened and a little blue-eyed boy of about eight years old entered the room.

"Ah," exclaimed the visitor, "this is your youngest child, doctor, I suppose, of whom you were speaking just now.—Come here, my little man, and shake hands with papa's friend."

The boy advanced fearlessly and placed his little hand in that of his father's old pupil, while he looked in the face of Lord Rivers with bright, intelligent eyes, and that peculiar smile which even in childhood added such a charm to the face of Henry Halford.

"My only boy, Henry, and my only child now, I may say," was the remark of the father, in a rather sad tone.

"I see nothing in that fact calculated to make you speak sadly, doctor," said the nobleman, pushing back the brown curls from the child's broad white forehead. "There is room for any amount of knowledge here, I should say. Are you fond of your books, my boy?"

"I like reading history," replied Henry, simply—"all about those wonderful Greeks and Romans, and the great Northmen that conquered so many countries," and then the child paused suddenly, as if ashamed of his enthusiasm.

Lord Rivers, with a glance at the radiant face of the proud mother, drew the boy nearer to him, and said—

"Go on, Henry, tell me what books you like best; have you begun to learn Latin yet?"

"Oh yes, sir," said Henry, "I've been all through my Latin grammar and the Delectus, and now I'm learning Greek."

"So you mean to be a learned man like your father, eh, Master Henry?"

"I don't know, sir; but I should like to be a learned man very much."

"And I daresay you will, if you study very hard."

Lord Rivers glanced at his old tutor as he spoke, and said, "What do you mean to make of this boy, doctor?"

"Go into the schoolroom, Henry," said his father, "and ask Mr. Howard to assemble the classes for afternoon school."

Henry turned to obey. Lord Rivers detained him a moment.

"May I?" he said, holding a sovereign in his hand, which could only be seen by Dr. Halford. "Just a trifle to purchase any books he may choose, and consider them my present."

There was a silent acquiescence to this appeal, which Lord Rivers quickly understood.

Turning to the boy he placed the sovereign in his hand, saying, "Good-by, Henry; there is something to buy you any books you wish for, and you must call them my present."

The child for a moment looked bewildered, then he turned to his father with inquiring eyes.

"Thank Lord Rivers for his kind present, Henry," said his father, "and when you have delivered my message to Mr. Howard you can return here."

"Thank you, Lord Rivers," said the child; and then with an earnest look in the nobleman's face he asked, "Was papa your tutor once?"

"Yes, my boy," said the earl; and as he stooped to kiss the bright, intelligent face, he added, "And now go and deliver papa's message."

With a quick movement the boy, turning to his father, placed the sovereign in his hand, and hastily left the room.

"What a splendid boy!" was the earl's remark as the door closed on the child. "What do you intend to make of him? he has genius enough for any position."

"I hope to send him to the university," replied Dr. Halford, "and if I find he has any predilection that way, I shall encourage him to take orders."

"Almost a pity, doctor, to bury such talents in the Church, and limit the young man's income to 100*l.* a year as a curate."

"I shall be guided by the boy's own wishes; but if I find he desires to become a clergyman as earnestly as I did, I will not raise a single obstacle in his path."

"Well, no," said Lord Rivers, rising as Thomas entered with the information that the horses were at the door. "I can quite understand your wish that your son should not be thwarted in his hopes as you were; and remember one thing—if in the years to come your son Henry should become a clergyman, I have two livings in my gift, one of which shall be his as soon as it becomes vacant after he is ordained."

Before the delighted parents could express their warmest thanks for this promise, the little boy made his appearance, and accompanied his father to the gate with the visitor.

The child's eager admiration of the beautiful high-bred animal which the earl mounted, and indeed of the earl himself, was so enthusiastic that it formed an epoch in his life never to be forgotten while memory should last.

Not more lasting and real was the earl's promise in the memory of the doctor and his wife; and this promise, added to the fact that Henry Halford's talents and wishes tended the same way, led to the results which have been described in the preceding chapters of this history.

Perhaps Dr. Halford, whose character was not hopeful, did not allow himself to trust too much in the earl's promise. He remembered the words, "Put not your trust in princes, for vain is the help of man." Yet it influenced him to a certain extent, for he felt convinced that if his old pupil lived, and the opportunity presented itself, Lord Rivers was not likely to forget his promise.

CHAPTER X.

HENRY HALFORD'S NEW STUDY.

Mr. Armstrong's horse, a valuable and spirited chestnut, stood at the gate of Lime Grove about ten days after Mrs. Armstrong's visit to Englefield Grange.

The family had just finished breakfast in a large room overlooking a beautiful garden from its broad bay-window. The sun shone brightly on the frozen gravel walks, and glittered in the rime that hung on the branches of the leafless trees. Bare and cold as the January prospect of winter

might be, yet the clear air and bright sunlight had an invigorating effect on youthful and healthy constitutions.

"Pray wrap up well," said Mrs. Armstrong, as she saw Mary helping her father with his great-coat, "you will have a cold ride this morning; and take care Firefly does not slip."

"No fear of that, Maria, he's a most sure-footed horse; and besides, the ground is too hard to be slippery. And as to wrapping up," he added, patting with his hand a thick shawl doubled across his chest and throat, "I think I am wrapped up sufficiently to defy any kind of weather."

"Not in Russia, papa" (the once objectionable title was tolerated now); "your nose would be frozen, and icicles would hang on your eyelashes; I learnt that in my geography at school."

"Yes, there is no doubt about that fact, Freddy; but in England such terrible results are not likely to happen; and that reminds me I hear you are going to a new school, and I hope you will be a good and attentive boy, and not give your mamma and sister any trouble about your lessons or by being late; and I must be off too," he added, glancing at the clock; "and, Freddy, you have only a quarter of an hour to finish your breakfast and get to school."

"I have finished now, papa," cried the boy, starting up as his father left the room; and then coming over to where his mother sat in an easy-chair by the fire, he put his little hand on hers and said—"Mamma, will you go with me to school? I don't like going by myself the first morning."

Mrs. Armstrong put her arm round her boy and drew him to her side.

"I am not well enough to venture out in the cold, Freddy," she replied, "but Mary will go with you; and you need not be afraid of Dr. Halford, he is most gentle and kind to little boys who are attentive and learn their lessons, and I hope you will try to please him.—Mary, my dear," continued Mrs. Armstrong as her daughter entered the room, "Freddy does not like to go to school the first time by himself, will you take him?"

"Oh yes, mamma, I should like the walk above all things on this bright cold morning. I know the house, it is not far—come Freddy."

Freddy kissed his mother, and then ran upstairs after Mary, and in a very few minutes they were walking along the country road together, Mary with elastic graceful step, and Freddy half walking, half running by her side.

The brother and sister were overflowing with health and spirits on this clear wintry day, and stepped quickly on till they drew near their destination; then Freddy subsided into a more sober pace. The first visit to a new school has rather a depressing influence upon the boyish feelings at eight years old. Freddy's manner excited Mary's sympathy, it was therefore with a very demure look that she led her little brother to the entrance and knocked.

As they stood waiting for admission several boys older than Freddy entered the gate, and passed round the house by a side way to the schoolroom entrance. Of course such a proceeding would have been at that moment too trying for Freddy's nerves, but he cast furtive, inquiring glances at his future schoolfellows, which they returned fearlessly and with interest.

So intent was the child that the opening of the door startled him, and he did not quite recover till he found himself alone with Mary in the drawing-room of Englefield Grange. How often in after years Mary recalled that visit! and how little she anticipated, as she stood admiring the prospect which had so attracted her mother, that its consequences would be interwoven with the whole thread of her future life!

Mrs. Armstrong had been unwilling to send her boy too soon after the close of the Christmas holidays. More than a week had passed, and yet the boarders were returning rather slowly.

"School is all very well," they argued, "in summer, when we can have cricket and games in the playground till bedtime." And we are quite willing to own that winter evenings at school are a trial to a boy who compares them with the warm carpeted parlour, the blazing fire, and the freedom of home, with no lessons to learn.

The arrangements at Dr. Halford's in winter were, however, very homelike. The boys sat on winter evenings in a comfortable class-room, with two fireplaces, not stoves, in which genial fires, protected by wire guards, blazed pleasantly, and large gas burners increased the warmth and created light and cheerfulness.

Still, during the first week or two after the holidays the restless boy-spirit often rebelled against the necessary restraint, without which or the presence of a master the room would very soon have become a modern Babel, or something worse, in noise and tumult.

On this Monday morning Mrs. Halford was busy in the dormitory, arranging, with the assistance of the wardrobe-keeper, the clothes of those boys who had arrived during the preceding week.

The door opened hastily, and Kate Marston entered. Mrs. Halford has changed very little since we saw her at the tea-table some years before, listening to Dr. Mason's letter. She looked up hastily and smiled as her niece said, "Aunt, is the key of the wardrobe room in your key-basket? I cannot find it anywhere." She advanced to the table on which the basket lay, and began to turn over the contents.

"I have the key, my dear," said her aunt, putting her hand into her pocket. "I found it in the door

last evening, and took possession of it."

"Oh! Harry, Harry," exclaimed Kate, laughing, "you are incorrigible; how earnestly the dear old fellow did promise me to put the key back in its place! I expect I shall find the drawers open and every sash of the wardrobe pushed back."

Mrs. Halford smiled. "No, my dear," she said, "I went in and put everything to rights before I locked the door."

The kind, loving mother had found doors and wardrobe open, and the usual neatness of everything destroyed by her boy in his anxiety to discover a missing vest, which after all was found in his own bedroom.

Henry Halford has changed very little in character during the years that have elapsed since the receipt of Dr. Mason's letters. He has made great progress in his studies, and when he left Dr. Mason's care, about three years before the Christmas-time of which we write, his father, who had just parted with a classical assistant, found Henry quite capable of supplying his place.

Dr. Halford felt also the truth of Thomson's words—

> "Teaching we learn, and giving we retain,
> The birth of intellect, when dumb, forgot."

And Henry Halford so thoroughly understood the advantage to himself that he entered into his task with interest and zeal. Young as he was, he soon gained the honour and respect of his father's elder pupils, who were not slow to discover the real value of their young teacher's knowledge.

But Henry Halford at the age of twenty-two was far beyond that age in appearance as well as knowledge. His figure, though tall and rather slight, had a manliness of carriage seldom seen before twenty-five. The clear olive complexion looked even fair by contrast to the thick dark whiskers and eyebrows that adorned it. A beard and moustache were not then, as now, considered necessary ornaments, or we might say useful appendages for the mouth, neck, and throat. At all events, Harry Halford was pronounced handsome by those who were sufficiently intimate with him to observe the play of features, the mobile mouth, and the intelligent sparkling of the deep blue eyes while conversing, although the former was large and displayed want of firmness, and the nose scarcely escaped being pronounced a snub.

Such was the young tutor who now sat in the class-room of the Grange, reading some Greek author, and quite oblivious to the unchecked noise made by the early arrival of day pupils and the boarders in the room.

He had a wonderful power of concentrating his mind on any one subject in spite of surroundings which would have driven some students crazy. The brass bands or a grinding organ might have paraded London streets in peace so far as Henry Halford was concerned. And his sister and cousin would often practise together for hours in winter, in a room close to his little study, uncomplained of by him even when a boy.

As he grew older, and after Fanny left home on her marriage, he would often say to Kate Marston, "Why don't you practise, Kate? I assure you it will not disturb me."

But Kate, after his return from Dr. Mason's, seldom touched the piano while he was in the house; her love of music was so true that she could not understand the possibility of not being disturbed in any mental employment by the *practice*, not the *perfect* performance of a piece of music.

Well and correctly played, a beautiful air falls on the ear as melodious harmony without disturbing any mental effort then occupying the mind; but to a true musician every false note, every break of tune or measure, jars upon the senses, and attracts other mental powers beyond the mere sense of hearing, and totally breaks up for a time the disturbed train of thought.

But Henry Halford was no musician, and therefore not liable to interruptions of this kind, nor indeed of any other, as his present oblivion in the class-room plainly indicates.

Even the opening of the door failed to disturb him, and it was only when a sudden silence fell on the rebels that the voice of his father made itself heard.

Henry started from his seat, closed the book, and followed Dr. Halford, who beckoned him out of the room.

"Mrs. Armstrong is in the drawing-room, Henry. I suppose she has brought her little boy. Will you go and see her? I fear she will detain me. The clock has struck nine, and I will get these boys into order while you are gone."

Dr. Halford always took this "getting into order" upon himself; it was one of the duties he could not delegate to his son.

Dr. Halford had understood from the maidservant who admitted Mary and her brother that *Mrs.* Armstrong had brought the little boy, and Henry passed on to the drawing-room, prepared to be detained by a long story of the requirements of her child and the injunctions of a fond mother.

It must be owned he opened the door rather reluctantly, but it was to start with surprise, and for a few moments to lose all self-possession. A young, handsome, and elegant girl rose as he

entered, and bowed also with slight confusion. Her mother had described Dr. Halford as a tall, pale, intellectual-looking man of sixty, with white hair and a slight stoop. Who then could this be, with his erect bearing and youthful face? Mary Armstrong could not control the deep blush that rose to her cheek, but she quickly recovered her self-possession. Mary had been subject to too many contrasts in life and was too really well-bred to allow of any awkwardness. She took Freddy's hand and led him forward as she said, "I have brought my little brother, Frederick Armstrong, to school; he did not like to come alone on the first morning, and mamma was not well enough to bring him herself."

Henry Halford by this time had also recovered himself to a certain degree as he stammered out—

"I will tell my father, Miss Armstrong; he is in the schoolroom at present. He asked me to see—I thought Mrs. Armstrong——" and then remembering his father's fear of being detained by that lady, and of his own dread of her in consequence, he paused in helpless confusion. Woman-like, this hesitation gave Mary courage. She could scarcely repress a smile as the young man's words explained unintentionally the cause of his evident surprise. He had expected a middle-aged lady, her mother, instead of a young girl. Perhaps this was the studious son spoken of by Dr. Halford to her mother. Bookworms were always awkward in the company of ladies, especially young ones; and as these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, she said with her accustomed ease and dignity—for Mary Armstrong could be dignified at times—"I need not detain you, Mr. Halford, if you will kindly take my little brother to the schoolroom and explain to Dr. Halford why mamma could not bring him herself."

"Certainly, Miss Armstrong," was all he could say, as he opened the door and followed her with Freddy downstairs to the entrance.

When they reached the door he opened it for her to pass out.

"Be a good boy, Freddy," she said, as she stooped to kiss her brother, then she bowed to Henry Halford and descended the steps. On the gravel path she turned to give Freddy one more encouraging look. Henry Halford still stood at the open door, holding Freddy's hand in a firm clasp. Of course she could only bow to him again, but as she passed through the gate into the high road she reflected that this young man who held the child's hand so kindly would no doubt be kind to their little Freddy.

But of the thoughts which had been passing through Henry Halford's mind during that short interview Mary Armstrong was quite unsuspecting; neither had she the least idea that he stood at the open door watching her for some minutes, to Freddy's surprise, and until a movement of the child recalled him to the duties of the hour.

Hastily taking Freddy to the schoolroom and telling his father the child's name, he brought his mind to bear upon the duties of his class with his usual power of concentration. No sooner, however, had morning school closed than he retired to his own little sanctum, but not to his usual studies. A new object of study was occupying his mind, and he threw himself into his chair, and folding his arms, thought over again his adventure of the morning. How clearly every movement, every look, even every article of dress worn by the visitor was photographed on his memory! He could see again the tall graceful figure, the fair expressive face, the large blue eyes, the bright auburn hair, one or two locks as usual escaping under the hat.

He recalled the blush which added brilliance to the face, and knew that in action, word, and movement the young girl before him was a true gentlewoman. Even the dress, so suitable to the season and the hour, showed this—warm and dark and soft, only brightened by an ermine muff and furs, and red ribbons in the hat. And the boy too, young as he was, had more of the *savoir faire* about him than many of the sons of rich merchants who attended the school, and yet the father of these young people was a tradesman. Henry Halford was puzzled. He had been brought up with the foolish prejudice against trade then so prevalent. Both his parents had been well born and were well connected. His father's sister had married into a good family, although, like many of these old families, they had little to boast of in the way of money. And then the young student grew bewildered. Hitherto his books had so occupied every thought that any idea of falling in love had never entered his mind. Perhaps he had too much poetry and imagination in his heart connected with the subject of marriage to allow him to do so easily. In him there existed a refined and spiritualised sense of what a woman should be in the different phases of her existence, as daughter, sister, wife, and mother. Marriage to him was too holy, and the pure love of a woman too ethereal, for either to be trifled with, or made the means of merely obtaining a home or a settlement.

As he thus reflected he began to wonder that the mere meeting with a stranger could arouse in his mind such thoughts as these. Henry Halford had certainly never given the subject such deep consideration before in his life as now. He had met with many young ladies, sisters or relations of the boys under his father's care, and also among his own relations; but none had ever so struck him as Miss Armstrong. What and how did she differ from others? Most certainly there was something about her he could not define.

These conflicting thoughts no doubt arose from ignorance of the world. Perhaps also the mind, fatigued by teaching and study, required more frequent relaxation. Indeed, his mother felt this necessary, and often urged him to accept invitations which he had refused, but without success. Be this as it may, before Henry Halford had been sitting an hour in his little study the old habits asserted themselves. He started up. "Well, I wonder if I am suffering from premonitory symptoms

of softening of the brain?" he said to himself. "What have I to do with falling in love or marriage for years to come? Such thoughts, too, just as I am about to succeed in my aims, and have matriculated at Oxford! No, no, this will never do, Henry Halford;" and shaking himself as a dog fresh from the water, he took up Seneca and buried himself in its pages till the dinner bell rang.

CHAPTER XI.

OUR ANTIPODES.

In direct contrast to the bright frosty day we have described in the last chapter, the reader must be introduced to the clear atmosphere, cloudless sky, and bright sunshine of a midsummer day at Melbourne—almost England's antipodes. The inhabitants are enjoying a long summer's day on this 29th of January, and the surrounding country is presenting a verdant aspect and leafy foliage something akin to England in July. Midsummer when we have Christmas. Cold and frosty weather while we enjoy June sunshine; picnics and evening strolls in the calm summer moonlight, while we are shivering by the fire, or preparing for a Christmas party; midnight while we have noon, and short summer nights when with us darkness sets in at four in the afternoon and continues until eight the next morning.

Such are some of the contrasts which astronomers tell us are the consequences of the earth's varied movements on her own axis and round the sun. But in neither country are the inhabitants conscious of these differences, much less can they realise that we in England are walking feet to feet with our brethren and sisters in Australia. At Melbourne, indeed, with its broad streets, elegant shops, and noble buildings, there is too much that reminds one of England to allow of any consciousness of contrast. Cathedrals, churches, colleges, botanical gardens, and other proofs of refined civilisation mark the progress of Saxon energy and enterprise, which have already supplanted in large territories of our globe the original inhabitants.

The English are carrying with them not only civilisation and refinement, but also the principles of that "knowledge of the Lord which shall cover the whole earth as the waters cover the sea."

True, the seed so scattered is mixed with the tares which settlers in distant lands carry with them from Christian England to her shame. But, like the grain of mustard seed, Christianity will grow and flourish into a large tree wherever the seeds of the "kingdom of heaven" are sown, in spite of the tares.

In a large drawing-room, luxuriously furnished, and lighted by noble windows overlooking a broad street more than a mile long, reclined a pale, delicate-looking lady, about thirty-four years of age. Her sofa had been drawn near the open window, and as she gazed upon the gaily attired passengers passing to and fro on the broad pavements, or making purchases in the shops, she sighed deeply.

"What makes you sigh, mamma?" said a pretty little girl of nine years, who sat reading in a low chair by her mother's side.

"If I sighed, darling," she replied, "it was because this place reminds me of England, and I could almost fancy myself in that broad street in London that you have heard me speak of, Mabel."

"Regent Street, you mean, mamma. Yes, I know, for I've heard papa say Bourke Street reminded him of it. He says there are just the same sort of beautiful shops, and lots of carriages, and ladies and children so handsomely dressed. Oh, mamma, I should so like to go to England, and see grandpapa and grandmamma, and uncle Henry. Do you think we ever shall?"

"Perhaps *you* may, my dear, but go on with your book, Mabel. I cannot bear talking."

The child gladly obeyed; she was a great lover of reading, and never more happy than when allowed to bring her book and her low chair, and sit near her mother, ready to attend to her every wish.

Mrs. Franklyn leaned back on the sofa and closed her eyes. Some recollections of England had during the past few months been very painful to her from their contrast to the present time.

She had left her home at Englefield Grange, and readily consented to what appeared a sentence of banishment to every one but herself, for was she not sure of happiness with the man of her choice, even at the other side of the world to which they were going?

None of her friends could deny the apparent suitability of the marriage between the young lawyer, Arthur Franklyn, and Fanny Halford, the schoolmaster's only daughter. Arthur had been one of Dr. Halford's earliest pupils, and being an orphan and under the care of his aged grandmother, he often remained at school during the holidays. The boy soon became very fond of playing with the little Fanny, then nine years younger than himself, and this childish acquaintance was kept up long after he had left school to be articled to a solicitor. The almost friendless youth paid frequent visits to his old schoolmaster, and was always received with a kind welcome.

To make Fanny Halford his wife had been the purpose of Arthur Franklyn's heart for many years,

but to mention the subject to her father until his means were sufficient to maintain a wife he well knew would be useless.

He had reached his twenty-ninth year, when the death of his grandmother made him the possessor of about fifteen hundred pounds. Now the way seemed open to him. But he had another scheme in view, which very nearly caused him the loss of Fanny. Australia had for many years been the El Dorado of his hopes; he had also distant relatives doing well at Melbourne, who had often expressed a wish that he should join them, but Fanny Halford had been the tie that bound him to England.

The little girl had learnt to love her boy playfellow in childhood as they grew older, and the young people, as if by mutual consent, seemed to take it for granted that some day they should be husband and wife. Although no word had passed on the subject either between them or to Fanny's parents, Dr. Halford felt towards the young man almost as much affection as for his own son, Henry Halford being at that time a mere child. It was not till his grandmother's legacy had altered Arthur Franklyn's position that his eyes were opened to the fact that the young man and his daughter might be attached to each other.

The good old gentleman, however, when once brought to understand the case, readily agreed to Arthur's proposals; and Mrs. Halford, much as she dreaded the loss of her child from her home, raised no objections. Her daughter would still of course be at a visiting distance now railways and omnibuses were becoming so general, and she could therefore often see her.

Arthur Franklyn's intimation, therefore, came upon them like a thunder-clap. "Australia! Our antipodes! No, no, Arthur, the idea is impossible, we cannot part with our child to such a distance," were the doctor's words. But neither the father's objections nor the mother's tears could influence Fanny, she would go with Arthur all over the world; and so at last the parents were conquered by the pale face and failing health of their only daughter, and they consented to the marriage.

To Arthur's legacy was added the 1000*l.* saved by Dr. Halford for his daughter's marriage portion, and the young people sailed for Australia with their own hopes for the future bright and glowing, and followed by the earnest prayers of their reluctant parents.

Fourteen years have rolled by since then, and what are Fanny Franklyn's reflections as she now reclines on the sofa in her luxurious home? What had she to complain of beyond the failing health and strength to which we are all liable? She had a kind and loving husband, four healthy, intelligent children, and every comfort and attention she required. But all this was on the surface; only wife or husband can detect faults in each other which are hidden from the world, unless those faults lead to or produce consequences which eventually become matters of publicity.

And a fear of this latter result had been the one bitter drop in Fanny Franklyn's happiness, the bane of her married life.

Arthur on arriving at Melbourne established himself as a solicitor, and for a time with moderate success. Then he became restless and dissatisfied. He wanted to make a fortune more rapidly, gave up his profession, and commenced speculating. With this began Fanny's anxieties. She had quickly discovered her husband's want of business knowledge. She could see how differently he acted from her own parents, to whose careful, saving habits she owed her marriage portion. Fortunately for Arthur, his wife was thoroughly domestic, and more than once she had warded off an impending blow by her economy and good management.

But as their family increased her anxieties became greater. The very good nature, and pleasant unsuspecting sociability which had won them all at Englefield Grange, proved Arthur's greatest danger. Sanguine to the highest degree respecting the results of a new speculation, he would recklessly act upon the mere hope of success, and involve himself in difficulties, and so it had been going on; at times living in a style of elegance and luxury, in consequence of a successful speculation, and at others in obscurity and almost penury.

No wonder poor Fanny Franklyn's health sunk in the midst of such vicissitudes.

While reflecting over the past which has been so briefly described, the sound of a hasty footstep roused her, and presently her husband stood by her couch anxiously questioning her.

"How are you, darling?" he said gently as he stooped to kiss the pale cheek. "I have been so much engaged all day, or I should have come in to see you before this." And then, without waiting for her to reply, he walked to the window and looked out on the gay and busy scene in the street beneath.

"You will soon get well in this lively place, Fanny," he said; "I cannot tell you how anxious I have been to get you out of that dull cottage on the hills, with nothing to look at but gardens and fields and trees."

"Yes, but, papa," said little Mabel, rising from her seat and coming to his side, "we were close to the Botanical Gardens and the park, and mamma used to go out in a chair every day."

"Well, so she can here, Mabel, and I should think you and Clara like these large noble rooms better than those low ceilings and cramped apartments at the cottage."

"There are some rooms I should prefer far beyond those at the cottage, or even these," said Mrs.

Franklyn, gently.

Mr. Franklyn smiled, and was delighted to see a smile and a slight tinge of colour on his wife's face as she spoke. "Where are they, darling?" he exclaimed. "I have only taken these for a month certain; we would move directly if I thought it would do you good."

"I'm sorry I expressed my thoughts aloud, Arthur," she said, "for you must not incur any farther expense; but the rooms I mean are at Englefield Grange."

Arthur Franklyn became silent. He was longing to return to England almost as much as his wife; but at that moment he had more than one speculation in view, which he felt sure would make him a rich man; and then to return to his native land and star it amongst his schoolfellows, who had often scorned the penniless orphan, would be indeed a triumph.

"I wish I could take you to England at once, dearest," said her husband; "indeed, I should like to send you and the two girls now, and remain here alone for a year or two; but I cannot allow you to attempt such a voyage in your present weak state."

"No, no, Arthur," she replied, "I will not leave you, I could not go alone. Let us continue in this house as long as you like, rather than go to greater expense. I hope I shall be better as the weather becomes cooler."

The appearance of the tea-tray put a stop to the conversation, and Fanny consoled herself by the thought, "I cannot leave him of my own free-will, and if God sees fit to remove me before he is able to return to England, I can leave him and the dear children in His hands."

CHAPTER XII.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

Mary Armstrong returned home after leaving Freddy at school, quite unaware of the disturbance her appearance had created in the mind of Henry Halford; and indeed so perfectly indifferent, that after removing her walking dress she entered the dining-room where her mother sat, and said—

"I did not see Dr. Halford, mamma, he was engaged in the schoolroom, but his son took charge of Freddy."

"His son! Ah, yes, I remember he spoke of a son who was studying for the Church. From Dr. Halford's description I should say this son was a man of very studious habits."

"Yes, mamma, and I am sure he must be, for he appears quite unused to the society of ladies; he hesitated, and stammered, and seemed hardly able to say a word: he did manage, however, to explain that he expected to see Mrs. Armstrong. I set him down as a bookworm at once."

Mrs. Armstrong glanced at her daughter; she was not one of those foolish mothers who overrate the charms of their daughters, but a thought she could not repress made her fear that this son of Dr. Halford's might be a dangerous acquaintance. A kind of presentiment of evil made her look at Mary intently as she took her German books from a side-table and commenced studying the language just then coming into vogue.

There was a look of perfect indifference on the face which Mrs. Armstrong so carefully studied, and yet she could not help saying suddenly, "What sort of young man is Dr. Halford's son in appearance, Mary?"

The sound of her mother's voice made Mary look up with a start from a difficult exercise. "*Haben sie!*" she exclaimed aloud; and then, "Oh, mamma, I beg your pardon, did you not ask me a question? I have such a puzzling sentence here, and I quite forgot what Herr Kling told me about it."

"It was nothing of importance, my dear," said her mother, as carelessly as she could speak; "I only asked you what sort of a young man Dr. Halford's son is in appearance."

"Handsome or plain, you mean, mamma," was the reply: "certainly not handsome, and his hair looked as if, while poring over a book, he had been pushing it up with his hands till it stood on end like pussy's tail when she is angry."

"My dear, what a comparison!" said her mother, with a laugh and a feeling of satisfaction. But Mary felt ashamed of her description.

"I ought not to speak in this way, mamma, I know; the fact is, when I found young Mr. Halford so confused, I avoided looking at him; but he is a gentleman, I could see that, and his hair is black. He appeared to be careless about his dress and appearance, and that, added to his confused manner, made me think he was a bookworm. You know, mamma, two or three of papa's friends who are so wrapped up in science and literature fidget me dreadfully when they dine here. Mr. Barnett, the great engineer, often has his collar on one side, or a button off his boots, and they all look as if they dressed in the dark, and without a looking-glass. So I suppose young Mr. Halford

will be just the same. Oh, mamma, please don't make me talk any more," she added, glancing at the clock. "Herr Kling will be here in half an hour, and I am not yet ready for him."

Mrs. Armstrong was quite contented to remain silent. The easy and rather satirical tone in which Mary spoke of Dr. Halford's son removed all apprehension from her mind for the present.

Mr. Armstrong she knew too well would harshly oppose marriage for his daughter with any man who did not possess the means of making a handsome settlement on his wife, and raising her to the position of her mother's relations. Neither of Mary's parents wished her to marry young: the idea of losing her was agony to Mrs. Armstrong, and a constant dread had now arisen in the mother's heart lest this new position in a country home, which had already drawn them into society, might lead Mary to form a girlish attachment not in accordance with the conditions laid down by her father.

Mr. Armstrong, however, had no such fears; Mary's ready acquiescence in all his wishes, and the evident respect she had always shown to his opinions, caused him to overlook in his child a will as firm and unbending as his own.

Hitherto none of his requirements had been opposed to the deeper or more sensitive feelings of her nature. Mary could overcome her repugnance so long as her father's wishes only required the sacrifice of certain conventional rules, and minor matters of opinion. But he could make no distinction, and he was prepared to expect implicit obedience in every point, even where her wishes were opposed to his. The thought that she would ever fail in this obedience never entered his mind.

Mrs. Armstrong understood her daughter's character more correctly than her husband, with all his boasted superiority of intellect, and therefore she dreaded a passage of arms between these two so near and dear to her.

The trial was more closely at hand than even she for a moment anticipated.

Little Freddy often brought home from school a full and particular account of some incident that had occurred during the day, and in which he had been greatly interested.

These incidents were listened to by Mary only out of love to her little brother; and although very often Mr. Henry Halford's name stood prominent in these narrations, Mary's interest on that account was very little excited. It gratified her, however, to find that the child was treated with great kindness by both father and son, and to hear his earnest declaration—

"Oh, Mary, I like Mr. Henry Halford so much, he is so kind to us little ones in the playground; he plays at peg-top, and all sorts of games, with us; and sometimes we go into the cricket-field, without the big boys, and he teaches us how to play; isn't it kind of him?"

All this was very pleasing to Mrs. Armstrong, more especially as she could discern very clearly that Mary listened to it all as a matter of course. No suspicion that this kindness to her brother could arise from a wish to win the sister, or for her sake, entered her mind.

Not so her mother; suspicions of this kind would intrude themselves at times, only to be set aside by her daughter's evident indifference.

Mrs. Armstrong, however, was wrong. Henry Halford's kindness to the little boys arose from a natural love of children, and Freddy Armstrong was not favoured more than others. All thoughts of the fair girl whose appearance had so confused him on that cold January morning had been banished with determination. After school duties ceased he became, as usual every day, absorbed in his books, his only recreation a game at cricket, or, as we have heard, the fun with the juniors, which gave him the greatest pleasure. And so the weeks passed on, and brought with them signs of the approach of spring.

One afternoon, about a fortnight before Easter, Mr. Armstrong returned from the City rather earlier than usual, to have a ride with his daughter. He had on this account travelled to town and back by the omnibus.

"Give me half an hour's rest, Mary," he said, as she came in full of pleasure to ask when he wished to start.

"Yes, papa," she replied, "and there will be also time for you to have a cup of tea with mamma; she generally has it about four o'clock." Away ran Mary to hasten the refreshing "cup which cheers but not inebriates," while Mr. Armstrong seated himself and began to talk to his wife.

"I shall not be sorry to have a cup of tea," he said, "for I rode outside the 'bus, and the roads are too dusty to be pleasant, whatever the old proverb may say, and perhaps with some truth, that 'a peck of March dust is worth a king's ransom.'"

"If it is good for the gardens and the harvest to have a dry March," said Mrs. Armstrong, "it is certainly worth while to bear the inconvenience, and my health is always much better in dry, clear weather. Your proverb about March dust will form another incentive for patience when it troubles me while taking my daily walks."

"How much improved your health appears lately, my dear Maria!" remarked her husband, after a pause; "and you are looking almost as young as ever. I am not a little pleased to find you in such good spirits, because I want you to join me in accepting an invitation next week to dinner at the

Drummonds'; I suppose you have returned Mrs. Drummond's visit?"

"Oh yes, a few weeks ago; she is a most pleasant, lady-like woman, and we were friends almost immediately."

"Then you will raise no objection, my dear; indeed, I am sure the change will be good for you. Mary is also invited, and I have my reasons for wishing her to go. Drummond rode with me from town to-day, and I accepted his invitation for Mary and myself at once, but for you conditionally."

"I shall be happy to go with you," replied his wife. "The Drummonds are people I should wish Mary to know, and I am much more able to bear an evening visit at this time of the year than in the depth of winter. You must remember, Edward, that even when living in London I always regained health and strength in the spring and early summer."

"And here, of course, your health and strength are doubly sure to improve in these seasons," he replied, laughing. "Ah, well, darling, I am glad we made the change for your sake."

The appearance of the tea put a stop to the conversation, and in a very short time Mrs. Armstrong stood at the door watching her daughter as she sprang lightly to her saddle, on a beautiful grey mare, her father's latest gift.

Bucephalus is not, however, quite discarded; sometimes in the morning she will take him for a canter over the heath, or in the holidays join her brothers, one of whom rides Rowland's pony, and the other Bucephalus. Edward Armstrong is fifteen now, and has grown too tall for Boosey; during the absence of the elder boys the pony belongs entirely to Freddy, who is learning to ride under Mary's guidance.

During their ride, Mr. Armstrong told Mary of the invitation to dinner at Mr. Drummond's. "You will like to pay such a visit, I suppose," he said, "and I have accepted the invitation for you as well as myself."

"Will it be a large party?" asked Mary, timidly; she had no thought of opposing her father's wishes, after hearing that he had accepted the invitation for her, but she remembered her discomfort at her first dinner-party, at which a large number of guests were present, some of them not very refined, and certainly not well-bred.

In fact, she could not help making comparisons between the noisy, and to her, almost vulgar visitors at the table; or at the evening parties of the rich in the neighbourhood, and the quiet refinement and dignity of such gatherings at the homes of her mother's relations.

Something akin to Mary's thoughts was passing through her father's mind before he answered her question, and influenced his reply.

"Mr. Drummond told me to-day that he did not expect more than six or eight guests in addition to his own family. And, Mary," he continued, "you need not fear meeting coarseness or vulgarity at Mr. Drummond's table. Your mother has readily consented to accompany us, and that is a sufficient proof that she considers the friends of Mrs. Drummond fit associates for her daughter."

"Oh, papa," said Mary, "I hope you do not think it was pride that made me speak as if I did not wish to go, only I do dread a large number of people; and papa——" But Mary paused; she hesitated, with the delicacy of a refined mind, to speak of the coarse flattery to which she had been subjected at one dinner-party by some of the gentlemen when they left the dining-room.

"And what, my dear?" said her father, gently.

"I told mamma," she replied, "when I came home, but I only meant to ask you whether some of the gentlemen at Mr. Ward's dinner party had not taken too much wine."

A flush of indignation rose to Mr. Armstrong's brow as he thought of what, under such circumstances, some of them might have said to his gentle daughter. Determining to ask her mother, however, he merely said,—"I fear such was the case, Mary, but you are not likely to meet with anything of that kind at the Drummonds'. The practice of staying for hours after dinner, drinking wine, till men make themselves unfit for the company of ladies, is happily becoming less frequent in good society. And now," he added, looking at his watch, "we must canter for awhile, or we shall be late for dinner."

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHANGE OF OPINION.

Among the guests expected at Mr. Drummond's table on that memorable occasion was a gentleman of great note in the scientific world, to whom Mr. Armstrong had been very anxious to be introduced. Indeed, this wish had influenced him greatly in his ready acceptance of the invitation.

"My friend Professor Logan will dine with us on that evening," had been Mr. Drummond's remark to Mr. Armstrong. "I suppose you have read his address at the Royal Society on the inventions of

the last thirty years? It was correctly reported in the *Times*."

"Yes, indeed, and there I saw it," was the eager reply. "Is Professor Logan your friend, Drummond? It will be a great privilege to meet such a man."

"And he will be equally pleased with you," was the reply; "indeed, I expect it will be quite a learned gathering, for I have asked three or four other men of education to join us, and I almost fear the evening will be dull for Mrs. Armstrong and your bright, lively daughter; but Mrs. Drummond will be terribly disappointed if they do not come, and she will make the evening as pleasant as possible for them. My nieces are very musical, and——"

"Oh, pray do not make the invitation more attractive than it is already," interrupted Mr. Armstrong. "My daughter's tastes resemble my own, and she has had advantages of education which I have not. I'm afraid, Drummond, your friends will expect too much from a self-taught man like myself if you have, as you say, placed me on the list of your 'learned' acquaintance."

"Nonsense, Armstrong!" was the reply, as the omnibus stopped for that gentleman to alight. "Mind," he added, as he waved his hand in farewell, "we shall expect you all on Tuesday."

Mr. Armstrong's close carriage arrived at Argyle Lodge only five minutes before the hour appointed for dinner. In a very short time, therefore, Mary found herself being conducted to the dinner-table by a gentleman whose face seemed familiar to her, but whose name, when spoken by her hostess, she had not caught.

"I think I have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Armstrong once before, when she brought her little brother to school," was the remark which made Mary turn and look at her companion.

There was a smile on the face she had called plain, but it did not now deserve such an epithet. The rough, dark hair, which in its disorder she had likened to a "pussy-cat's tail in a rage," was now arranged in shining wavy curls across the broad forehead; the dark eyebrows almost meeting over the nose gave character to the face, and a look in the deep blue eyes, although Mary Armstrong had quickly recognised her companion as Henry Halford, made her ask herself if she had really ever seen them before. So changed was the face, so expressive the glance, so winning the smile, that Mary could only stammer out with a blushing face—

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Halford; I did not at first recognise you, but I do now."

They entered the dining-room as she said this, and during the slight commotion occasioned by placing every one with due regard to the varied requirements which make the position of a hostess so difficult, Mary could only recall with shame and wonder her satirical description of Henry Halford.

The silence that generally pervades the company at the commencement of dinner enabled Mary to recover herself and look round for the home faces.

Her mother, who had been taken into dinner by Mr. Drummond, was seated nearly opposite to her at his right hand. At the moment of this discovery she observed her bow to some one on Mary's side of the table. Her surprise at this caused her to lean forward slightly. What friend of her mother's could be dining with Mr. Drummond?

A gentleman with white hair, and a pale, handsome face, was returning the recognition. Mary was fairly puzzled, but she had conquered the confusion caused by Mr. Henry Halford's unexpected appearance, and when the conversation became general she could talk to her companion with ease and intelligence.

Mary could hear her father's voice, but she could not see him, as he sat at the same side of the table as herself by Mrs. Drummond.

Presently Henry Halford spoke.

"Are you acquainted with that gentleman at the head of the table on Mrs. Drummond's left hand?" he asked, under cover of many voices.

Mary shook her head. She had observed that he and her father were already in earnest conversation across the table, but he was a total stranger to her.

"No, I am not," she replied; "all here are strangers to me, excepting Mr. and Mrs. Drummond and my own parents."

"Then you do not know my father, to whom your mamma bowed just now. I saw you lean forward to discover who had been so honoured by Mrs. Armstrong's notice."

"Is that gentleman your father, Mr. Halford?" said Mary, simply. "I think he is a very handsome old man; that silvery white hair always looks to me beautiful when accompanied with dark eyebrows and eyes."

"My father would feel extremely flattered if he heard your opinion of him, Miss Armstrong," said Henry Halford.

"I am not flattering," replied Mary, "I am only giving my opinion, and you have not told me the name of that gentleman opposite. He looks clever."

"Why, really, Miss Armstrong, I shall begin to be afraid of your opinion about myself if you are so

quick at reading character. That gentleman is Professor Logan, whose address at the Royal Society has made such a stir in the scientific world."

"Oh, I am so glad to meet him!" she exclaimed. "I know he must be clever because papa is talking to him so earnestly, and I read his address at the Royal Society in the *Times*."

"Did you, indeed, Miss Armstrong?" said Henry, in a tone of surprise.

"Certainly I did, and with very great interest. Is there anything very wonderful in that, Mr. Halford?"

Henry Halford hesitated to reply; he looked earnestly at the young lady who could read an address on the most abstruse sciences with "great interest." He had heard young ladies spoken of rather contemptibly as "pedants" and "blue-stockings." Was this gentle, simple-speaking girl by his side one of these? Or if not, did she belong to the frivolous, half-educated young ladies, who think of nothing but dress, or lovers, or husbands *in futuro*? Although Mary had spoken of him as unused to ladies' society with some truth, yet he had seen and heard enough to judge of them as belonging to a sex inferior in strength both mentally and physically, and in those days of which we write his judgment was not far wrong.

"I will put a few questions to this young lady who expresses her interest in abstruse subjects," he said to himself. "Perhaps after all it is merely a smattering of knowledge which she possesses, and a wish to be thought a 'blue.' Are you fond of scientific subjects, Miss Armstrong?" he asked, with something akin to satire in the tone of his voice.

But Mary Armstrong did not detect it; she replied unaffectedly—

"I think I am, at least so far as I can understand them, and that is not to a very great extent; but arithmetic is a science, is it not? and I am very fond of that; and I like the study of thorough-bass quite as well as the practical part of music."

"I am rather surprised to hear a young lady say she is fond of arithmetic," replied Henry Halford, rather amused, and doubtful still. "How far have you penetrated into the mysteries of calculation?—to Practice, perhaps?"

Mary now detected a shadow of satire.

"A little beyond Practice," she replied, with a smile. "I begin to feel afraid to tell you how far, you appear so surprised that a girl should learn boys' studies, but my father wished me to do so."

Henry Halford flushed deeply. The straightforward simplicity of the young lady whom he wished to prove a pedant or a "blue" baffled him, and made him feel ashamed of his satire.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Armstrong," he said. "It is such an unusual thing in the present day to meet with young ladies who really care for any studies beyond music and singing, and what are called the fine arts, that I was a little incredulous; pray show me I am forgiven by telling me what advance you have made in these studies, which you consider belong to boys."

There was an earnestness and sincerity in the young man's voice which could not be mistaken.

Mary replied candidly, but without the slightest appearance of ostentation—

"Mr. Halford, papa himself taught me algebra after I had studied every rule in arithmetic, and the first book of Euclid. That is the extent of my knowledge—nothing so very wonderful, after all."

"And the *pons asinorum*, Miss Armstrong?"

"Yes," she replied, "even the *pons asinorum*."

There was a look of respect, mingled with surprise, on Henry Halford's face; for once he had met with a young lady who had evidently some pretensions to mental strength without being proud of it.

By degrees he managed to discover that, owing to her father's wise decision, she had not been allowed to learn music without studying thorough-bass, or drawing unless accompanied with the study of perspective. But as, without asking direct questions, he contrived to draw her out by adopting a conversational tone, he found to his delight that this scientific young lady was far more deeply interested in poetry and literature.

Mrs. Armstrong watched the fair face of her daughter as it lighted up with pleasure at the poetical remarks of her companion, who criticised her favourite authors with so much clearness and justice.

She was not sorry when Mrs. Drummond gave the signal for leaving the table. She could read in the gentleman a growing interest and admiration of her daughter, which made her uneasy; not a little increased by a remark of Mr. Drummond's—

"Mr. Henry Halford and your daughter are getting on famously together. I know that her education has been solid as well as accomplished, and he appears to have found out that fact."

"Is that Dr. Halford's son?" asked Mrs. Armstrong; she remembered her daughter's description of him as plain, but the young man so earnestly conversing with Mary on a favourite topic was as usual giving to that face the flashings of intellect, the expressive smile, and, it must be owned, a

too evident admiration of the fair girl by his side, which made him unmistakably handsome.

"Yes; did you not know it?" was Mr. Drummond's reply. "And a really clever fellow he is too; he has lately matriculated at Oxford. His father wishes him to be a clergyman, and I have no doubt he will come off with 'flying colours.'"

No wonder Mrs. Armstrong was relieved when the signal came to remove her daughter from such dangerous company.

But Mary very soon restored her mother's peace of mind by the absence of all consciousness when she referred to Mr. Henry Halford.

On entering the drawing-room the mother noticed with anxiety the deep flush that so generally made Mary's face too brilliant. She watched her as she wandered alone to a distant table and took up a book, after examining several, and seated herself to read. She walked over to her and said, "You are interested in your book, Mary."

"Yes, mamma; Mr. Henry Halford has been talking about Milton's 'Paradise Lost,' and he has explained to me a great deal of those learned terms and classical references which make some pages of the book so difficult to understand, and I mean to read it through again; you know how fond I am of Milton."

"Yes, dear," said her mother, "but you cannot do so now in Mrs. Drummond's drawing-room."

"No, mamma, of course not; I was only glancing over a few pages to try how much I could remember of Mr. Henry Halford's explanations. Oh, mamma, you cannot imagine how clever he is."

"No doubt, and I hear he is at Oxford studying for the Church. But, Mary, do you remember your description of Dr. Halford's son? In my opinion he is anything but plain, and his hair——"

"Oh, mamma, pray don't refer to what I once said;" and Mrs. Armstrong knew that the flush on Mary's cheek as she spoke arose from shame at her foolish words, nothing more. "I hardly looked at him that morning, but now that I have heard him speak with so much animation and cleverness I consider Mr. Henry Halford handsome; don't you, mamma?"

This simple admission satisfied the anxious mother; she agreed readily with her daughter's remark, and a servant advancing with tea and coffee put a stop to the conversation.

Presently the gentlemen made their appearance.

Mary noticed that her father and Mr. Henry Halford were eagerly discussing scientific subjects with Professor Logan as they entered.

Even as they stood with a cup of coffee in the hand of each, the subject was being carried on with great earnestness.

At last one of Mr. Drummond's nieces approached the piano, at her aunt's request, and struck a few chords.

A sudden pause, and then the rich tones of the singer hushed the scientific controversy. Even those who had no natural appreciation of harmonious sounds were attracted to listen; among these ranked Henry Halford.

To a singer with less confidence the silence would have been fatal, but Edith Longford was not likely to fail from nervousness, and there is nothing so calculated to steady the nerves of a performer in any subject as a perfect knowledge of what he is about.

As the soft melodious tones ceased, Henry Halford contrived to whisper to Miss Armstrong a question, intended to try whether the young girl, whose conversation had so interested him at dinner, could bear the praise of another without jealousy.

During the song he had not been able to resist the attraction of her presence. Although really occupied with the subject of dispute as he entered the room, Henry Halford's quick eye discovered at once the whereabouts of Mr. Armstrong's daughter, and he had gradually moved towards the table where she sat.

"Miss Longford plays and sings well, Miss Armstrong," were the words that made Mary start from a reverie. "I am quite ignorant of music theoretically, and I have no natural taste for the harmonies; but you can tell me whether my opinion is a correct one."

"I, Mr. Halford!" said Mary, recovering herself; "Miss Longford is far beyond me in music. I could not take the liberty of forming a judgment upon her, excepting that I know she sings and plays far better than I do."

"Generous and candid," said the young man to himself as a gentleman advanced to lead Mary to the piano. He followed them, and stood listening with surprise to the simple English ballad which Mary sang with real taste and feeling.

Henry Halford when alone in his room that night made a decision in his own mind on certain points; in some of these, had he remained firm and unshaken, our story would have ended here.

"Mary Armstrong is a very beautiful girl," were his first mental words, "full of intellectual

knowledge, far beyond any young lady I have ever met. She is candid, plain-speaking, impervious to flattery, and generous to a rival—at least if Miss Longford is a rival. For my part, I consider Miss Armstrong's music far more pleasing. And then what a talented man her father is! no wonder, with such a teacher, his daughter should be so different from other girls. I have met many girls, but none like Miss Armstrong."

By a strange association of ideas, to which we are all subject, Easter and Oxford presented themselves to his mind, and the involuntary sigh that followed a recollection of the fact that in less than a week he should be miles away from Mary Armstrong, changed the whole current of his thoughts.

"How absurdly I am allowing my mind to dwell upon this young lady!" he said to himself. "A man so rich as her father will of course wish her to marry a man of wealth, and one equal in position to her mother's relations. I might lay claim to the latter qualification, but what shall I be at the end of my three years at Oxford? an usher in my father's school, or a curate with an income of perhaps 100*l.* a year or less. I will think of her no more!"

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY.

Whatever impression might have been made by Mr. Henry Halford's cleverness on the mind of Mary Armstrong was destined to be obliterated by the most unlooked-for occurrence.

One evening, about a fortnight after Easter, Mr. Armstrong returned at an unusually early hour, and entered the library, where Mary and her mother were seated, with a look of anxiety on his face which surprised them both.

He held a letter in his hand, and his wife asked nervously—

"What is the matter, Edward? you have no bad news about the boys, I hope."

"No, no," he said hastily, "but I have had a letter from John Armstrong; my poor father, he says, is sinking fast, and wishes to see me once more."

"Oh, papa, when are you going?" cried Mary, "can I pack your carpet bag, or prepare anything for you? I suppose you will go this evening?"

"I should have gone direct from London, after sending you a telegram," he replied, "but my father wishes me to bring Mary; have you any objection, my dear?" he added, turning to his wife.

"No, indeed," she replied, "take her with you by all means; I remember how pleased the dear old gentleman was with his little granddaughter when we paid him a visit fifteen years ago."

Mary, who had risen when she offered to assist in preparing for her father's hasty departure, stood still during this conversation in silent astonishment. Rapid thoughts passed through her mind. Was she really going to see the dear old grandfather, of whom she had so often heard her mother speak, and beautiful Meadow Farm, the home of her father's childhood, and the house in which he was born?

So bewildered did she feel at the sudden news, that her mother had to say—

"Do you not wish to accompany your father, Mary?"

"Oh yes, yes, mamma, but it seems too good to be true."

"You must be quick, Mary, if you wish to go," said her father, looking at his watch; "I have ordered James to have the brougham at the door by half-past three, and the train starts from Waterloo at 4.30."

In a moment all was bustle and excitement. Slight refreshment was quickly prepared for the travellers. But Mary had still her useful fairies at her elbow, and when her father summoned her from the dining-room at the time appointed, she only detained him one moment to cling to her mother's neck and kiss her fondly.

Mrs. Armstrong stood at the door to see them off and wish them *bon voyage*. Then she returned to the library to rest after the hurried excitement, which fatigued her even more than a long walk.

This hasty summons which her husband had received carried her memory back to those early days of her married life when with her husband and her little daughter Mary, she had visited Mr. Armstrong's paternal home. She recalled the sweet country landscape, the apple-orchards in full blossom, the fragrant hayfields, the leafy woods surrounding Meadow Farm, then redolent with the delights of early summer.

She saw and heard again, in imagination, the crowing of cocks, the clucking of hens, the chirping chicks and lowing cattle, and the occasional "quack, quack" of ducks and geese, all of which sights and sounds greeted eye and ear from her bedroom window when she rose in the morning.

Even the journey by the old-fashioned stage-coach was not without interest; and how well she remembered the pride of her mother's heart as her little Mary, then scarcely three years old, excited the astonishment of the passengers by spelling from the coach window the letters upside down, which formed the name of the coach proprietor!

Again she recalled their amusement at one of Mary's childlike speeches, when they stopped to change horses on the road. Across the inn yard came a man with a wooden leg, carrying a pail of water. The child, who had never before seen this substitute for a human limb, almost screamed with excitement as she exclaimed—

"Oh, mamma, mamma, do look; there's a man with one leg, and a piece of stick for another!"

Even now she could smile at the memory of the child's remark, but it was soon lost as her thoughts turned to the time when she stood in the old hall at Meadow Farm to receive the welcome of her husband's father, a tall, noble-looking man, one of the olden times, whose dark eyes at the age of sixty-seven had not lost their sparkling intelligence. These eyes, with eyelashes and brows equally dark, contrasted pleasantly with the silvery white hair; and the face with its winter-apple colour, though bronzed by constant exposure to the weather, wore a refined dignity of which his son Edward could scarcely boast. The welcome awarded by this fine old yeoman to his son's wife had a mixture of deference and affection which deeply gratified the well-born daughter of the St. Clairs, and her father-in-law's love for his little fairy grandchild completely won her heart.

All this Mrs. Armstrong had described to Mary so vividly, that the young girl felt as if she already knew every nook and cranny of the old farm, as well as the face of the dear old gentleman who was her father's father. And yet she had not the slightest recollection of the visit so clearly remembered by her mother.

Since that time Mr. Armstrong had more than once paid a visit to his paternal home, but delicate health and an increasing family prevented his wife from accompanying him, yet he never offered to take Mary. Once her mother had proposed to him to do so, but he repudiated the idea.

"No, Maria dear," he had said, "there are no women at Meadow Farm, or in the neighbourhood, who are fit associates for your daughter. By-and-by, when her manners are more formed, I shall have no objection."

But Mrs. Armstrong was not deceived by these excuses; she knew that as her husband's income increased, so did his pride. For eccentric persons are always inconsistent, and his strange notions about his daughter's education, and his refusal to allow her to ride on horseback after a certain hour, with other objections to practices which he called "aping the gentry," all arose from "the pride that apes humility."

Meanwhile, quite unaware of her mother's reflections or her father's opinions, Mary seated herself in a first-class carriage, her happiness in the prospect of the coming journey only clouded by the fact that her aged grandfather was approaching the borders of the grave.

They were alone in the carriage as far as Slough, and as the express train sped on the consciousness of this made her so uneasy that she could not help breaking the silence by saying —

"Papa, do you think my grandfather will remember me?"

"I think not, my daughter," he replied; "you were scarcely three years old when he saw you last, and now you are a woman."

"But I do hope he will be well enough to know who I am," she said. "I have heard mamma talk of grandpapa so often that I feel sure I shall recognise him when I see him, from her description."

"Your mother does talk to you, then, about her visit to Meadow Farm?"

"Yes, papa, often, and she says grandpapa was a fine, handsome old man when she saw him fifteen years ago."

There was a little feeling of gratification in Mr. Armstrong's heart at this proof that his lady-wife could so think of his father; she had often so spoken of him in conversation, but he had passed it by as the loving words of a wife who wished to prove that she did not look down with contempt on her husband's relations.

But in her remarks to Mary there could be no such motives, and it was in a tone of regret that he replied—

"Fifteen years will make a great difference in your grandfather's appearance, Mary, and I expect you will find him decrepit, and infirm at eighty-two years of age, and very much changed from the handsome old man your mother describes."

"I shall love him just the same, papa," she said firmly.

The early spring evening was closing in as Mr. Armstrong and his daughter drove to the gates of Meadow Farm. Mary could see, however, that her father's face was pale with anxiety, as he hastily alighted from the railway fly and turned to assist his daughter.

At the same moment she heard a pleasant voice exclaiming—

"You have brought your daughter, Edward; I am very glad, for uncle is longing to see her.—You are the image of your mother, Miss Armstrong," continued the speaker, with a sudden deference, as the tall, graceful girl held out her hand to the lady whom her father introduced as his cousin Sarah. "The men will bring in your luggage, Edward," she added; "come in at once and see uncle; he seems to have gained new life since we sent for you and—Mary."

The name came at last after a slight hesitation, for the bearing and manner of Mary Armstrong, though perfectly free from pride, threw a restraint upon her homely kinswoman, who remembered her only as a little child of three years.

Before they reached the house John Armstrong met them, and involuntarily removed his garden hat, when his cousin Edward asked him if he remembered his little playfellow Mary.

"I hope you do, cousin," said Mary, pleasantly, to put him at his ease, for this deferential treatment by her country cousins pained her greatly. "I have often heard mamma speak of cousin Sarah and cousin John, and I am so happy to be able to pay you a visit at last."

As she spoke they entered the old farm kitchen. A space round the fire was partially hidden by a screen.

Mr. Armstrong led his daughter forward to the enclosed spot.

"Who is come, Sarah?" said the quavering voice of an old man.

"It is your son Edward. Father, how are you? This is my daughter, the little Mary of whom you were once so fond."

The old man looked up and grasped the hand of his son; then, as he saw Mary, he made an effort to rise.

"No, no, grandfather," she exclaimed, kneeling by his side and kissing his cheek; "you must try to forget I am taller and older than the little Mary you once knew."

"Thank God that I have lived to see you, my child," said the old man, laying his hand on her head, for Mary had thrown off her hat; "I thought you wouldn't bring her, Edward," continued the old man, in the tearful voice of excited old age. "But now you're come, my dear, we'll make you happy. You're like your mother, child. Dear me, how the time flies! Ah, well, I'm almost home now, and I feel like old Simeon, 'ready to depart in peace,'" and the voice had a choking sound as he paused as if for breath. Cousin Sarah approached.

"You must be quiet for a little while, uncle," she said, "and not excite yourself. I'm going to take Miss Armstrong upstairs for a few minutes till tea is ready, and Edward would like to go to his room, I daresay."

"Yes, yes, quite right, Sarah, I'll take care of myself," replied the old man. "I'm only a little overcome at first." And as they left the room he leaned back in his easy-chair and quietly watched the rosy country servant as she covered the table with a profusion of good things, such profusion as country people consider necessary to prove their hospitality.

Meanwhile Mary had followed cousin Sarah to a bedroom which, while it lacked many of the elegant luxuries of her own room at home, charmed her by its simplicity, cleanliness, and tasteful arrangements. The ceiling, across which appeared a large beam, was low, the floor uneven and only partially covered with a carpet. But through the lattice window the moonlight fell in diamond patterns on the floor, only broken by the shadow of the flickering rose-leaves that surrounded it. The dimity curtains, the quilt, the bed furniture, and the toilet covers were of snowy whiteness, and that peculiar fragrance of the country which is often found in country bedrooms pervaded the room.

Twilight still lingered, yet Mrs. John Armstrong carried a lighted candle which flared and flickered in the draught from the open window.

"I am sorry the window has not been closed, Miss Armstrong," she said, as she shaded the candle in her hand, and advanced to fasten the casement.

"Please call me Mary, cousin Sarah," said the young lady, earnestly; "and if you will put out the candle and leave the window curtains undrawn, I shall prefer the moonlight. Oh, what a pleasant window!" she added, as she looked out on the prospect so often described by her mother. "Did mamma sleep here?"

"No, your papa has the room in which she slept, it is larger than this; but you shall see it to-morrow, the window overlooks the orchard."

"Yes, I know," said Mary; "mamma has described it so often that I am sure I shall recognise it."

"Then Mrs. Armstrong remembers her visit to Meadow Farm?"

"Indeed she does with great pleasure, and I have been so longing to come here. I hope, however, that my coming has not excited dear grandfather too much," she added, anxiously; "but I did not expect to find him up from what cousin John said in the letter."

"Oh, did you not? Why, uncle has never kept his bed a whole day yet; he always comes down to dinner; strong, healthy men like he has been seldom live long after once they take to their beds."

Mary had been hastily making some slight alteration in her dress, and emptying her carpet bag with a quickness which surprised cousin Sarah; and seeing her ready they went downstairs together.

Mary Armstrong had never before seen a real farm-house kitchen, and she was not likely to forget the scene that presented itself as she entered.

A large roomy apartment, containing two oriel windows, with leaden casements and diamond window-panes. On one side a dresser and shelves, covered with pewter plates, old china bowls, and various articles of wedgwood and earthenware.

Through an opposite door she could see another large kitchen lighted by the blaze of a wood fire, in which servants were apparently busy, and the voices of men and women could be heard. She noticed as she followed her cousin to the screen that the window nearest the entrance door was uncovered, and that the floor of the old kitchen appeared to be formed of rough stones which she afterwards found was a mixture of lime and sand. But for the moonlight, which passed through the uncovered window and glittered like silver on the pewter plates, this part of the farm kitchen would have had a very desolate aspect. Once, however, inside the screen, how changed everything appeared! The portion enclosed was as large as many a London parlour, and entirely covered with a thick carpet. On the wide, open hearth lay a pile of coals and wooden logs, that sent a blaze and a sparkle up the chimney, while the glowing heat rendered the stone on which the carpet in front of the fire lay a far warmer resting-place for a cold foot than the thickest hearth-rug ever invented.

On a large round table in the centre, covered with a snowy cloth, were arranged china teacups of curious shape and rare value, the silver teapot, cream-jug, and sugar-dish of most antique patterns, in which the firelight gleamed and flickered, adding brightness to the good fare with which the table was loaded. Above the high mantelpiece hung various useful kitchen articles composed of tin, copper, and brass, all so carefully and brightly polished that the light from a lamp and the reflected blaze of the fire flashed from their surfaces with a glitter that illuminated the enclosed portion of the kitchen, making the outer part darker by contrast.

In the most protected corner of this pleasant enclosure, and near the glowing fire, sat old Mr. Armstrong with his son by his side, cheering the old man by his pleasant conversation. Mary, as she entered, thought she had never seen her father to so much advantage. The tender, deferential manner of the son to the aged father was a new phase in his character which charmed his youthful daughter. Mrs. John Armstrong took her seat at the tea-table, while her husband rose with a native politeness to place a chair for Mary, which made her forget that his dress was the homely garb of a farmer.

"Give up your seat to your daughter, Edward, and let Mary sit by me."

The change was quickly made, and then the old gentleman said—

"Ah, my dear, I can see you more plainly now in the light of the lamp; there is a look of the little child I remember so well, although you are grown so tall and womanly."

"Do you not think Mary is like her mother, uncle?" said cousin Sarah; "and yet she has a look sometimes that reminds me of Edward."

"Never mind whom she resembles," said the old man; "if my granddaughter is, as I hear from her father, a dutiful and affectionate daughter, that is of far more value than her personal appearance."

How pleasantly that evening passed! Mary played a game of chess with the old gentleman, whose mind was still clear, notwithstanding his eighty-two years, and delighted him by her quick intelligence, and perhaps not less by finding that he could beat her after a well-matched contest.

When Mary laid her head on her pillow that night in the pretty white bedroom, as she called it, she felt that there could be found much more real happiness in a country life than in all the gaieties and frivolities of a London season.

But Mary had yet to learn the real foundation of the peace and harmony which seemed to surround the residents at Meadow Farm like a halo, and even to make her sleep more sweetly in her white-curtained bed than she had ever done even in the richly furnished rooms and luxurious couches at her aunt Elston's, in Portland Place, after an evening spent in gaiety and excitement.

For the first time in her life Mary had knelt at family prayer.

The old clock in the kitchen had scarcely finished striking nine when cousin Sarah rose, and taking from a shelf a large old-fashioned Bible and book of family prayers, placed them on the table before Edward Armstrong.

"Do you not read yourself, father?" he asked.

"No, my son, I have not been able to do so for some years; John always supplies my place; but now you are here you must officiate."

To Mary all this was new. Except at church she had never seen her father with a Bible in his hand, and she wondered whether he had been accustomed to this in his childhood.

Edward Armstrong possessed one accomplishment which is not always sufficiently appreciated,

he read well; and the beautiful chapter which his father requested him to read sounded to Mary as something she had never before heard—the 15th chapter of St. Luke, and the story of the prodigal son.

The prayer also which followed was new to her. It seemed so suited to the time and place and persons assembled, that she could follow every petition as if it came from her own heart. No wonder Mary Armstrong after this could sleep peacefully.

The sunbeams of an April morning aroused her at an early hour next morning. She sprung out of bed and drew back the window-curtains. What a charming prospect met her view! Close beneath her lay stretched a large and well-kept garden, old-fashioned paths bordered with box, and flower-beds of various geometrical shapes, in which crocus and snowdrop, wallflower, and polyanthus spread themselves in picturesque confusion.

Nearer the house the lilac buds were just bursting into flower, and around her windows the monthly roses mingled their delicate pink leaves with the dark green ivy that covered the wall.

Beyond stretched field and meadow in early spring verdure. In the furrows of an adjacent field men were already busily employed in sowing seeds, and from a distance could be heard the lowing of cattle, the clucking of hens as they led their chirping broods, the quacking of ducks and geese, the peculiar note of the guinea-fowl, and above them all Chanticleer's shrill but familiar crow. Mary turned from the window with a hasty determination to obtain a closer inspection of these pleasant rural sights and sounds. Dressing herself quickly she descended the stairs, and found every one in the house up and busy except her father and grandfather, although it was not yet half-past six o'clock.

Mrs. John Armstrong came forward with surprise to greet the London lady, who could leave her room at such an early hour.

"What, up already, Mary?" she said, "I did not expect to see you till nine o'clock."

"I rise early at home always," she replied; "papa often leaves for London at half-past eight, and I breakfast with him."

"Ah, yes, I forgot that you live at some distance from London now, and therefore our country manners and ways are not quite new to you."

"It is very pleasant country where we live, but not so rural as this," said Mary; and then, as she observed her cousin take some barley from a bin in the outer kitchen, she exclaimed, "Oh, cousin Sarah, if you are going to feed the chickens, do let me go with you, I am longing to see the farmyard, and I can carry something for you."

"Of course you shall go, my dear; I shall be glad to have you. Ned and Jack are away at school now in Southampton, and I miss their help very much."

Mary was soon loaded with a basket containing provision for the farmyard pensioners, and while they walked she asked many questions about her cousins John and Edward, boys of eleven and fifteen, cousin Sarah's only surviving children. But the strange farmyard scenes soon occupied all Mary's attention. Never in her life had she seen so many geese, ducks, chickens, and pigeons, and until they were all fed and satisfied nothing else could be attempted.

At length Mary was at liberty to look round her. The farmyard was surrounded by barns, stables for horses and cattle, waggon-sheds, hen and pigeon-houses, rabbit-hutches, and a pond in the centre, by no means small, for the ducks and geese, near which stood their comfortable nests.

"The man is going to feed the pigs, Mary," said her cousin; "their sties are at the back of the stables, opening into a field."

She led the way from the farmyard as she spoke, and as they drew near the spot Mary heard a most unmelodious sound, half-grunting, half-squeaking, with which the little hungry animals greeted their keeper. There appeared about a hundred little pigs in a portion of the field adjoining the sties, and railed in from the other part by wooden palings and hurdles. At intervals, close to the fence, stood troughs, and the moment their keeper appeared in sight there arose such a perfect yell and growl of grunting and squealing that Mary could not attempt to speak.

The little animals, who varied in age from six weeks to three months, were beautifully clean and white, and when Mary saw them looking through holes in the palings, and many of them standing on their hind-legs to put their noses over, she could scarcely speak for laughing.

"I thought pigs were such heavy, stupid things," she said at last, "but these are lively enough."

"They be lively enough when they be'es hungry," said the man, as he entered the enclosure and drove them back into their houses while he and his helper filled their troughs.

"You can come and see them fed another morning," said cousin Sarah, "but I must go in and prepare breakfast now. Will you amuse yourself in the garden till you hear the bell ring, and gather some flowers for the table?"

"Yes, I should like it of all things;" and Mrs. John Armstrong led Mary to the garden gate and left her.

Mary wandered down the dew moistened paths, now and then gathering flowers as she passed.

In her mind, while looking at the ungainly little beasts in the field, had arisen a memory of words in the parable she had heard read the evening before—"and he sent him into the fields to feed swine." Her knowledge of Oriental customs enabled her to understand the deep degradation of such employment, not only to the Jew, but to the natives of other Eastern countries. And yet, after all, the prodigal's father received him again with open arms.

She was walking still in deep thought when her father's step aroused her.

"What is the subject of my daughter's thoughts?" he said as he placed his arm round her.

Mary avoided a direct reply. Not even to her father could she open her heart on the real subject of her thoughts. But she described with so much vivacity the scenes she had lately visited, not forgetting the greedy pigs, that her father was quite amused.

The eight o'clock bell summoned the whole household to prayers, and when Mary entered the farm kitchen she found the screen drawn back and about twenty farm-servants, male and female, waiting to join in the morning devotions.

Her grandfather was absent, but her father conducted the service as on the previous evening. And when she seated herself at the breakfast-table the glow of health on her cheek was not brighter than the glow of pleasure in her heart as she thought of a whole family kneeling and asking God to guide and keep them through the day from danger and sin.

Mr. Edward Armstrong was obliged to return to London on the day after his arrival, and finding his father so much better than he expected he did so with less regret. "You can leave your daughter for a few days longer, Edward," said his father; "I have hardly had time to renew my acquaintance with her, and it is not possible that I shall ever see her again in this world."

"Would you like to stay for a week, Mary?" asked her father.

"Yes, papa, very much, if dear mamma can spare me for so long."

"There is no doubt of that, my dear," he replied, "especially if she thinks your stay will be agreeable to your grandfather."

And so Mary Armstrong remained at Meadow Farm for a week, a period which in after-life was never forgotten. The loving affection of the kind old man was returned by her in attention to his every wish. So much, indeed, had this visit cheered and revived him, that on fine afternoons, when persuaded by Mary, he would lean on her strong young arm, and walk about the garden and fields of the farm.

On the Sunday he even ventured to the village church; and when congratulated by friends who wondered at the elegant graceful girl on whose arm he leaned, he would say with affectionate pride, "This is my granddaughter, Edward's eldest child."

In these walks the young girl opened her heart to the aged Christian, who had had a long life's experience in the "ways of wisdom," and had found her paths "paths of peace."

From him Mary Armstrong learnt those truths which were to be her comfort and guide in after days of sorrow and trial.

When her father came for her at the end of the week she felt the parting from her grandfather and cousins only softened by the thought that she was returning to her mother so dearly loved. At parting the good old gentleman gave her a Bible with marginal references, and a concordance, which she received with many tears, for she felt that never again on earth should she hear the loving voice that had first said to her, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

CHAPTER XV.

A VISIT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

During the evening at Mr. Drummond's there had been very little opportunity for Mr. Armstrong to discover that the gentleman with white hair was the head of the school at which his little Freddy attended as a pupil. He had been greatly pleased with the gentle and refined manners of Dr. Halford and his son, and felt at once that they were both men of superior education. He had greatly appreciated their remarks on both literary and scientific subjects after the ladies had left the dinner-table; but, unfortunately, one of Mr. Armstrong's narrow-minded prejudices made him judge schoolmasters and clergymen with anything but Christian charity. Added to this they were proverbially poor, and poverty in his eyes was becoming almost a crime.

"What business," he would say, "has a man to educate his son to be a clergyman if he has not independent means, or a living ready for him? or even to be a schoolmaster, with fine notions about education, and not a penny in his pocket? Better by far make him a carpenter or a shoemaker, to work for his living without having to endure the torture of keeping up a genteel appearance upon poverty."

Mr. Armstrong had been unfortunate in his experience respecting schoolmasters and curates;

and with the unbending obstinacy of his nature adhered to the opinion he had formed. The bare idea that Dr. Halford could be a schoolmaster, or that his son was studying at Oxford to become a curate, never occurred to him. His wife, who knew his prejudiced opinions too well, would not enlighten him on the subject, while speaking next morning of the great pleasure he had found in their society, although she wondered that the name had not reminded him of Freddy's school.

Mrs. Armstrong congratulated herself, as she remembered that Mary's father had been too much occupied at the dinner-table to notice the gentleman who sat by her side. "If any unpleasantness should arise from the attentions of that young man to my daughter," she said to herself, "I shall have to remove my little Freddy from school, and he is so happy there."

One afternoon, after the Easter holidays, Freddy brought home a little note, fortunately addressed to herself, containing the quarter's account. The sum was comparatively trifling, and she sent it herself the next day by Freddy. It had been made out to Mr. Armstrong; but she feared to show him the bill on which the name of Halford stood so conspicuously written.

Mrs. Armstrong was giving herself unnecessary anxiety. Henry Halford was already at Oxford absorbed in his books, and more than ever determined to ignore even the existence of a certain young lady with large grey eyes and bright brown hair, who had for a time dazzled his senses.

And Mary, did a thought of that pleasant dinner-party ever pass over her mind? Yes; for true to her promise she had read Milton's works with greater interest than ever; she had made notes of the explanations Mr. Henry Halford had given her so far as she could remember them, and perhaps a little feeling of disappointment arose in her heart that he had not sent the copy of "Paradise Lost," which he had offered to lend her, and which contained notes in the margin. Mary Armstrong owned to herself that she liked Mr. Henry Halford, both in manners and appearance; and, above all, for being so evidently clever and well-informed; but she was not likely to be easily won. The thought of marriage, as a possible event at some future time, would sometimes occur to her; but *falling* in love implied a weakness, and the citadel of Mary Armstrong's heart was so well guarded by constant and active employment, a love of acquiring knowledge, and a mind well informed on the best subjects, that it would need a strong siege to make the citadel surrender. At present, therefore, Mary was free; and the spring months passed away; and June, with its roses, its blue skies and balmy air, arrived to gladden the earth.

The health of Mrs. Armstrong had greatly improved since her residence at Lime Grove. Freddy was also looking well and rosy; and letters from Edward and Arthur were full of the anticipation of the happiness in store for them during the Midsummer holidays.

One morning early in June a carriage drove up to the gate of Lime Grove, and to Mrs. Armstrong's great satisfaction she saw her sister, Mrs. Herbert, preparing to alight. The colonel and his wife had been abroad during the winter; and the sisters met in the hall with affectionate pleasure.

"Why, Mary," said her aunt, as her niece came forward to welcome her, "you are grown quite a woman; and you and your mother look so well, I am sure this place must agree with you."

"Yes, indeed it does, aunt," replied Mary, leading her to a chair; "but has it not made a change in mamma?"

"Wonderful!" said the lady, as she seated herself.

"Wont you take off your bonnet, Helen, and stay to lunch?" asked her sister.

"Yes, presently. I want a little talk first, and there is plenty of time."

"Let me send a message to the coachman to put up the horses, aunt," said Mary; "it's a long drive from town, and they must want rest."

Mrs. Herbert agreed to remain for an hour or two; the horses were safely stabled, and the servants desired to give the two men their dinners; all, indeed, was arranged according to Mary's wishes, for Mrs. Armstrong gave up every household management to her active, energetic daughter.

"Well, upon my word, Mary," said her aunt, after having been, as she said, carried upstairs by force of arms to remove her bonnet and shawl, and was now seated in a luxurious chair near an open window, "upon my word you manage to have your own way very decidedly."

"Perhaps I do," she replied, laughing; "but now, aunt, is it not more comfortable to feel you have nothing to do but talk or listen, instead of being obliged to interrupt a pleasant conversation to get ready for lunch in a great hurry?"

"Ah, yes, I daresay you are right, Mary; but now, before I tell you one cause of my visit I must hear all the news. Do you like your house as well as ever?"

"Yes, quite; indeed I may say, better, for the garden is repaying the money we laid out upon it last year, and we have obtained such a nice school for Freddy."

"Your flowers are beautiful, I can see so far," said Mrs. Herbert—and so of one thing and another the ladies continued to talk, till at last, after Mary's drawings had been examined, her German lessons described, as well as the beautiful grey mare her father had given her—Mrs. Herbert said, "When will Edward be at home, Maria?"

"Not before five; we dine at six. If you wish to see him you must stay to dinner."

"I would rather not do so; it will make my return home so late. Do you think I may venture to take Mary away for a week or ten days without asking her father's consent?"

"Oh, aunt, I'm afraid not," said Mary, "if you wish me to visit you in Park Lane."

"Only for a day or two, my dear. Your uncle and I are going to Oxford for a week on a special invitation from Charles, and in his letter he says I am to be sure and bring Mary."

"It is no use to look so anxiously at me, my dear," said Mrs. Armstrong; "I could not decide myself in such a matter; you must persuade your aunt to stay to dinner, and then she can ask your father herself."

"Would you like to go, Mary?" said her aunt.

"Oh yes, above all things, aunt. I went to Cambridge once with papa, but he says it is nothing to Oxford. We shall be able to visit the colleges, and the museum, and libraries. I've read about them; and to visit such ancient, antique places, will be a great treat."

"Charles seems to think," replied her aunt, "that there is nothing so likely to attract visitors to Oxford as the grand commemoration which takes place once in three years, and is to happen this year. I suppose, from what he says, that it will be a very gay and exciting time at Oxford."

"Can you manage without me, mamma?" asked Mary, suddenly.

"Certainly, darling; I would not deprive you of such a pleasure for a great deal."

"Then if aunt cannot stay I'll ask papa myself, and perhaps he will take me to Park Lane to-morrow, when he goes to town."

"I should like to have a decision to-day, my dear, that I may write to Charles and tell him when to expect us, so I suppose I must stay, for I intend to take you back with me this evening, Mary; and as it is daylight till ten o'clock, we need not mind being late."

This decision gave pleasure to both mother and daughter; and after luncheon Mary left the sisters to their pleasant afternoon chat, while she went to pack a box with various articles which she knew she should require for so long a visit.

"I don't think my father will refuse to grant me this great pleasure," she said to herself, "so I may as well have everything in readiness, and not keep aunt Helen waiting when his consent is obtained. If he does object to my going I can easily unpack my box again, and replace everything."

But Mary sighed at the prospect of a disappointment.

She was, however, not doomed to such a result. Mr. Armstrong could not resist the pleading eyes of his daughter when her aunt stated her wish, and readily gave his consent. As quickly as possible after they had dined, the carriage was brought to the door. Yet with all the delightful anticipations of the visit in store for her, Mary could not part from her mother without a feeling of regret which almost produced tears. She had so lately left her to visit her grandfather for a week, and as she kissed her she whispered—"Mamma, are you sure you can manage without me, and shall you feel lonely?"

"No no, dearest, don't be afraid, Morris will do all I require, and I shall amuse myself by thinking of your happiness, and of all you will have to tell me on your return."

Mr. Armstrong seemed to participate fully in his daughter's pleasure, and as he placed her in the carriage with her aunt, after kissing her affectionately, a deep feeling of pride rose in his heart. Mary was all he could wish her to be. He had superintended her education, and to himself alone he attributed all the good qualities she possessed.

"My daughter will attract notice in the society she meets at Colonel Herbert's," he said to himself. "I wish her to marry well, both as to position and money. She is not likely to make a foolish attachment. At all events, should such a thing arise I have influence enough with her to put a stop to it. Mary will not disobey me."

Meanwhile Colonel Herbert's open carriage was bowling along on its delicate springs towards London in the pleasant summer evening.

For some minutes the present and anticipated enjoyment kept Mary silent. At last her aunt made some remark which caused her to say—"I thought cousin Charles was at Windsor with his regiment."

"So he was a week ago, but he has taken advantage of leave of absence to visit an old friend at Oxford, who has lately obtained a fellowship, and he is so delighted with the place that he wishes us to participate in his pleasure."

"He is very kind to think of me," replied Mary, "and you could not have proposed for me a greater treat. When do you intend to start?"

"On Thursday, I hope, but I must write to Charles this evening that he may secure apartments at the Mitre Hotel. I believe that during the week of commemoration Oxford presents a very gay

appearance, and every available room in the town is quickly hired at a fabulous rent. I have heard the scenes described, but while Charles was at the Woolwich Academy the grand days there in which he figured were my greatest attraction."

"Oh yes, aunt, I can quite understand a preference for the places where our own relations are studying. Those days when you took me to Woolwich while cousin Charles was a cadet were delightful."

And so the aunt and niece continued to talk till the carriage drove into Park Lane, and Colonel Herbert appeared to welcome the arrival of his niece.

"Well done, Helen," he said, as his wife led Mary in. "So you have succeeded in your expedition, and enticed the home bird from her nest?"

"Not without waiting for permission from head-quarters," she replied. "I was made to remain to dinner, for the young lady appeared resolute; she would not stir without her father's sanction, which, however, was most readily given."

"Quite right, Mary, there can be no hope of future happiness in any matter which opposes a parent's will."

"Take Miss Armstrong to her room, Annette," said Mrs. Herbert to the little French maid, who stood waiting to attend the young lady; and then she added in English—"I am going to write to Charles at once, Mary. Go with Annette, she will unpack your box, and do all you require."

Mary followed the tastefully yet neatly dressed French girl to a pleasant room overlooking the park, and soon delighted the young foreigner in a strange land by addressing her with ease in her own language.

Mary, after arranging her dress, and allowing her beautiful hair to pass through the agile fingers of the French girl, seated herself at the open window to watch with eager amusement the varied groups who still lingered or sauntered leisurely along in the cool evening air.

The summons for tea took her to the drawing-room, and the evening passed in listening to descriptions of her aunt's journey to the south of France, and of the beautiful *château* overlooking the blue waters of the Mediterranean in which they had lived.

"We often wished you and your mother were with us, Mary," said her uncle, "all the reading in the world about these lovely spots can never realise the scenes to the imagination of the reader in their full beauty. They must be seen to be understood."

"I hope I shall have that opportunity some day," said Mary. "Papa often talks about spending a few months on the Continent, although he dreads the thought of leaving the management of his business to others. But, aunt Helen, I should think some of the scenery in Wales or Scotland, and in England too, especially in the lake country, must be as beautiful as any place in foreign lands."

"England has a beauty of its own in its soft and picturesque scenery," said her uncle, "but in the glorious south the sunshine, the luxurious vegetation, and the clear air, which makes distant objects so sharply defined, render the scenery very unlike that of a northern landscape. Still, it is a fact that many English people go abroad to admire foreign countries who know nothing of the beauties in their own native land."

"I've heard papa make the same remark, uncle, and I shall always feel thankful to him for taking me so many pleasant trips through England, and if I ever have the good fortune to visit other countries I shall be able to make comparisons, and I don't think dear old England will lose much after all."

"Quite right, Mary, stand up for your own native land, and be thankful that you are not being suffocated with the heat in India, nor subject in England to earthquakes, tornados, or storms, such as destroy cities, and terrify so often the inhabitants of the torrid zone."

"Indeed I am thankful already, uncle, for I have heard Aunt Helen describe Indian storms, and the terrible heat, too often not to be glad I have a dear English home. Is the scenery round Oxford beautiful?" she asked after a pause.

"It is rather flat, but very picturesque on the banks of the Thames, which runs behind Christchurch Meadows, especially in summer. Have you never been in Oxfordshire, Mary?"

"No, uncle, but I have seen Windsor, that is the next county, so I suppose there is a similarity in the scenery."

"A little, perhaps, but I will leave you to judge for yourself. And now, suppose you give us a little music."

And thus the evening passed away, and we cannot wonder if in Mary's dreams were mixed up various subjects which had made that day so different to the quiet studious scenes of home.

Next day they drove to the Kensington Museum, and afterwards spent a few hours at the Exhibition of the Royal Academy, the latter always a delight to Mary. And at a rather early hour she laid her head on her pillow full of joyous anticipations of the morrow's journey.

Could she have foreseen the result of this visit would she have shrunk from it? We cannot tell.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COMMEMORATION WEEK.

Brightly shone the sun over the towers and pinnacles of the glorious old city as the train sped along between Didcot and Oxford. Down the High Street towards the railway station two gentlemen were walking slowly, one of them wearing the Master of Arts gown and the trencher cap; the other, though in plain clothes, had the bearing and gait of a soldier.

Except the bright dark eyes and the clear olive skin there is very little in the tall manly figure and whiskered face to recall the Charley Herbert whom Edward Armstrong saved from an untimely death. His companion, who scarcely reaches to his shoulder, has no such personal attractions as his friend, but the keen eye, broad forehead, and intellectual, studious face, command at once respect and attention.

"At what time is the train due?" asked Charles Herbert, taking out his watch.

"12.30," was the reply.

"Oh, then we have plenty of time to drop in at Queen's and asked Maurice about the boatrace. Hollo, old fellow, where are you going?" and the young officer looked at the offered hand of his friend with surprise.

"I ought not to intrude upon your friends on the very moment of their arrival, Herbert, so I'll say good-by now."

"Nonsense! I want you to know them; come, along, Wilton; you are not going to escape me in this way; and here comes Maurice, the very man I want. Who is that tall fellow with him?" he added hastily, in a low tone, as the two undergraduates approached, one of them with a pleased recognition of Charles and his friend.

"I'll introduce you if you like," had been Mr. Wilton's reply, and as the four gentlemen met and exchanged a friendly greeting, Charles found himself returning the bow of the stranger, who was being named to him as "Mr. Henry Halford, of Queen's."

"I think we have met before, Mr. Herbert," said Henry, with a smile, "we were fellow pupils at Dr. Mason's."

"To be sure, I thought the name was familiar," exclaimed Charles, holding out his hand, "but how was I to recognise our famous Grecian as a tall undergrad. with whiskers; but I remember the face now." And then the two gentlemen stood talking over olden times until Horace Wilton reminded Charles Herbert that he had but a few minutes to spare if he wished to reach the station in time to meet his friends, and persisting in wishing him "Good-by," started him off.

Hasty promises were made to meet on the morrow, hasty farewells uttered, and then Charles Herbert found himself proceeding alone at a rapid rate towards the station.

He had, however, several minutes to wait on the platform before the train slowly drew up, and then from a window of a first-class carriage he recognised the bright, intelligent face of his cousin Mary.

In a few moments the door of the carriage was opened, and a proud, fond welcome from the son whom the mother had not seen for so many months almost brought tears in Mary's eyes.

"Are you tired? Shall we walk to the hotel, and leave the boxes for a porter to bring?" were the eager questions readily assented to at last, and then Charles Herbert, taking possession of his cousin's arm, led the way to his hotel.

Perhaps, to a stranger, no period of time at Oxford can be more fraught with interest than the week in which the yearly commemoration is held. The town no doubt appears more dull by contrast during the long vacation, but in full term time the streets seem redolent of learning; the grave don walking with stately step, as if conscious how far above all other is the power conferred by knowledge and mental superiority; the severe-looking proctor, with his black velvet-trimmed gown adding to his appearance of stern, gloomy determination to be the punisher of evildoers; the youthful freshman, who wears his new honours with shy pride, contrasted with the careless indifference of his more experienced companion, who, carrying a number of musty-looking volumes under his arm, seems quite unconscious that his gown is in rags, or that the cane is visible at one or more corners of his cap.

The yearly commemoration at Oxford certainly presents a scene of excitement scarcely equalled, from the peculiar features of the place, the period, and the principal actors.

It is preceded by that terrible time when the aspirants for honours, shivering and pale, sit writing answers to questions of alarming difficulty, or replying with painful nervousness to their seemingly stern examiners, who sit or stand before them with covered heads.

This is followed by sickening suspense till the list of names decides their fate. Then the scene changes; books are laid aside, learning seems for a time ignored. The long vacation is about to

commence; all is pleasure and gaiety.

Happy fathers, proud mothers, brothers, sisters, and cousins, occupy every habitable part of Oxford outside the college walls, submitting to any inconvenience that they may be present during the exciting week.

On the day of Mary's arrival with her aunt and uncle, several of the men who had been going through a terrible ordeal in the schools might be seen with pale and anxious faces wending their way to different colleges. But as Mary entered the High Street at Magdalen Bridge, the colleges on either side of the road, and the steeples in the distance so occupied her attention that she scarcely noticed any other object.

"What college is that?" she asked, as the beautiful but antique outline of Magdalen first met her view.

"I am not quite up in the wonders of Oxford yet," he replied, "although I have been here a week; but I can tell you the names of those before you. This is Magdalen College. A little higher on the right is Queen's; the one opposite is University. That church with the spire is St. Mary's, the University Church; close to it All Soul's College, and——"

"Oh, stop," cried Mary, "if you have whole streets of colleges and churches in Oxford to describe, you must let me learn their names a few at a time, or I shall mix them all up together. Are those young men with caps and gowns clergymen?" she asked, suddenly.

"No, but what made you think so, Mary?"

"Because they have white ties, and others in the same dress have not."

"I am glad to be able to explain so far," he replied, laughing; "they have been passing their examination in the schools, and at such an occasion, I am told, the white tie is a customary appendage. But, Mary, if you are bent upon understanding all the unusual things you see at Oxford, I must provide you with a more experienced guide than myself. And here we are at the hotel," he added, as he stopped to wait for his parents, who were examining the buildings they passed with almost as much eagerness and interest as Mary.

They turned into the hotel together, and in a very short time, after taking a hasty lunch, they sallied forth in the bright sunshine, bent upon exploring the wonders of a city so famed in ancient lore.

"We may as well begin with Magdalen College," said Charles, as they walked down the High Street, but on reaching Queen's, he suddenly paused, and saying, "Wait for me a moment," darted into the quadrangle, and disappeared among the cloisters.

In a few moments he returned in the company of a gentlemanly-looking man, in cap and gown, whom he introduced to the colonel and Mrs. Herbert. Then turning to his cousin, he said—

"Mr. Maurice, my cousin Miss Armstrong has been already asking me so many questions about the manners, customs, and buildings of your famous university, that I shall be glad to place her in the charge of a more well-informed guide than myself."

The young man, who wore a bachelor's gown with its large sleeves, gladly but modestly accepted the charge so pleasantly made over to him. And Mary, though at first a little reserved, soon found it pleasant to have a companion who could answer her questions and give her unasked many interesting particulars. In the course of the afternoon they were joined by Mr. Wilton, Charles Herbert's friend, who proved himself a very valuable addition to the party.

And so Friday and Saturday passed away in sight-seeing, visits to the colleges, or attending afternoon service at New College and Magdalen; and yet Mary showed no signs of fatigue. Never in her life had she been more deeply interested; and although as *Show Sunday* approached, the streets were filled with well-dressed people, her attention was not easily diverted. Sunday arrived, a bright June day, and in the evening a gathering took place in Christ Church meadows, singularly styled *Vanity Fair*. Fair ladies are certainly present on these occasions, but who would apply to them the term vanity, although they have literally come out to see and to be seen?

Show Sunday, as the Sunday before commemoration is termed, certainly presents a show very seldom seen in any other locality in England.

The most dignified of Oxford's learned magnates are there, accompanied by the ladies of their families and distinguished visitors.

Strings of gownsmen, arm-in-arm, parade the Long Walk, observing with a sort of good-natured envy their more favoured fellows, on whose arms lean some of the fairest and noblest of England's daughters. And in almost every instance the promenaders of the gentler sex are attired in that simple elegance of style which marks the well-bred woman of polished society. Into this novel and attractive scene Mary Armstrong was led by her cousin and Frank Maurice, upon whose arm she leaned.

Her uncle and aunt had continued their walk to the water side, but Charles and his friend detained her after the second turn in the Long Walk for another stroll through the broad promenade beneath the lofty elm trees.

Charles Herbert felt proud of the slight, graceful figure, so becomingly attired, by whom he

walked. The simple, white dress, lace mantle, and blue silk bonnet were attractive from their simplicity, and more than one gownsman, who raised his cap to Frank Maurice, cast admiring eyes on the fair, intellectual face and noble features of the young lady by his side. Presently two gownsmen turned into the walk, and as they approached, one of them said to the other—

"Why, Halford, here comes Wilton's tall friend with Maurice, and a lady on his arm."

The young man thus addressed started as his companion spoke; he had quickly recognised the young lady whom he had twice met, and now as they drew near, and Charles Herbert advanced to claim his acquaintance in a friendly manner, his face became pale as death. It flushed, however, and the consciousness of this restored his self-possession as Charles introduced his cousin, Miss Armstrong.

"I have met Miss Armstrong before," he said, with an effort; "my father resides at Kilburn, at a very short distance from the Limes."

For once Mary was at fault, so great was her surprise to see her dinner-table friend, and her little brother's tutor, at Oxford, in the costume of an undergraduate. But as the new-comers joined them in their walk, and entered into conversation, with her companions, she recovered herself, and took the first opportunity to address a few words to him.

The bells began to toll for evening service, and Frank Maurice, excusing himself to Mary and her cousin, wished them good evening and joined the gownsmen with whom Henry Halford had a few minutes before made his appearance.

"Whither shall we go this evening, Mary?" asked her cousin.

"I have no choice," she replied; "aunt talked of going to St. Mary's, but where are uncle and aunt gone?" she exclaimed, looking round in surprise.

Charles Herbert hesitated for a moment, and then, as the sudden thought occurred that Mary had met an old acquaintance, he said—

"Mr. Halford, if you will kindly take care of my cousin, I will go in search of my runaway relatives."

Henry Halford bowed, and as Charles quickly disappeared he offered his arm to Mary, and led her slowly on in the direction taken by her cousin.

For some minutes conflicting thoughts filled the minds of these two young people so suddenly thrown into each other's society.

"How very pale Mr. Halford looked when he met us just now!" said Mary Armstrong to herself. "What could be the cause? How strange that I should meet him here! and yet I remember now that mamma said Dr. Halford's son was going to Oxford. How nervous he seems! and so different from his manner at the dinner-table at Mr. Drummond's. Ah, how clever I thought him then! and after a university education I should feel absolutely afraid to talk with him. I expect he will end by taking a fellowship like Mr. Wilton. These clever men never marry;" and then a quick flash of thought that crimsoned the young girl's face passed through her mind: "yet I should like my husband to be even more clever and well informed than papa." The silence was becoming painful, and Mary was glad enough to be able to say—

"Oh, here they come at last; do you know my uncle and aunt, Mr. Halford?"

Before he could reply, the colonel and his wife drew near, and Charles quickly introduced the young gownsman, whom he had seen more than once, and of whom he had heard favourable accounts.

After a while Charles Herbert offered his arm to Mary, leaving his young friend to make his own way with his elders, which he did so successfully that they invited him to their hotel to dine on the following day.

Charles made the most of his time during the walk home with his cousin. He had a kind of brotherly affection for Mary, and her regard for him had all the elements of sisterly love; there was therefore perfect ease on both sides in their association with each other, which perhaps induced him to say to her on this evening words which created in her mind new ideas, and led to results he little anticipated.

Charles Herbert himself had no thought of marriage at present, and therefore never suspected that the trifling questions he put to Mary in a joking way would lead to serious thoughts on her part.

"So you and Mr. Halford are old friends. Mary?"

"No, Charles, I have only met him twice; the second time, three months ago at a dinner party."

"Well, he appeared considerably discomposed when he met you. Do you think uncle Armstrong would consider the future parson a suitable match for his daughter?"

"Oh, Charles, don't say such foolish things; does every young man want to marry a young lady when he talks pleasantly to her? if I thought so, I would never speak to any of them again."

The young officer laughed heartily as he replied, "Well, Mary, I wont tease you any more, but if

Mr. Halford does take advantage of pleasant talk with you, and should make you an offer, remember I warned you."

Mary did not reply, and the conversation drifted into another subject.

But her cousin's playful remarks had excited new ideas, and when alone in her room that night she almost decided to avoid the society of the young man in whom she felt herself already interested. In about two years he would finish his terms, and with his acknowledged talents was it likely he would fail to pass for his degree, and obtain ordination? And then—he would be a clergyman, a curate perhaps with a hundred a year,—would her father consent to such a match for her? Some such thoughts as these for a time perplexed her, till at last she dismissed them as absurd. Mr. Henry Halford had never by word or look given her a right to imagine any such nonsense; and after all why should she allow herself to be influenced by the jokes of her cousin Charles?

But to dismiss thoughts of persons with whom we are constantly associated is not an easy matter, as Mary quickly discovered. In an early walk next day with her cousin and his friends they again encountered Henry Halford. He accompanied them to the afternoon service at New College, and soon proved himself as efficient a guide as Frank Maurice. At dinner he completely won the good opinion of Colonel Herbert, by making sensible remarks on various subjects with a modest unobtrusiveness so pleasing in a young man to his elders; and when they separated on that evening it was quite understood that Henry Halford was to consider himself one of their party during this visit to Oxford. Charles Herbert looked however in vain for any signs that these two young people, Henry Halford and Mary Armstrong, were, as he called it, "falling in love" with each other.

They appeared on most friendly terms; Henry rather reserved, but kind, attentive, and polite to the young lady, who treated him with easy familiarity totally unmixed with self-consciousness. There was no scheming to separate from the rest of the party, and Charles Herbert was at length forced to admit that his joking remarks to Mary had been ill-timed.

And yet in the heart of Henry Halford a struggle had commenced, which he could with difficulty maintain when in Mary's society. He also had secretly communed with himself after meeting her so suddenly on the Sunday evening in Christchurch meadows. His first impulse was to leave Oxford and return home at once, rather than again meet the girl whose presence had aroused all the former emotions which he had supposed were completely crushed. He tried to reason with himself on the folly of supposing that he could form a just estimate of a young lady's character in scarcely two interviews; and even if he had now the opportunity placed in his way of seeing her more frequently, could he venture to offer himself to Mr. Armstrong as a suitor for his only daughter? But this very hopelessness nerved him to remain in her society; he was not coxcomb enough to suppose such a sensible girl as Mary Armstrong in any danger from this association with him; and so he remained, firmly guarding his words and actions, that not one might be mistaken as a wish to gain her affections.

Yet the days passed pleasantly: very frequently the three young people sallied forth alone, Mrs. Herbert and the colonel not being able to endure so much fatigue; at other times they were punted up the river to Iffley, passing water-lilies and banks of forget-me-nots, while the gaudy dragon-fly, with its green and gold feathers glittering in the sun, flitted across from bank to bank.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHRISTCHURCH MEADOWS.

The morning of Commemoration-day dawned in full summer splendour. At an early hour Mrs. Herbert and Mary were conducted by Henry Halford and the captain to the ladies' gallery of the Sheldonian Theatre, which on these occasions bears the closest resemblance to a flower-garden.

Ladies in bonnets and dresses of every shade and colour are seated closely together, no break occurring by the appearance of a figure in black broadcloth, and a white tie, as from this gallery gentlemen are entirely excluded. And here for many hours sat Mary Armstrong and her aunt, enjoying with amused surprise the performances in the gallery above them, where persons and subjects were named only to be received with cheers or groans, as it best suited the ten or twelve hundred wild spirits there assembled.

Perhaps in the time of which we write these said wild spirits were more under the control of their own good sense than others have been lately, and therefore were not above submitting to the rules of the university. Most certainly when the dons entered, and the business of the day commenced, they did suppress the noisy shouting, and treat their superiors, in learning at least, with some deference; and although now and then there would occur a little outbreak of mirth and drollery, the Sheldonian Theatre had not yet aspired, as it has lately, to the dignity of a "bear-garden."

Mary Armstrong therefore could listen with but little interruption to the Latin oration and the delivery of the prize poem—the latter most attractive to a girl of intellectual tastes. Indeed, all that took place possessed for her the attraction of novelty, and tired as she felt, she could not

help saying to her aunt as they rose to leave the place—

"Oh, aunty, I'm sorry it's all over."

"Why, my dear child, you must be tired to death; it is nearly three o'clock, and we've been here ever since half-past ten."

"Oh, aunt, have I kept you here all this time on my account? I'm so sorry. I did not feel tired, and I forgot to think of you; why did you not tell me?"

"Nonsense, dear Mary! it is not likely I should wish to spoil your pleasure. But see, here are the gentlemen, and they have got a carriage for us to ride to the hotel. How very thoughtful!"

Mary also acknowledged herself tired now the excitement was over, and gladly seated herself in the carriage by her aunt, with a sense of relief at not having to walk.

Yet after a rest she was quite ready to accompany her cousin and Henry Halford to the afternoon service at Magdalen. Mary felt she could never be too tired to enjoy the sweet choral services at this and other college chapels.

After dinner the young people proposed a stroll in Christchurch meadows.

"With all my heart," said the colonel, "if I am not expected to join you. I don't think I ever felt more tired after a day's march than I do now. Take care of Mary, Charles," he added, "she mustn't overdo it."

"Oh, I don't feel tired, uncle," she replied, "at least, not very—besides, this is our last day at Oxford, and I must have a farewell walk."

"A walk wont hurt her," said Mrs. Herbert, who was lying on the sofa; "young people have a reserve force of strength which enables them to recover quickly from fatigue."

A very few minutes brought Henry Halford and his companions to the Long Walk, in which many persons were already assembled.

The sun, still in full brightness, was approaching the west, and his slanting rays glittered like golden bands of light through the summer foliage. But neither Mary nor her friends seemed inclined for promenading in a crowd, so they sauntered slowly away from the company towards the river side. Here they found a seat, and were presently joined by Charles's friend Wilton. For more than an hour they sat talking over the events of the day, and other matters connected with university life, to which Mary had very little to do but listen with great interest.

Suddenly Horace Wilton rose, and exclaimed, "Here are my aunt and cousin, Captain Herbert; will you allow me to introduce them to you?"

Mary Armstrong and Henry Halford also rose as the ladies approached, for they recognised Mrs. Drummond and her niece Edith Longford, whose musical powers had been a matter of discussion between them at the dinner party.

A mutual and surprised recognition took place amidst sundry inquiries. "How long have you been at Oxford?" "When did you arrive?" "What have you seen?" and so on.

At length Mrs. Drummond suggested that they should retrace their steps to the chief entrance, as the evening was becoming cool. The whole party therefore returned towards the Long Walk.

As usual in such cases, each gentleman fell into companionship with the one lady to whom at the time of moving he happened to be speaking. Horace Wilton therefore led the way with his aunt, Charles walked by the side of Edith Longford, evidently much pleased with her companionship, and Mary found herself alone with Henry Halford. In this lingering summer evening walk there was no occasion for a gentleman to offer his arm to the lady who accompanied him moving slowly by his side. Mary therefore felt herself free. She was, however, for some minutes silently occupied in contemplating the calm beauty of the sunset, which threw over the park-like enclosure of Christchurch Meadows a glow of crimson and gold. Behind them the rippling waters of the Thames dashed their tiny waves against the mossy banks. At a distance in front, the turrets and grey walls of the college glittered through the trees with the gleam of sunset. A thrush in a thicket close by was sweetly warbling his evening hymn of praise; and the scent of new-mown hay filled the air with its fragrance.

Strollers like themselves were wending their way homewards to pass the gate before Old Tom should sound out his one hundred and one sonorous notes, and the meadows were almost deserted in the precincts of the river. All this Mary noticed in silence on this never-to-be-forgotten evening.

Suddenly she exclaimed—

"Oh, Mr. Halford, I have left my book on the seat; is there time to go back for it? I meant to leave it at the library as we passed."

"I will fetch it for you, Miss Armstrong," he replied, "if you do not mind waiting here alone for a few minutes."

"Oh, not in the least; thank you very much;" and she turned towards the river as he started at a rapid pace to fetch the book. Another summer evening beauty presented itself to her delighted

eyes. Across the river glittered a silver band of light, and looking up Mary saw through the trees the full moon casting shadows of the quivering leaves on the turf beneath.

Almost unconsciously she continued walking towards the river, and in a few moments met Henry Halford returning hastily with the lost book in his hand. After many earnest thanks from Mary they hastened to overtake their companions, who were now out of sight; but some moments elapsed before Henry could recover breath to speak easily after his rapid movements.

Strange to say, amidst all his firm resolves a strong impulse was at this moment agitating every nerve, and seeming to impel him to discover whether this young girl, his very *beau idéal* of what a woman should be, could return the love which he now knew was rising for her in his heart.

The twilight hour, the lonely walk, the expected separation on the morrow, all tended to strengthen the impulse; yet he did not speak. Mary walked on quickly, wondering at his silence, and anxious to overtake her friends, yet evidently feeling fatigued.

"You are tired, Miss Armstrong," he said at last; "will you take my arm?"

In silence Mary complied, and after walking rather quickly for a few minutes they came to a turn in the road, and saw their companions at some little distance before them.

"Oh, there they are," exclaimed Mary, slackening her speed; "we need not walk so fast now if we keep them in sight: I am so sorry you had to return for the book, Mr. Halford. I am afraid——"

"Don't, pray don't apologise, Miss Armstrong," was the reply that interrupted her in agitated tones. "I should only be too happy to attend to your every wish for my whole life, if I dared to encourage a hope that such a result was possible."

Was it true? Had she heard aright? What could he mean? What could she say in reply? Nothing. They walked on slowly in silence. How sweetly it accorded with her feelings at the moment! Those few words had shown her, as by a flash of lightning, the state of her own heart. Did it not re-echo the sentiments just uttered by her companion? Was it not happiness to be near him, hanging upon his arm, and conscious from his words of his thoughts respecting her? so talented, so clever, and so good, or he would not wish to be a clergyman.

During this visit to Oxford she had been conscious of a pleasure in his society, and a satisfaction in observing how readily he won the approbation of her friends; but now she could see more clearly the cause of these feelings, and in the first moment of gladness she had no dread of the future. Perfectly innocent of the world, she did not, as many would have done, laugh off the agitated words as a mere compliment. She had formed too high an estimate of the truthful character of Henry Halford to doubt him for one moment.

But Henry Halford already trembled at what he had done in a moment of impulse. Silently he led his companion to her friends, who had stopped at the entrance of the cloisters to wait for them. Together they crossed the quadrangle, Henry now and then joining in the conversation, and at last, to Mary's great delight, passed out at the gate as Old Tom sounded the first of his hundred and one strokes at nine o'clock.

No other words passed between these two till just before they reached the hotel, where the rest of the party were waiting to wish them good night.

"I will not intrude upon your family circle this evening, Miss Armstrong," said Henry Halford, "but I will call in to-morrow to say good-by;" and he added quickly, "If I have offended you by what I said just now, please forgive me and forget it."

"I am not offended, Mr. Halford," was the almost whispered reply, which caused the young man to press the little hand resting on his arm, and then turn quickly away to bid farewell, with stifled feelings, to those who stood waiting for him at the door of the hotel.

Mary escaped to her room, and closing the door, turned the key in the lock. To be troubled with Annette's French chatter at such a moment was more than she could bear even to contemplate.

Taking off her hat and gloves, she threw herself into the easy-chair and began to reflect. Had she compromised her womanly dignity by allowing Henry Halford to suppose she believed what might have been a compliment? No—impossible; he was too honourable and truthful, and too agitated while he spoke, to allow of such a fear. Besides, had he not, during the last few days, given her evident proofs of his preference and notice, made more apparent by the unmistakable efforts he made to conceal them? More than this, was not her own admiration of his talents and character leading to a feeling which made her listen for his footstep, and feel happy in his society? And as the young girl thought thus her cheek flushed even in her loneliness.

"Ah, well," she continued to herself, "there is nothing to be ashamed of; I know I should only be too proud if I am to be married some day to have such a clever, intellectual, well-informed man for my husband. Besides, he must be a good son to help his father as he does, especially as he is going to be a clergyman."

And so the young girl, who knew nothing of the world outside her own home, and who, at the age of eighteen, had never read a novel, sat raising an idol in her own heart to which she could offer that worship which in characters like Mary Armstrong often leads to an infringement of the first commandment.

A summons to tea aroused her. Hastily smoothing her hair, and with deft fingers making those little alterations which, as if by magic, add neatness to a lady's dress, she descended to the private room they occupied at the hotel.

As she entered, the light of the gas dazzled her eyes, and she could scarcely distinguish who were present.

Not so Mrs. Herbert, who exclaimed—

"Why, Mary dear, how flushed you are! I hope you have not taken cold."

"Am I flushed?" she replied, raising her hand to her cheek. "It is warm this evening, aunt, and we walked home quickly."

Her cousin Charles, who had observed the blush deepen as his mother spoke, quickly made a remark that turned the subject.

He had his own suspicions as to the cause of Mary's unusual colour, but he had no wish for the cause of those suspicions to suggest itself to others.

By degrees the conversation turned pleasantly on the events of the week, and the prospect of returning to her dear home with so much to tell her mother for a time diverted Mary's thoughts from a subject which was beginning to make itself all-absorbing.

Charles accompanied them next day by train as far as Slough, from thence he changed carriages for Windsor. Mary stayed with her uncle and aunt in Park Lane that night, and next day was driven home to Kilburn to be welcomed with the fondest expressions of love from her mother and brother Freddy. Equally warm, yet less demonstrative, was her father's greeting to his cherished daughter. How little he guessed that she was nurturing in her heart any sentiment likely to turn her father's love to a fierce anger, of which she had not supposed him capable!

Mary Armstrong's education, on which her father so prided himself, had been lacking in more ways than one. Among other mistakes in training their daughter, her parents had kept her from the society of girls of her own age. Pride on Mrs. Armstrong's part caused her to object to allow Mary to visit often at any houses except those of her own relatives. The same foolish pride of those days prevented those whom she met at her aunt's from inviting the daughter of a tradesman, especially while he resided at his place of business.

She had only one cousin, Charles Herbert; and therefore at the age of seventeen, when her father removed his family to Kilburn, she knew literally nothing of female society, or indeed of any society but that of her mother's relatives.

True, she could and did feel her mother to be her best confidential friend, yet it was not a favourable position for a young girl of her age to be thrown into society with nothing but the knowledge obtained from books to direct her conduct.

Accustomed to be candid and truthful in every action, she knew nothing of the conventional customs which would have condemned the readiness with which she admitted and trusted Henry Halford's first attempts at a more intimate acquaintance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

Henry Halford had intended to return home from Oxford by the 11.40 train, but while saying a few hasty words of farewell to Captain Herbert at the door of the hotel, he discovered that his party were purposing to leave by the same train. He instantly decided to remain an hour or two longer in Oxford. After what had passed that evening he felt it impossible to meet Miss Armstrong's friends as if nothing had happened.

No, he must wait till his return home, and then openly and honourably place the matter before Mr. Armstrong.

This gentleman was, as yet, in happy ignorance of the news in store for him. He welcomed his daughter home with undisguised pleasure, and listened to her lively and vivid descriptions of what she had seen and heard, and of the wonderful and delightful places she had visited with great interest.

Not once, however, did the name of Henry Halford escape her lips. She spoke in a general way of Charles Herbert's college friends who had met them in their walks and shown them the lions of Oxford, but not one was singled out for any particular description.

Mrs. Armstrong watched her daughter's countenance as she talked, and noticed a something in her manner and appearance that marked the change from girlhood to womanhood—a certain reticence on some points, unlike Mary's usual frankness and candour.

"Something has occurred," said the gentle mother to herself, "and Mary's wish to conceal it is painful to her natural frank truthfulness. But she will tell me by-and-by when we are alone."

Happy is the daughter who makes a confidante of her mother in preference to one of her own age and sex, and thrice happy is the mother who feels that she knows all that daughter has to confide —of course supposing that mother to be one who is anxious for her child's happiness, and able to give her good advice.

Perhaps, after all, mothers whose only ambition is to see their daughters married for the sake of riches and position, are not likely to gain their confidence on any subject.

Mrs. Armstrong would have been the very last to take an undue advantage of the girlish confidence of her daughter, although she trembled at the thought that what Mary might have to tell would be displeasing to her father.

With all Mr. Armstrong's habit of looking upon gentle, amiable women as inferior in intellect and deficient in mental strength, he would have been rather surprised to find that his wife understood his daughter's character better than himself.

Days passed, however, after her return from Oxford, before Mrs. Armstrong had any opportunity for discovering Mary's secret, and then it was only by accident that the truth came out.

One fine afternoon in July Mrs. Armstrong, with Mary and her three brothers, was returning home along the high road, in which stood their own house and Englefield Grange. They had passed the latter, which was less than a quarter of a mile from Lime Grove on the opposite side of the road, when Freddy exclaimed—

"O mamma, here comes Mr. Henry Halford."

And, regardless of ceremony, he started off at a rapid pace to meet him.

Taking the hand of his little pupil, who literally danced along by his side, Henry Halford advanced to greet Mrs. Armstrong and her daughter with the easy self-possession of a gentleman.

Yet there was a flush on his face as he shook hands with Mrs. Armstrong, which changed to paleness when he greeted Mary, and spoke to the boys, Edward and Arthur.

The latter had heard so much of Freddy's school and the masters, that they were earnest in their petitions to be allowed to stay at home and attend with their brother at Dr. Halford's. They had heard from Mary of Mr. Henry Halford's wonderful cleverness, and they now had eyes for no one else as he stood talking to their mother.

"Have you recovered from your fatigue at Oxford, Miss Armstrong?" was one of his first questions.

Mary saw her mother glance at her with surprise, but the commonplace question had set her at her ease, and she replied—"Yes, quite, thank you, Mr. Halford. It was a most delightful visit, yet I was glad to get home again."

While the two young people continued to talk of what had been seen and heard at Oxford, Mrs. Armstrong would now and then make some remark, and the boys listened with interest.

Yet as she did so across the mother's mind passed the memory of the dinner-party at Mr. Drummond's.

Were her fears about to be realised? Had these young people met at Oxford and formed an acquaintance fraught with disappointment to Mary and pain to herself in consequence of her husband's displeasure? Still as they talked she could see the clear grey eyes of the young tutor light up with a pleasure which made Mary droop her own and blush beneath his gaze.

And then another recollection flashed upon her Mary had not mentioned the fact of having met Henry Halford at Oxford. What did it all mean?

In her anxiety Mrs. Armstrong looked at her watch.

Henry Halford saw the action, and said, quickly—"I am keeping you standing while we talk, Mrs. Armstrong."

And then, to her astonishment, instead of taking his leave, he turned to walk with them towards their home.

Placing himself by Mrs. Armstrong's side, he continued to speak of various subjects so agreeably that she forgot her fears and began to account in her own mind for any attraction her daughter might feel to his society.

They had nearly reached home, when Mrs. Armstrong, hearing the sound of horse's feet, looked up quickly, and saw her husband alight from his horse and advance to meet them.

He seemed to recognise the stranger in a moment, and as Henry lifted his hat, Mr. Armstrong held out his hand.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Halford," he said, as the gentlemen shook hands cordially. "I have often thought of our pleasant discussions at Mr. Drummond's that evening. I hope your father is well. Are you staying in our neighbourhood?" he added, scarcely allowing Henry time to reply respecting his father's health.

"I am a neighbour of yours, Mr. Armstrong," he replied, firmly. Henry Halford had decided upon what course to pursue with this gentleman, and was therefore prepared to act candidly and openly.

"A neighbour, Mr. Halford? then why have you not paid us a visit before this? I never give dinner-parties, but if at any time you and your father will join our family dinner-table at six o'clock, we shall be most happy to see you. Will you come in now?" he added, as Mrs. Armstrong moved to open the gate.

"Thank you, not to-day, Mr. Armstrong," he replied, "but I will not forget your kind invitation." And merely raising his hat in farewell to the ladies, and returning Freddy's warm adieu by lifting the boy and kissing him, Henry Halford turned towards his own home, feeling greatly elated. Was not this meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong full of hopefulness as to the result of a project on which he had made up his mind?

Mary escaped to her room to dress for dinner with every nerve quivering with excitement.

What would be the result of this meeting? Why had Henry Halford forced his company upon her mother? Was he going to ask her father about her, as she had read in books was the custom of gentlemen? And the young girl who had been kept so secluded from society, blushed at the recollection that if Henry Halford meant what he said on that evening in Christchurch Meadows, he must wish her to be his wife.

Mary Armstrong had never been joked about sweethearts and flirtation; to her mother there had always appeared a want of womanly delicacy and refinement in making such things a subject for ridicule, and Mary had grown to womanhood with the same innate refinement. She had no girl friends of her own age to tell her their tales of love and conquest, of discarded lovers, and contemptible treatment of honourable proposals, as conduct of which a woman might be proud. She had gained her ideas of love from poetry, and Milton's Eve before the fail was her *beau idéal* of what a woman should be—

> "For contemplation he and valour formed,
> For softness she, and sweet attractive grace;
> He for God only, she for God in him.
> ... Though his eye sublime declared
> Absolute rule ... implied
> Subjection, but required with gentle sway,
> And by her yielded."

No doubt poets describe ideal characters not to be found in these fast days of practical utilitarianism. What is an ideal worth when compared with the real earthly good which money can produce? Yet money cannot produce happiness, with all its power; and the ruling god of the present day has caused more unhappiness in domestic life by its presence than by its absence. Mary Armstrong had formed her own *beau idéal* of what a husband ought to be, and certainly in the component parts of this ideal money had no place. She had never known the want of money, and was therefore ignorant of its value. She was to learn this lesson by bitter experience.

Very little remark was made at dinner on the evening of which we write respecting the meeting with Henry Halford.

Mrs. Armstrong avoided the subject as much as her daughter, but for very different reasons; and her brothers, who had not been at home from school long, were full of talk about their examinations and their prizes. But with the dessert Freddy made his appearance, and as usual took his place between his father's knees.

Presently Freddy looked up. "Papa," he said, "isn't Mr. Henry Halford a nice man?"

"Ah, yes, I saw him kiss you, Freddy, as if you were old friends; when have you seen him before to-day?"

"Oh, often, papa, and he kisses the other little boys too when we're in the playground, and he's so kind to us in the schoolroom."

"Schoolroom! what schoolroom? Who are you talking about, Freddy?"

"About Mr. Henry Halford, papa; he used to teach the little boys' class at our school—Dr. Halford's, you know, papa, where I go at Englefield Grange. Dr. Halford is Mr. Henry's father. He hasn't taught us since Easter, because he's been to Oxford learning to be a clergy man."

There was silence for a few moments. Mr. Armstrong glanced at his wife and daughter.

"Did you know this when we met the father and son at Drummond's?" he asked his wife.

"Of course I did," she replied.

"Why did you not mention it to me?"

Much as Mrs. Armstrong dreaded an angry word from her husband, she could not utter an untruth.

"I had my reasons," she said, calmly; "they cannot be explained now, I will tell you when we are alone."

"And did you know it, Mary?" asked her father, as he saw the flushed face on which blushes had fixed a colour that made his daughter look as if she were painted.

"Yes, papa," she replied, "if you remember I took Freddy to school in the winter, because mamma was not well enough to go herself."

Mrs. Armstrong saw the gathering clouds on her husband's brow, and turning to her boys, she said—

"Freddy, go up to the nursery, or into the garden, with your brothers for half an hour. I will send Morris for you when it is time for bed."

The boys obeyed, and Mary also rose to go, but her father stopped her.

"Sit down, Mary. I want to know why I have been kept in ignorance about these school people. Why did you and your mother hide the fact from me?"

"I did not hide it, papa. I thought you knew from Mr. Drummond who these gentlemen were. Why should I wish to conceal their names from you? I knew nothing of them except as schoolmasters until I went to Oxford."

"And how often have you met this young schoolmaster?" asked her father, with suppressed anger.

"Once when I took Freddy to school, and a second time when I dined with him at Mr. Drummond's. Until I met him at Oxford with his friend Charles Herbert he was a comparative stranger to me."

"And you met him there often?" said her father, his tones slightly softened by finding this schoolmaster a friend of his nephew Charles.

"Every day."

"Alone?"

"Once, by accident."

"And then he made love to you, I suppose."

"Papa!" There was a mixture of sorrow, distress, anger, and indignation in the tone in which Mary Armstrong repeated this word.

And then her memory recalled the words Henry Halford had uttered, the pressure of the hand, the inquiry whether he was forgiven. Was all this making love? Perhaps it was—perhaps he wished by speaking and acting as he did, to show her that he loved her. So tender was the young girl's conscience that she was about to tell her father all that had passed rather than feel conscious of having unwittingly deceived him. His angry words checked her.

"Well for you that this poverty-stricken schoolmaster has not dared to make love to my daughter. Going to be a parson, is he? and wants her money to make up the deficiency of a curate's pittance. No, no, Mary, no such half-starved husbands for you; and if you ever dare to marry without my consent, not a penny of money shall you have, even to save you from the workhouse!"

He rose as he spoke, his utterance inarticulate, and his features distorted with rage; then he left the room, banging the door after him.

Mrs. Armstrong leaned back in her chair, pale even to the lips; Mary had risen in terror when her father left the room; she now hastened to her mother, and leading her to the drawing-room, placed her in an easy-chair, and then fetched her a glass of wine. The calm and loving attention of her daughter restored quietness to her nerves, and then Mary knelt at her feet, and burying her face in the folds of her dress, she said—

"Mamma, I am afraid I have not been quite truthful in what I said this evening. Mamma, I have wanted to speak to you about something ever since I came back from Oxford; but I did not know how to begin, and I must now. If—if a gentleman tells you he should be too happy to attend to your every wish for his whole life, if he could only dare to hope such a thing were possible, is that making love?"

Mrs. Armstrong smiled, even in the midst of her fears; but as Mary did not raise her head, she said—

"Well, my dear, it depends. Many men would make such a remark merely as a compliment; but has any gentleman said this to you?"

"Yes, mamma."

"What gentleman, Mary?" How the mother dreaded the answer which she already guessed! It came at last, clear and distinct, for Mary raised her head to speak, but she did not look up.

"Mr. Henry Halford."

"Did you see much of him at Oxford, Mary?"

"Yes, mamma, he dined with uncle and aunt at the hotel several times, and they liked him very much."

"Was he very attentive to you?"

"No, mamma, not more than to other ladies."

"Did you walk out often alone?"

"Never but once, and that occurred because he went back to fetch a book for me, and the rest got a long way before us."

"Did nothing more pass between you?"

"Not much; when we were getting near the hotel he asked me to forgive what he had said and forget it."

"And what was your reply to this?"

"Mamma, I told him there was nothing to forgive."

"Then of course he understands that you would like him to attend to your every wish for your whole life—is that it, Mary?"

"Yes, mamma," in smothered tones.

"But you say this Mr. Henry Halford did not pay you more attentions than to other ladies. What has made my daughter so easily won?"

"O mamma!" and Mary raised her head now and looked fearlessly at her mother, "Mr. Henry Halford has not tried to win me. I should have told papa at once if he had asked me to be his wife; and I hope he wont now, for I am sure I should learn to love him if he did. I suppose it is not right to marry people who have no money, but, mamma, I could not marry any man, if he were the richest in the world, unless he were as clever and intellectual as Henry Halford, and I'm sure that's not very likely."

Mrs. Armstrong sighed. There was no doubt now as the state of her daughter's affections, or how it would end!

The appearance of the boys at the drawing-room window, and the sound of Mr. Armstrong's footsteps, roused mother and daughter. Mary, however, had scarcely reached the door, for she felt unable to meet him, when her father entered, and, as she tried to pass, caught her in his arms and kissed her fondly. Then he advanced to his wife and apologised for his roughness.

"You know, Maria dearest," he said, "that I am only anxious to prevent your clever and accomplished daughter from making an unsuitable marriage."

"I know it, Edward," replied his wife; "but we must be careful not to make her unhappy for life, as I should have been had *my* friends objected to *you*."

Mr. Armstrong made no reply. He knew too well the truth of his wife's remark, and exerted himself through the evening to make Mary forget his angry words. She appreciated and understood the effort, but he could see by her swollen eyelids how much he had wounded and pained his hitherto dutiful daughter.

CHAPTER XIX.

HENRY HALFORD WRITES A LETTER.

When Mr. Henry Halford parted from Mr. Armstrong and his family at the gates of Lime Grove, he felt as if walking on air. After such a kind reception and cordial invitation from the father of Mary Armstrong, there could be nothing to fear of disappointment.

He reached home in a very short space of time, and looked so bright and joyous as he met his mother in the hall, that she said to him, "Why, Henry, you appear as if you had heard good news; where have you been?"

"Only for a walk, mother; but on my way home I met Mrs. Armstrong and the young people, and they have given me a cordial invitation to come in and see them as often as I like."

"I thought you disliked going out to dinner and paying visits, Henry?"

"So I do as a rule, but there is no rule without an exception; and Mr. Armstrong's family forms that exception."

Mrs. Halford stood for a moment contemplating her son's bright and lively mood with real surprise. Truly he presented an exception to the rule which generally governed him. For once the sedate, studious youth had assumed a gay and lightsome manner, which completely changed his appearance. Suddenly she remembered hearing Dr. Halford speak of the young lady he and her son had met at Mr. Drummond's dinner-party—the only and elder sister of little Freddy Armstrong. Determining to question her husband respecting this young lady, she readily allowed

Henry to go on to his study without another word.

But once seated in this sanctum, so exclusively his own, Henry Halford's thoughts took a more serious turn. What he was about to do appeared more formidable on reflection than during the first few minutes of his walk home, when every difficulty seemed swept from his path.

On his return from Oxford, although, if possible, more earnest in his wish to obtain Mary Armstrong as a wife when he had made for her a home, the wish seemed hopeless. He had met her father and mother but once; he was not a visitor at their house, and till his terms at Oxford were ended he had no profession, excepting that of usher in his father's school.

Report said the woman he loved would be rich; how could he ask for her in his present penniless condition? So reasoned common sense. But then arose a thousand arguments in favour of asking for her now. If Mary Armstrong really loved him she would wait years for him. Might not he ask her father's permission to discover if such were the case? After all, it might be only for three years; and as soon as he was ordained had not his father's old pupil promised him a living for his son? And even if that failed, his father would make him a partner in the school, which he knew would be his at his death.

Thus reflecting he made up his mind to the venture, and seated himself at his desk to commence a letter to Mr. Armstrong.

But he found the task too full of difficulties to be hurried over. Two sheets of paper had been filled and thrown aside as unsuitable, and the summons to tea came before he had finished his third attempt. Carelessly pushing the spoiled sheets into his desk and locking it, he arose to join his friends at the tea-table, saying to himself, "I will write my letter to-morrow; it must not be done in a hurry." With this resolve he entered the little breakfast parlour, where we once heard a letter read which so faithfully portrayed his own characteristics. Kate Marston, who was pouring out the tea, looked at him earnestly.

"Why, aunt Clara," she said, "Henry looks as grave as a judge. I expected to see him come into the room like a sunbeam from your description."

"Well, Katey," said her cousin, "clouds must cover the sunbeams sometimes; and have you forgotten the poet's words?—'O man, thou pendulum betwixt a smile and tear.'"

"You can defend yourself, at all events, Henry," she replied; "and you know how completely you can silence me when you quote poetry. I never could learn to repeat a line of poetry in my life."

There was a pause, during which Henry, who sat opposite the window, appeared to be absorbed in the prospect of garden, fields, and meadows, thick summer foliage, and the distant blue hills of Highgate and Harrow which met his view. But the eyes were not "with the heart, for that was far away,"—in the meadows of Christ Church, Oxford, with a fair young girl leaning on his arm.

Persons who have the power of concentrating the mind on one particular subject at a time are spoken of as absent, and many curious incidents are related of talented men and their strange doings during these fits of abstraction. But it is to this very power of concentration that we owe our greatest statesmen, lawyers, poets, and warriors. The discovery of the power of steam, the inventions in science, art, mechanics, and medicine, which have given to the world its luxuries, its comforts, its advantages, and its power of alleviating suffering and pain, can all be attributed to that concentration of thought on one subject, which alone can give the mind a power to grasp it in all its completeness. The subject, however, so absorbing to Henry Halford might in one respect be called trivial; and yet that subject which involves the future happiness or misery of two individuals for life, can scarcely deserve such a name.

The probable success of his letter to Mr. Armstrong was the least important of his thoughts at this moment. Would it insure the happiness of the girl he loved? and was he justified in proposing mere possibilities as a basis for that happiness? were some of the questions he asked himself.

A smart blow with the palm of her hand on his shoulder, and his cousin Kate's words, "Uncle has spoken to you twice, Henry. What are you thinking about so deeply?" aroused him from his reverie.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he exclaimed, with a flushed face, "did you ask me a question?"

"Yes, Henry; I asked where you met Mr. Armstrong yesterday."

"Outside his own gate. He had just arrived from town on horseback. He treated me most affably, and said he should be glad to see you and myself to join their six o'clock dinner at any time without a special invitation, as he never gives dinner-parties."

There was a pause for some minutes, and then Mrs. Halford remarked—

"You met Miss Armstrong and her mother at Mr. Drummond's in March, James?"

"Yes, I remember the young lady's bright, intelligent face. Drummond told me her father has interfered greatly in the education of his daughter, teaching her the advanced rules of arithmetic, and even algebra and Euclid, and other subjects most unusual in the education of girls."

"I should imagine such knowledge would deprive a girl of all softness and refinement," remarked Mrs. Halford.

"It has not done so in Miss Armstrong's case," said Henry, quickly; "I saw enough of her at Mr. Drummond's to discover that."

"And you have seen her since at Oxford?" said his mother.

"Yes, almost every day for nearly a week; and I can assure you I never met a more lady-like, accomplished girl in my life, in spite of what is said of her father's eccentric plans in her education."

Kate Marston noticed the rising colour as it deepened in her cousin's cheek. She glanced at her aunt, and in that glance knew that the mother's suspicions confirmed her own.

"I think you told me, James, that Miss Armstrong's marriage portion will be very considerable," remarked Mrs. Halford.

"Something fabulous, according to Drummond's account; that is, if she marries a man of whom her father approves;" and the father as he spoke looked at his son. "Drummond told me that the ambition of Mr. Armstrong is to marry his daughter to a man of wealth and position, but if both are not attainable he will give her money enough to purchase the latter. He heard him say once that such a girl as his daughter would be an ornament to society in the highest circles in the kingdom."

"Would Mr. Armstrong sacrifice his daughter's wishes to gratify sinful pride and mistaken ambition?" asked Henry, indignantly; "it seems to me an impossibility that any father could act thus." He drank off the contents of his teacup and left the room without waiting for a reply.

Again in his little study, he closed the door and locked it, opened his desk with impulsive eagerness, took out a sheet of writing-paper, and drew his chair to the table.

"I cannot believe any man could be so cruelly unkind to his only daughter," he said to himself. "Would he force her to marry a man she did not love, even if by so doing he could make her a countess? Does the acquisition of money so harden a parent's heart? I cannot, I will not believe it. I will try Mr. Armstrong before I can credit anything so base in human nature. He will no doubt answer my letter; and if he refuses to allow me to address his daughter, he will of course give me his reasons for doing so."

And so the young heart, ignorant of the world, as is the case with most men of studious habits, and with the trust in human nature which seldom outlives a few years of worldly experience, commenced a letter to a man who would, while reading it, sneer at the noble expressions of true-hearted affection it contained, and perhaps treat the writer with contemptuous silence. Nevertheless the letter was written and posted before Henry Halford slept that night.

We will follow it to its destination in London, and intrude upon Mr. Armstrong's private room at his office in Dover Street, to which it was addressed.

Several letters were lying on the table when he entered the room on this morning of which we write, followed by his clerk. Still talking to him while opening them rapidly, he came upon the unknown hand and glanced at the signature, pausing in the midst of an important commission to the clerk to do so. "What could Mr. Henry Halford write to him about? excepting——" and at the thought that followed he flushed with anger. But a question from the gentlemanly young man who stood so patiently waiting his commands, recalled him to the business in hand. Laying the letter at a distance on the table, he opened the rest, and after a few brief directions, yet still so clear as to leave no room for a mistake, the clerk was dismissed. Then Mr. Armstrong, after writing in pencil various notes on the business letters before him, pushed them on one side and took up Henry Halford's long and closely written epistle.

We will read it with him:—

> "Englefield Grange, July 4th, 18—.
>
> "Dear Sir,—Your very kind and cordial invitation this afternoon makes it imperative on me to address you with reference to a certain subject before I accept it. It is probable that after I have candidly explained the cause of my hesitation you may forbid me to enter your house, yet I should prefer even that sentence to any clandestine or concealed proceedings.
>
> "Since Mrs. Armstrong placed her youngest son under my father's care I have had the pleasure of seeing your daughter several times; only twice, however, until the week of her visit to Oxford.
>
> "I will confess to my admiration of Miss Armstrong even on the two former occasions, more especially while in her society at Mrs. Drummond's; but many considerations made me resist the inclination to call at your house and become better acquainted with the young lady.
>
> "At Oxford, however, I met your daughter with my friend Captain Herbert, who was my fellow-student some years ago at Dr. Mason's, though older than myself. I was surprised to find that my friend Charles Herbert was your daughter's cousin and Mrs. Armstrong's nephew; Colonel Herbert kindly invited me to his hotel during their visit to Oxford, and I there met your daughter, and saw and conversed with her frequently during the week of her stay.

"I need not enlarge upon the personal attractions, the unusual talents, and the sweet character which make Miss Armstrong so charming, for these must be well known to yourself. But I ask to be allowed to seek to win her affections with the sanction of her parents and under their own roof.

"I ask this with great hesitation, because I am not yet in a position to offer your daughter such a home as I could wish, and shall eventually obtain for her. In two years I hope to be ordained, and my father's friend, Lord Rivers, has already promised him a living for his son.

"If I can succeed in gaining the affections of your daughter, she will not mind waiting the time I have named. We are both young, and I would wait as Jacob did for Rachel, so great is the love I bear her.

"I will only add that if you kindly grant me your consent, it will give me increased energy to prepare for my profession, and to make every effort to shorten the period of my probation, in the hope that the great happiness of making your charming daughter my cherished wife may eventually be mine.

"I remain, dear Sir,

"Very faithfully yours,

"HENRY HALFORD."

When Mr. Armstrong had read this letter hastily through, words cannot describe the angry passions that raged in his breast. What! the schoolmaster's son, an usher, a curate *in futuro*, with perhaps 80*l.* or 100*l.* a year to live upon! "What!" he thought, "give up my precious daughter to be a schoolmaster's wife, or rather drudge!—making rice puddings, mending stockings and shirts, and slaving for other people's children, and getting no thanks for it! Or perhaps in paltry comfortless apartments waiting upon her husband the curate, for whom she is often obliged to cook a dinner fit for him to eat, because the food obtained with such difficulty is spoiled by the lodging-house cooking. I've heard the misery of a curate's home described," continued the angry man, "less wages than a mechanic, and yet husband, wife, and children have to struggle to keep up appearances and to live in genteel poverty because the husband is a clergyman!"

Mr. Armstrong drew his desk towards him, and dashed off a coarse insulting letter to the daring aspirant for his daughter's hand, and with the effort the fierceness of his anger evaporated, conscience made itself heard. "Why should you insult this young man for acting as you did yourself?" said the stern voice; "he is a well-born, well-bred, intelligent gentleman, which you were not when you married Maria St. Clair." "But I had money," replied self, "and he has by his own account nothing to call his own." "He or his father must have had money to pay for a university education," suggested conscience; "besides, half of the boasted fortune you talk of giving your daughter would establish these young people for life, and make them happy if they love each other."

"I don't believe they do," was the next suggestion, "or at least there is no love on Mary's side. She is not one to give her affections so easily; the young man's letter proves that he is not sure of her, for he asks to be allowed to try and win her. Perhaps if the girl really loved him, I might be inclined to give up some of the fortune in store for her to make them happy. There's no harm done as yet on his own account, so I'll say nothing at home about his letter, but I wont send this," and he took up the sheet containing expressions of which in his cooler moments Mr. Armstrong felt thoroughly ashamed, and tore it into minute shreds; then lighting a taper, he reduced them to ashes in the fireplace. After this he seated himself and wrote as follows:—

"Dover Street, July 4th, 18—.

"SIR,—I have received your letter, and beg to thank you for your kind and complimentary opinion of my daughter, but I cannot favour your proposals. You are young to think of marriage, especially as you have not yet completed the profession which you intend to follow.

"I do not approve of long courtships, and therefore the idea of waiting an indefinite number of years for a living is out of the question. Added to these objections, I have other plans in view for my daughter, which I cannot set aside.

"Thanking you for the honour you have done our family by your proposal,

"I remain, Sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"EDWARD ARMSTRONG."

Mr. Armstrong sealed and addressed this letter with great inward satisfaction. He had effectually put a stop to any farther trouble on the part of Mr. Halford, who, he felt assured, was too honourable to act in opposition to the wishes of Mary's father.

Only one fear would at times during that day disturb Mr. Armstrong's equanimity: "Was he sure about the state of Mary's affections. They had been a week together at Oxford, had any unintentional word or look revealed the secret to each other?" He could not answer his own

question satisfactorily, but he quieted his conscience by saying, "Ah, well, if there is a little passing fancy for this young man in Mary's heart, it will soon wear off; she has too much pride to encourage it when she finds he keeps away, as I know he will after my letter." Mr. Armstrong returned home in great good-humour, and made himself so agreeable that Mrs. Armstrong and Mary were quite ready to forget the roughness of the preceding evening.

No reference of any kind was made to Mr. Henry Halford in Mary's presence, but when Mr. Armstrong and his wife were alone, he said quietly and gently, but with a firmness she well knew she could not gainsay—

"Maria, my dear, I should like to send Freddy to school with his brothers next quarter; he is getting quite well and strong enough to be with older boys. I may as well tell you the truth," he added; "I don't wish him to continue at Dr. Halford's, for many reasons which I need not explain."

CHAPTER XX.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

"Mamma, you will be better and more quiet here than in that noisy Bourke Street. I am so glad papa has taken such a pleasant house for us, and I know you will soon get well." And little Mabel as she spoke shook and arranged her mother's pillow and drew up the blind, that she might look out upon the pleasant view over the waters of the Yarra.

Mr. Franklyn had taken a house in a suburb of Melbourne noted for its beautiful scenery and wild and picturesque landscapes.

In this suburb at a walking distance, or reached easily by train from Melbourne, are situated the Botanical Gardens, laid out in park-like luxuriance. A beautiful stone bridge crosses the dark, deep waters of the Yarra, while painted skiffs and gaudy pleasure-boats skim over its smooth surface and add brightness to the scene.

The country beyond resembles the south of France and the shores of the Mediterranean; vines trained on poles, grapes hanging from verandahs, the blue sky, the pure clear air, and the bright sunshine remind the traveller of beautiful Italy.

Added to this, at the spot we describe, grow trees that retain their verdure during the whole year, white and green parrots and other birds of gaudy plumage flit from branch to branch. Sunrise also in Australia presents a sky of splendour never seen in England; even the colours of the sea-weed which the Yarra brings inland in its course are rich and varied.

Not far from the window opening to the ground on a verandah, near to which Mrs. Franklyn's couch had been drawn, spread what appeared to be a large lake, nine miles in circumference, surrounded by pleasant walks and shady trees.

To strangers it has the appearance of an artificial lake, and they are much surprised to hear that it is merely the reservoir from which the city of Melbourne and the surrounding neighbourhoods are supplied with water.

Altogether this suburb of Melbourne on the banks of the Yarra is one of the most beautiful spots in Australia.

To the pale invalid in her chair, however, all earthly spots had lost their charm, excepting one little island in the Atlantic, in which stood the home of her youth; and as she looked out on the beauty of an approaching Australian summer, and thought of the home she might never see again, she answered her little daughter's words with a sigh.

"Are you unhappy here, mamma?" asked the child.

"No, darling," she replied, "it was merely a longing for home that made me sigh. I know that heaven is the home on which my heart should rest, and yet I should like to see your uncle Henry and my dear parents once more."

"Mamma," said the child, "I heard the doctor tell papa that if you got stronger in this beautiful place, he could take you to England in March, and then you would have no winter, for when we arrived in England it would be midsummer."

Mrs. Franklyn smiled at the prospect described by her child. Her husband had mentioned this opinion of the doctor to her, and in his usual sanguine way he had promised to make early arrangements for them to leave in March. But she knew also that more than one of his speculations had failed, and therefore, unless "something would turn up," as he termed a successful speculation, he would be too much involved in debt to attempt to leave Melbourne.

A feeling of resignation had at length been granted to Dr. Halford's daughter, only disturbed now and then by old memories which could not be quite overcome, more especially as now, when the beauty of Australian scenery was spoken of in her presence, her thoughts would revert to a lovely English landscape—hill and dale, field and meadow, flowers and foliage, which could be seen from the windows of her own dear home in England.

But Fanny Franklyn, as she now lay helpless on the couch, knew well that for her was prepared a home in the skies, and that the dear friends for whose presence she longed could only expect to meet her there. She looked very lovely even now that Death had set his seal on those delicate features. The dark eyes, though sunken, were still large and bright; the pale face looked fairer by contrast to the dark pencilled eyebrows and eyelashes; and the hectic flush on the cheek would have reminded her brother Henry of some words of the great preacher Henry Melvill.

He had heard him once when quite a youth preach a sermon at a church in London on behalf of the Brompton Hospital for diseases of the lungs, in which the preacher, during one of his eloquent bursts of oratory, exclaimed, "And consumption, that flings its brilliant mockery in the mother's eyes."

Poor mother, she had indeed heard of her daughter's serious illness, and yearned with all a mother's love to be near her to tend to her slightest wish. But half the globe stretched between them, and Mrs. Halford consoled herself with the thought that Fanny had a kind husband and loving children, who must be able to supply the place of a mother. But Mrs. Halford did not know all. Fanny, while able to write, had concealed from her mother the real nature of the disease which left no hope of recovery. Yes, her husband was kind, gentle, loving, and earnest in his endeavours to provide for all her wants; yet, as we know, there was in his character a weakness of principle, and want of attention to steadiness of purpose, which made his position always precarious. At the birth of her youngest boy, eighteen months before the time of which we write, he had made a venture in the mercantile world which had failed, and for a time ruin stared them in the face.

The anxiety Fanny suffered in her then delicate state of health, added to a cold which attacked her at the time, was too much for a frame already weakened by the relaxing climate of Melbourne. For with all its bright skies and its clear atmosphere, Australian air is not suited to those who require a bracing climate. It has its periods of scorching heat, and the fair faces of Australian girls lack the roses which adorn the cheeks of their sisters in England.

Perhaps if Fanny Franklyn could have visited her home during the first appearance of failing health her life might have been spared, but this was not to be; and at last her husband had been aroused to the fact that, although he could not spare her to go alone to her home in England, he must spare her to God.

Now that it was too late, Arthur Franklyn, acting as usual on impulse, expressed to the doctor his eager anxiety to take his dying wife to England.

"Cannot I take her home before the autumn, doctor?" he said; "we should arrive in England about April or May, just as the summer is beginning. I could start next week even, if you think she is strong enough for the voyage."

"Too soon, my dear sir; Mrs. Franklyn must not be in England before May at the earliest, and it is now the commencement of November. We must try and help her through the Australian summer if we can, and then if all is well you can start for England in February or March."

But as the doctor left Mr. Franklyn, he said to himself, almost angrily—

"What is the use of talking about going to England now? she'll never live to see March again, or even February, it's too late. What's the man been about not to see his wife's danger? I'm afraid he's got too many irons in the fire to do much good."

And yet when he now entered the drawing-room, and with gentle step approached the couch, no voice could be more subdued, no words kinder.

"I have been talking to Dr. Moore about taking you to England in the autumn, darling; he says we can leave here in February so as to arrive there about May. Does not the prospect make you feel better already?"

Fanny raised her eyes to his and smiled, but she shook her head and said faintly—

"I never expect to see England again."

"Nonsense, dear! why, you are looking more like yourself to-day than I have seen you for weeks. You must not give up, and Dr. Moore seems to have greater hopes than ever. This is certainly a very pleasant spot," he continued, turning to the window, quite unconscious that this sudden announcement respecting a visit to England had agitated his wife. Her thoughts went back to the old days at Kilburn, when, a bright and happy girl, she had been wooed and won by one of her father's old pupils.

She glanced at him now as his tall figure stood out in full relief against the window, the strongly-marked profile clearly defined against the light. At three-and-forty Arthur Franklyn might still be spoken of as a handsome man; and although the light brown wavy hair had receded from the temples, there was not a line of grey visible. The blue eyes still twinkled with the humorous expression which spoke of light-heartedness and a keen sense of the ridiculous. In truth, he was one of those who are said to take things easy. Sanguine of success in everything he undertook, disappointment never troubled him for long. He could throw off the pressure of anxiety, and be as merry and light-hearted as if nothing had happened, while his poor wife was mourning in secret, or trembling for the consequences. She had quickly discovered the weak points in her husband's character, and felt that it could be said of him, "Unstable as water, thou shalt not

excel."

The light-heartedness which made him a favourite in society caused him also to drive away all anticipation of trouble from his mind. "Never meet troubles half-way" was a proverb which he preached so unwisely, that he not only had to meet troubles when they came, but actually increased their magnitude by foolishly shutting his eyes to their approach.

So had it been with his wife's illness; he saw her wasting away daily before his eyes, yet he closed them to the possibility that she might die. And now that he had finally decided to take her to England in February, her recovery seemed to him a certainty. He presently seated himself by her side, and spoke gently and kindly of the voyage, and recalled so many pleasant incidents of the old house at home, that in spite of herself Fanny felt cheered.

"I shall look in at Bevans' this evening, love," he said as he rose to go out; "they know all about the English passenger ships, and I can get every information I require."

After transacting a little business at his office, Arthur Franklyn walked on into Melbourne to call at his friends the Bevans, who were always pleased to see him, and showed their liking for his company in a manner most flattering to a man of his character.

Hour after hour slipped away, and although a kind of uneasy feeling made him prepare more than once to say farewell, he allowed himself to be flattered into remaining to supper. His friends when inquiring for his wife had been told with animation that she was better, and that Dr. Moore had given his permission for her to go to England in February or March, there was therefore every excuse for so kindly pressing him to stay.

The family of Mr. Bevan, a ship agent, consisted of himself, his wife, two sons in the business, and two daughters. They were in the midst of supper, and laughing heartily at one of Arthur Franklyn's jokes, when the door of the dining-room opened, and the servant entered, and advancing to Mr. Franklyn, offered him a missive not so well known then as now in either England or Australia—a telegraph message in its ominous-looking envelope. A sudden pause fell on those assembled round the table, as Arthur Franklyn opened and read aloud—

"Clara Franklyn to Mr. A. Franklyn.—Come directly, mamma is dying!"

He started up with impetuous haste, his face white even to the lips, and was quickly surrounded by the family hastening his departure, and trying to calm his agitation with words of hope. But like all those who are wilfully blind to the approach of danger, Arthur Franklyn became despairing and hopeless when it really arrived. Some one found a railway time-table.

"You will catch the 10.5, Franklyn, if you are quick," said one of the young men, as, half bewildered, he turned to shake hands with his friends.

"No, no, we'll dispense with that for once," said the old gentleman. "Good-by, keep up a good heart, it may not be so bad as you imagine;" and so they hurried him away, Mr. Bevan saying hastily to his eldest son, "Go with him to the station, Tom, he seems scarcely able to take care of himself."

"I hope he'll reach home in time," said Mrs. Bevan; "these sudden messages are dreadfully alarming."

While the train for which Arthur Franklyn was just in time is speeding on over the short distance to his home, we will precede him thither.

Fanny Franklyn, when her husband kissed her on that evening before leaving home, although she felt that for her no journey to England would ever be realised, was still unwilling to damp his hopes by her own misgivings. The conversation had certainly excited her, but she did not seem weaker than usual when her eldest daughter appeared to attend her to bed. Clara Franklyn, during the decline of her mother's health, had become a clever little housekeeper, while Mabel installed herself as nurse. Fanny could not but feel a certain degree of comfort in Clara's cleverness, yet the child of thirteen was already too precocious in manners and character, and the position of housekeeper was calculated to increase these characteristics. The mother also mourned over her own inability to continue the education of her two girls, who had hitherto never had any governess but herself.

Many changes had taken place in their style of living during the fourteen years of Fanny Franklyn's marriage. After a successful speculation, instead of carefully laying up a reserve in case of losses or disappointments, Arthur Franklyn not only lived to the full extent of his income, but actually to the full amount of the money he possessed.

"I have plenty to last us for two or even three years," he would say, "and by that time I shall no doubt have another successful venture; so it's all right, Fanny, don't you worry yourself. I mean you to have a house and servants, and every appliance suitable to my means. There is no other sure way of getting into society nowadays, and the more money you appear to have, the more likely people are to help you in the furtherance of your plans."

And Fanny, during the early years of her married life, though not convinced, submitted to be made a fine lady, to be waited upon by a lady's-maid, to have a first-rate cook, housemaids, a nurse, and a nursery-maid. They resided in a luxuriously furnished house, they gave dinner parties, and soon drew around them a host of acquaintances who were ready to become friends

with the rising young colonist and his family in the days of their prosperity. But this could not last long. By an unfortunate venture they lost house, furniture, servants, and sunshine friends, except some few who liked the genial company of the thoughtless speculator, and respected his wife. One thing, however, Fanny was firm in, she would engage no expensive governess for her children, and from their earliest childhood she had taught them herself.

After many ups and downs caused by her husband's reckless speculations, which are, after all, a species of gambling, we find them now in a small pleasant house, plainly furnished, with but two servants. One of them, whose attachment to Fanny and the children still kept her in the nursery, had, on the evening of which we write, assisted her dear mistress to undress.

Something in the appearance of Mrs. Franklyn made the faithful woman call the two girls out of the room, and say—

"Don't leave your mamma, Miss Clara, I am going to put little Albert to bed, and then I'll come and take your place."

"I may stay too, nurse," said Mabel, "may I not? I've got an interesting book to read, and we wont talk."

"I do not intend to read," said Clara, in a tone of womanly importance. "I have my work to do, and I can watch and attend to mamma at the same time."

"Ah, well," said nurse to herself, as she left the room, "you're a sensible young lady after all, only a bit too precocious for your age, Miss Clara. Oh dear!" she sighed, "to think they're going to lose their mother, who has taught them to be so clever, and trained them in the right way! And then for the master to be so blind, and not to see that his wife is dying. Ugh! I don't like such light-hearted people; they shut their eyes to trouble till it's close upon them. He's gone out pleasuring to-night, and I don't like the looks of the dear mistress."

And at this thought nurse hastened her steps to the nursery, for it was past baby's bedtime, and she had left him in the care of the other servant.

Mrs. Franklyn watched her eldest daughter with a feeling of sadness, as she placed herself where she could see her mother's face, and near the window to obtain light for her work. The November evening of the Australian spring was as light as with us an evening in May; and although the sun was approaching the west, yet the venetian blind was lowered to keep out his rays.

Mabel, who had seated herself out of sight of her mother, soon became absorbed in her book; and as the sisters did not speak, Mrs. Franklyn was quite unaware of her presence.

The mind of the mother rested with anxiety on the future of her eldest girl. She knew too well that she must soon leave these dear ones to the mercy of the world, and a careless though loving father. Her husband was still in the prime of life, a man of personal and social attractions, likely to marry again, no doubt a rich woman, ostensibly to obtain a second mother for his children. James, a boy of eleven, now at school, and Mabel, could be easily managed; about her baby Albert she had written to her brother, Henry Halford, a letter, which in a great measure influenced him in his future conduct. But Clara—high-spirited, determined, self-sufficient, impatient of rebuke, and womanly beyond her age in both manners and appearance—what would she be without the loving, cautious guidance of her own mother?

These painful reflections agitated the invalid. More than once a violent fit of coughing had brought Clara to her side with a remedy. After awhile she sunk into a kind of doze. Nurse came to summon Mabel to bed, but the mother seemed to be sleeping so peacefully that the little girl left the room without saying good night.

Nearly an hour passed, and then the hall clock struck nine. Mrs. Franklyn started at the sound, although it seldom disturbed her at other times.

"Clara," she said faintly.

The child rushed to her bedside quickly.

"What is it, mamma?" and the tones were loving and tender.

"Is your father come home?"

"No, mamma. Shall I send for him?"

But instead of a reply a sudden and violent cough attacked the invalid. Clara, as she had often done, placed her arm under her mother's head and raised her gently.

This time the movement hastened the catastrophe. In a moment the blood burst from the invalid's mouth, covering quilt, sheets, and her night-dress with its ghastly stains.

Although ready to faint with terror, Clara laid her mother down gently on the pillow, and rushing to the bell pulled it so violently that both servants were in the room even before its tones had ceased vibrating.

"Run for Dr. Moore, run for your life, Sarah," cried nurse, as she approached the bed, and leaning over her mistress wiped the life-blood from her pallid lips. The dark eyes opened and the lips parted with a faint smile.

"Don't speak, dear mistress," she said softly; "Dr. Moore will soon be here."

The reply was a gentle movement of the head, which nurse readily understood to mean "too late."

Nurse looked round as the door softly opened, for Clara had disappeared, and saw Mabel in her dressing-gown hesitating to enter. She had been startled from sleep by the bell, and became wide awake when her sister entered with a candle, and opening her desk commenced writing on a half-sheet of paper.

"Clara, what is the matter?" and the startled child sat up in bed with a terrified fear in her face.

Clara turned her white face towards her. "Mamma is dying," she said, in a calm tone, that told of deep agitation under restraint; "I am sending a telegram to papa."

Before Mabel could realise the words, her sister had left the room, and meeting Sarah, she exclaimed—

"To Dr. Moore first, Sarah, and then to the railway station, and send this telegram. Say it is immediate, a case of life and death; anything to make them send it quickly."

While she stood talking, Mabel in her dressing-gown and slippers flew past them in her way to her mother's room, and entered as we have seen.

Quickly as Clara followed, she found Mabel already on the bed by her mother's side, holding her pale hand in hers, while nurse bathed the invalid's forehead with eau de Cologne, and wiped the pale lips from which the life-blood still oozed.

A slight smile welcomed Clara, for Mrs. Franklyn's eyes were opened with the brightness of death, and wandered round the room as if in search of some one. Clara understood her.

"Mamma darling, I have telegraphed for papa; he will soon be here." A look of thankfulness passed over the pale face, and the eyelids closed over the glistening eyes as if to wait in patience for her husband's arrival. For a time all was still. To aid the sufferer's breath nurse had left the door open, and the ticking of the hall clock could be heard distinctly. Clara, to conceal her agitated feelings, knelt by the bed and buried her face in the bedclothes. At length at the sound of the doctor's knock she started up and took her stand by her mother's pillow. Dr. Moore came prepared with stimulants. Sarah had told him what had happened, but he no sooner cast his eyes upon his patient than he knew her danger. No skill on earth could save her now. However, he administered a few teaspoonfuls of his remedy, which seemed to revive her as well as to stay the bleeding from the lungs. She seemed about to speak, when the doctor said—

"Not a word, my dear lady, not a movement; there is nothing so important now as quietness and rest." He placed his fingers on her pulse as he spoke, and felt the feeble fluttering which so often betokens the approach of death. For some time no one spoke. The invalid lay with closed eyes almost motionless. Through the open window came the balmy freshness of a summer evening air, and the sound of the rippling of the waves, as the dark tide of the Yarra flowed onward towards the sea.

Presently a loud, tremulous knock sounded through the hall, and in a few moments, pale and trembling with emotion, the husband and father entered the room. The state of the bed, the death-like face of his wife, and the silence overpowered him so completely, that but for the doctor's arm he would have fallen to the ground. "Is she dead?" he asked, for while in the train he had brought himself to believe that his daughter's telegram was merely caused by a child's fear and exaggeration; his wife's death-like appearance, therefore, was a shock for which he was quite unprepared.

The invalid's eyes opened, and rested with loving pity on her husband.

"I have lived to say good-by, darling," she said in a faint voice. "Thank God—I must speak, doctor," she continued—"I have been saving my strength for a few last words."

"Fanny, my darling wife, I cannot lose you. Oh! I did not expect this, doctor. Can nothing be done?" Clara had moved to allow him to approach the pillow. He stooped and kissed the pale brow. Then seating himself on a chair by her side, he took her hand in his and buried his face in the pillow to conceal his agony.

"Don't grieve, Arthur," said his wife, in whispered tones; "it has been hard to think of leaving you and the dear children, but I have learnt submission to our heavenly Father's will, and you must seek consolation from Him."

Mabel had slidden from the bed when her father appeared, and the two girls now stood by him, as if by their presence they could console him and share his sorrow. For a few moments there was silence, while their mother lay with closed eyes. The sound of Mabel's hardly restrained sobs aroused her.

"Do not weep, darling," she said; "you have both a father on earth to protect you, and a Father in heaven, more powerful than an earthly parent, to guide and comfort you. Never forget the lessons I have taught you of His love and tenderness to motherless children.—Arthur," she continued, "if you do not care to return to England again yourself, send my children to my home, will you?"

"I promise you, darling, I will indeed," replied the stricken husband; "Australia will be a spot of

desolation after you are gone."

Again there was a silence. The doctor administered another stimulant, but no one spoke.

Presently the nurse whispered, "Shall I take the young ladies away, doctor?"

Dr. Moore glanced at them, but the white stern face of Clara Franklyn showed a power of endurance and strength to support her sister as well as herself through the last trying scene. He shook his head, but the invalid had heard the whisper. She opened her eyes and looked fondly at her girls.

"Let them stay, nurse. Dear James, I wish he could have been sent for. Give him his mother's dying love, and——" But the voice failed.

"Kiss me once more," she said, feebly, and the girls came near to kiss the pallid face which would soon be hidden from them for ever. Mabel, unable to bear the painful excitement, clung to nurse, who placed her arm round the child and drew her from the bed. Mrs. Franklyn glanced at her as she did so.

"You will stay with my children, nurse, and take care of my little Albert."

"Trust me, dear mistress," she replied; but she could not say what her heart dictated, that she would never leave them till they were grown to be men and women. Her opinion of Mr. Franklyn made that impossible. Clara, after giving her mother what she well knew was a farewell kiss, felt her firmness giving way, and she clung to her father's arm and leaned her head upon his shoulder to hide the tears.

Dr. Moore was still unwilling to excite the invalid by sending the two girls away, yet he felt that the scene was becoming too painful for them. He stood at the foot of the bed, obedient to Mrs. Franklyn's gentle words—

"Don't go, doctor."

A long pause followed her words to the nurse, and for some moments it seemed as if the dying mother had ceased to breathe. Suddenly the dark eyes opened.

"Raise me, Arthur," she said, faintly.

With gentle hand he lifted her head and laid it on his breast.

"Arthur, it has come. How dark it is! Dear husband, meet me in heaven, it is all light there."

One sigh, then all was still.

Dr. Moore approached. Arthur turned upon him a startled look.

"Is she gone?" he exclaimed. "Oh, darling wife," he continued, kissing the pale face frantically, "oh, forgive me that I never loved you or valued you as I ought."

Dr. Moore removed his arm from the helpless head, and whispering, "Be calm for the sake of your children," drew him gently from the bed.

Arthur Franklyn glanced round the room. Nurse had led the weeping girls away, he was alone; and hastily leaving the bed of death, he rushed into the drawing-room, and, throwing himself on his knees, gave way to those bitter tears which shake manhood to its very centre. His unchastened spirit rebelled against God for depriving him of the wife of his youth in this unexpected manner, forgetting that his own blindness and thoughtless indifference had failed to discover what was plain to every one else. Alas! there is no feeling more painful than remorse for neglect or unkindness to those who are gone, because there can be no recompense made, or regret and sorrow expressed to them on this side the grave.

CHAPTER XXI.

MOTHER AND SON.

There is something in the old Saxon word "mother" which seems to convey more of love and dignity, and to command a greater amount of respect, than any of its substitutes in other languages.

Perhaps its constant use in the old Saxon translation of the Bible has thrown a halo of sanctity over the homely word, for no names in Scripture have been more honoured than those of the mothers of holy men. In our own biographies of great and good men, how often to the mother's influence over her boy, from even the days of infancy, can be traced the high principles, the noble character, and the great worth of the man! Most truly has it been said that the future of a child depends upon the training of the first five years of his life. It is therefore to mothers that this period of a boy's history is by Nature entrusted, and upon them chiefly rests the responsibility of laying the foundation of a high-principled, noble, and truthful character.

Another saying, that mothers love their sons better than their daughters, is not always true,

especially in such a case as Mrs. Halford's, when only one son and one daughter live to grow up.

And yet it is doubtful whether she would have parted so easily with her son had he proposed to place half the globe between himself and his family, for very dear was her clever and talented son to the almost childless mother.

The old adage—

> "My son is my son till he gets him a wife,
> My daughter's my daughter all the days of her life,"

seemed reversed to Mrs. Halford, for Fanny had been completely lost to her mother since her marriage.

She was also strongly impressed with the idea that Henry would continue to assist in carrying on the school, even after his ordination, and then marry some amiable girl who would live with them at Englefield Grange, and to be to her as a daughter in the place of Fanny.

Such were some of Mrs. Halford's castles in the air, greatly augmented by observing with a mother's penetration that her son was admiring Miss Armstrong. Even while her own good sense told her that the daughter of Mr. Armstrong would never obtain her father's consent to a marriage with her son, still she had hope that in some way or other such a result was not impossible.

August of the year which had already been so full of changes and events had arrived.

The pupils were returning to Englefield Grange after the Midsummer vacation, and Mrs. Halford quickly noticed that little Freddy Armstrong was not amongst them.

She waited a fortnight, and then one afternoon at the tea-table spoke to her husband on the subject.

"Mr. Armstrong's little boy has not come back yet," she said, "had you not better send a note, James? They have perhaps forgotten the day on which the school reopened."

"No, my dear, it is not necessary. I received a very polite note from Mr. Armstrong in the holidays, telling me that he intended to send the boy with his brothers this quarter, and enclosing a cheque for the Midsummer amount."

"Why did you not mention it, James?" she asked.

"I did not think it necessary, for I supposed you and Kate would hear of the new arrangement from Henry, as he is so friendly at Lime Grove."

The mother glanced at her son. In spite of his utmost efforts he could not conceal his agitation, yet he did manage to say—

"I have seen nothing of Mr. Armstrong's family for weeks, father."

"No, Henry, I daresay not," said his mother, quickly, "you are studying too closely to have time to spare for visiting. Besides, the loss of one little pupil is not a matter of great importance to us."

After a glance at Henry's pale face, Kate Marston took the first opportunity of turning the subject, and though by so doing she enabled her cousin to recover himself and join in the conversation, he very soon left the tea-table.

Mrs. Halford heard the door of his little study close on her son, but that did not deter her from her purpose. As soon as the tea was removed she rose and left the room.

Henry Halford, after leaving the tea-table and locking the door of his study, was for a few moments unable to touch a book. Resting his head on his hands, he gave himself up to reflection.

He had made a venture and failed; and deeply as he felt the mortification caused by Mr. Armstrong's letter, yet in his cooler moments he could clearly see that, in a worldly point of view, his proposal would appear an act of presumption.

He was still sitting in listless idleness, indulging in these painful thoughts, when a knock at the door startled him, and he impatiently exclaimed—

"Who is there?"

"I, your mother, Henry. I want to speak to you."

Without a moment's delay the lock was drawn back, and mother and son stood together in the room.

Mrs. Halford closed the door gently and locked it, and Henry, placing a chair near the table for his mother, seated himself and looked inquiringly at her.

"Mother," he exclaimed, suddenly, "you have guessed my secret."

"I know there must be something on your mind," she replied. "Close study has never before made you listless and unhappy."

"I fly to books to drown thought, they are my only relief."

"Would it not relieve you to confide in your mother, Henry?"

There was a pause.

"You used to tell me all your troubles when you were a child, and why not now?"

He raised his head, and the words burst forth impulsively—

"Mother, if I had told you weeks ago, instead of acting on impulse as I always do, I might have spared myself bitter mortification."

"In what way, my son? Explain yourself."

"You know I met Miss Armstrong at Oxford, mother, and on the evening before she left I said something to her under an impulse I could not resist, and now I regret it."

"On what account?"

"Because I have written to ask her father's consent to make her my wife, and he has refused me. Don't tell me I am a fool," he added, seeing her about to speak, "I know it now. What have I to offer as an equivalent to a young lady with such superior attractions and accomplishments as Mary Armstrong, setting aside the large fortune which her father can give her?"

"Does he write kindly?" asked the mother, whose heart ached for her son.

"Yes, and sensibly; here is the letter;" and he took Mr. Armstrong's letter from the desk and handed it to her.

She read it and returned it to him in silence.

"You will not allow this disappointment to interfere with your future intentions, Henry?"

"No, indeed," he replied, "I am throwing off the memory of my folly by degrees, and I own I am relieved by telling you all about it. I am not vain enough to suppose that Miss Armstrong will be influenced by the impulsive, unmeaning words I said to her, so there is no harm done. I have no doubt little Freddy was removed to prevent the possibility of any further intercourse. So ends my first and last dream of love."

"Better so, my son, better so, both for your sake and Miss Armstrong's. I quite agree with Mr. Armstrong about long courtship. You would not be in a position to marry for three or four years at the earliest, and not even then to such a girl as Miss Armstrong unless you had a living of some real value."

For nearly an hour Mrs. Halford remained with her son, listening to his account of the pleasant days at Oxford, and their result, and when at last she rose to go, he said—

"Please do not allow the subject to be spoken of by Kate, if you tell her, but I should like my father to know, and by-and-by I may be able to laugh over my folly as a thing of the past."

"No reference shall be made, Henry, I promise you," said Mrs. Halford, as her son rose to open the door for her with the family courtesy now so seldom seen.

He closed it after her, but without locking it. This little interview had done him good. A painful secret loses more than half its bitterness when it has been listened to with sympathising love by a true friend. And who such a true friend as a mother? She had purposely said very little to her son of her own opinion on the matter, but as she slowly ascended the stairs to be alone in her own room for a time, she said to herself—

"I will pay Mrs. Armstrong and her daughter a visit some day. I should like to become acquainted with this girl who has so fascinated my son."

And then, as she seated herself to reflect on what she had heard, her thoughts reverted to her own only daughter, whom she had not seen for nearly fifteen years. Mrs. Franklyn had written once only since the birth of little Albert, and although she spoke of being weaker than usual, and longing to visit England again and see them all, yet she was careful not to alarm her mother.

This reticence on Fanny's part, and her husband's lively and sanguine letters, removed all fear of anything serious about the health of the dearly-loved daughter. And yet at this very moment a letter from Fanny was on its way to England, in which she touched gently on the possibility that she might not live to reach England in the following spring, and enclosing one to her brother to be opened in case of her death.

This letter, however, which did not arrive till the end of October, was accompanied as usual by one from Arthur, written in good spirits, and attributing Fanny's illness and gloomy letters to nervousness.

But we must not anticipate the sorrowful news contained in our last chapter, which will reach Englefield Grange all too soon, and be the more bitterly mourned because almost unexpected.

At this particular time of which we write, Mrs. Halford could think of nothing but her son's disappointment, and the more she reflected on the subject the more indignant she felt.

On what could Mr. Armstrong base his objections to her son beyond the fact that his daughter was rich and her son poor? After all, a schoolmaster in Dr. Halford's position was at least equal to a tradesman, as Mr. Armstrong undoubtedly was. And if his wife could lay claim to good birth, she had been told that Mr. Armstrong was only the son of a Hampshire farmer. Whereas her son, Henry Halford, could boast that the ancestors of both his parents were quite equal in position to those of Mrs. Armstrong. She had seen that lady, and could trace in her not one spark of upstart pride, but the thorough good-breeding of a well-born gentlewoman. Besides all this, would not her son in a few years be a clergyman, and as such, to the honour of England be it said, admissible, on account of his education and the sacredness of his office, to any society?

What else then could influence Mr. Armstrong's refusal but a love of money and what it can buy? He had spoken in his letter of other plans in view for his daughter, and these no doubt were attempts on the father's part to purchase position for her, or to sacrifice her girlish affections for riches and a title.

So reflected Mrs. Halford, and she was not far wrong.

Like many men of strong prejudices, Mr. Armstrong had only overcome these prejudices to go into extremes.

The peculiar ideas which influenced him during his early married life had all disappeared with the increase of wealth. No talk now of "aping the gentry." Money and education had raised him to their level, and therefore far above schoolmasters and curates, or any such poverty-stricken members of society.

But Mrs. Halford's reflections were not made known to her son by even a hint. Had she been only a fond and foolish mother, she would have openly expressed her indignation at the treatment he had received, and aroused in him wounded pride and angry resentment, which would have unsettled his mind for his studies, and made him unfit to assist his father in the schoolroom.

Instead of this, her calm and quiet acquiescence in Mr. Armstrong's letter strengthened the young man in his purpose of overcoming the past and looking forward to the future.

Yet Mrs. Halford had not set aside the idea of paying Mrs. Armstrong a visit. For in her heart she did not despair of her son's ultimate success with Miss Armstrong. If that young lady deserved the opinion expressed of her by father and son, and was not quite indifferent towards the latter—well, it would certainly be difficult to make that discovery, however she would try.

For some weeks nothing occurred to give Mrs. Halford the opportunity she wished for, but it presented itself at last in a most singular manner. She had been seeking a new under-housemaid, and one morning a girl called upon her, whose manner and appearance pleased her so much, that after a little talk with her she decided to call upon her late mistress respecting her character.

What was that lady's surprise when the girl gave her the address of Mrs. Armstrong, Lime Grove!

At once she saw the way open before her, and sent the young woman with a message to ask if between twelve and one the next day would be convenient for a visit respecting the character of a servant.

Mrs. Armstrong had been very much interested in this young housemaid, who was not, however, sufficiently acquainted with her business, and on that account only she had parted with her.

It so happened that when the girl brought the message Mrs. Armstrong was engaged, otherwise she would have questioned her kindly respecting her new situation.

All, therefore, that could be done was to answer the message, which merely asked if Mrs. Armstrong could see *a lady* about Jane's character at the time named.

The reply in the affirmative gave Mrs. Halford the opportunity of paying an unexpected visit so far as her name went, but of this she was not aware when she presented herself next morning at the appointed time and sent in her card.

Mary and her mother were seated in the library, the former at the easel, the latter at work, when the servant entered.

"The lady about Jane's character, ma'am," she said, as she offered the card to her mistress.

Without reading it, Mrs. Armstrong laid it on the table by her side.

The next moment Mrs. Halford was ushered into the room.

Two of the three who then met so unexpectedly never forgot that meeting.

Although inwardly agitated, Mrs. Halford had self-possession enough to glance round the room as she entered. A young girl with bright golden hair, dressed in deep mourning, rose from her easel and bowed gracefully. She was about to reseat herself and resume her painting, when to her surprise she saw her mother advance towards the visitor, hold out her hand, and exclaim—

"How are you, Mrs. Halford? I am most happy to see you. Pray take a chair. I was not prepared for this unexpected pleasure; my housemaid told me it was a lady for the character of a servant. My daughter Mary," she added, seeing that young lady still standing by her easel, and Mrs. Halford looking earnestly at her.

With outward ease Mary Armstrong advanced to shake hands with the visitor, while every nerve quivered with surprise and excitement.

A sudden paleness was followed by a deep flush, which did not fade from her face while the interview lasted.

All this passed in a very few seconds, and then Mrs. Halford seated herself and referred to the object of her visit.

"I have come to inquire into the character of your late housemaid, Mrs. Armstrong, Jane Ford," she said. "I suppose she did not mention my name yesterday, when I sent her to ascertain if to-day at this hour would be convenient, but I sent in my card this morning."

"I must really plead guilty to not having read it," replied Mrs. Armstrong, "but I shall be glad to tell you all I can in Jane's favour, perhaps with double pleasure now I know the lady by whom she is likely to be engaged."

The ladies then entered at once into the various and usual inquiries made and replied to on such occasions. Well for Jane Ford that these two ladies did not belong to the class of mistresses who forget that young servants are human beings, endowed with the same feelings and tempers as themselves, that they also have likes and dislikes, affections and emotions, causes for joy or sorrow, all of which are apt to affect their natures more strongly, because in childhood they are often ill-trained, neglected, or exposed to bad example at home.

At all events, what passed so influenced Mrs. Halford, that she decided at once to engage the young woman of whom Mrs. Armstrong spoke so kindly.

During the conversation Mrs. Halford frequently allowed her eyes to wander towards the spot where Mary sat painting near the window, her beautiful profile defined in strong relief against the light.

Conscious of the glances cast upon her, the colour on Mary's cheeks deepened, but when Mrs. Halford rose and approached her to crave permission to examine the drawing, there was no want of well-bred ease in her manner of replies.

The conversation became general, and touched on other subjects, in which Mary joined readily; indeed, Mrs. Halford had introduced them to draw out this young girl whom her son so admired.

Nearly an hour passed, and then Mrs. Halford was reminded that she would soon be wanted at home for the dinner-hour, by the pendule on the mantelpiece chiming one o'clock.

As she rose in haste to take her leave, the door opened and Freddy entered. For a moment he did not recognise Mrs. Halford; but when she exclaimed—

"Why is my little Freddy still at home?" he came forward at once, and placing his little hand in hers, said, with childlike candour—

"Oh, Mrs. Halford, are you come to ask mamma to send me back to your school! I should like it so much! Dear Mary teaches me now," he added, with a look of affection at his sister, "but I've no boys to play with now. Edward and Arthur are gone back to school, and I don't care about playing alone."

"I persuaded Mr. Armstrong to keep Freddy at home till Easter," said Mrs. Armstrong in explanation; "he is rather too young to be with boys so much older than himself, at least at boarding-school, and his papa has a great objection to day schools as a rule."

"Many parents have that objection," was the gentle reply.

Mrs. Halford quite understood the apology for the removal of her boy from Dr. Halford which the mother's words were intended to convey. But she also by other signs made a greater discovery. Neither mother nor daughter knew anything of Henry's letter or of its reception.

"I hope Dr. Halford and your son are quite well. We have not seen Mr. Halford lately; I suppose he is constantly engaged in study, and has no time for visiting."

Just as Mrs. Armstrong commenced this inquiry, Mrs. Halford had turned to wish Mary good-by. She felt the hand she held quiver as the mother spoke, and the telltale blush could not all be ascribed to the suddenness of rising from her chair. She pressed the young girl's hand, and then turned to the mother.

"My husband and son are quite as well as usual, Mrs. Armstrong; and Henry is more wrapped up in his studies than ever. Thank you very much for so kindly inquiring for them, but Henry has given up all idea of visiting for the present."

And so the ladies parted, Mrs. Halford charmed with the young girl who had won her son's heart; and Mary, after accompanying her visitor to the door and giving her a last bow and smile as she passed into the road, went to her room to prepare for lunch.

Mechanically she made the necessary alterations, all her thoughts occupied with the tall, gentle lady, who in manner and words and face so strongly reminded her of her son, notwithstanding the silvery white hair and difference of years.

CHAPTER XXII.

PARK LANE IN JUNE.

Nearly a year has passed since Mrs. Halford's visit, but no farther intercourse has taken place between the families at Englefield Grange and Lime Grove. Henry Halford had listened eagerly to his mother's description of that visit spoken of in a passing way at the tea-table in the evening, but only once did he venture a remark.

"Mrs. Armstrong and her daughter were in deep mourning," his mother said in the course of conversation. "I was not aware they had lost a near relative."

"They are in mourning for Mr. Armstrong's father," said Henry; "I saw his death in the *Times* a few weeks ago, in his eighty-third year."

This year of Mary's life had indeed been an eventful one. The first meeting with Henry Halford, the second at Mr. Drummond's, the visit to Meadow Farm, and the happy week with her dear old grandfather, that never-to-be-forgotten time at Oxford, her father's angry suspicions and threats, and a few weeks afterwards the hasty summons of his father's death-bed—all these events, following each other so rapidly, were to be also deeply impressed on Mary's memory by future results.

To Englefield Grange in February of the following year came the overwhelming sorrow caused by the news of poor Fanny's death. So completely had Arthur Franklyn's light-hearted letters removed all anticipation of danger, that the shock was the more terrible, and poor Mrs. Halford's health for a time completely gave way.

Mr. Armstrong's family also saw a notice of it in the

Times obituary, and Mary and her mother were both surprised when her father suggested that a message of condolence and kind inquiry should be sent to Englefield Grange. The messenger brought back a formal acknowledgment, and also the information that Mrs. Halford was dangerously ill.

How Mary grieved over the conviction that she could not go and offer her services to soothe and tend the mother of Henry Halford in her terrible griefs! She had never heard of Kate Marston, Henry's cousin, who had for so many years supplied to him and his parents the place of sister and daughter. In spite of what appeared to Mary something like neglect and indifference on the part of the schoolmaster's son, she would have been glad to show him and his family that no proud or resentful feeling on her part could raise a barrier between them as neighbours and acquaintance.

Mary Armstrong possessed a good share of what is called common sense. She had reflected deeply on the occurrences at Oxford, and she reasoned thus with herself:—

"I daresay Mr. Henry Halford is sorry for what he said to me at Oxford, or perhaps he meant nothing but a compliment. He is sensible enough not to think of being married till he is ordained, and so perhaps he keeps away for fear I should learn to love him;" and the young girl blushed as this thought arose in her heart, even when alone. "And besides, after what papa said that night in his passion, I am very, very glad he has not paid us a visit. I could not marry any man without papa's consent, but I hope he wont ask me to marry any one else. I shall be twenty next July, but that doesn't matter; I should like to stay at home always, and there is nothing very dreadful to me in the prospect of being an old maid."

And so the young girl schooled her heart to try to forget that she had met her *beau idéal* of what a husband should be, and that her father had forbidden her to associate with him or to notice the family until their time of trouble called for neighbourly inquiries. How little poor Mary guessed that her father had effectually put a stop to any farther acquaintance, and that even this formal attention would have been withheld had he not supposed her to be quite indifferent to this schoolmaster's son who had presumed to ask him for the hand of his daughter! Perhaps Mr. Armstrong would have been very much surprised had he been told that another influence was at work in Mary's heart which would prevent her from disobeying her father by marrying against his wishes; an influence which had first made itself felt while listening to the teachings of her grandfather, and which would prove her support in the future through weary days of sorrow and trial.

During this twelve months other changes had also taken place; Charles Herbert's regiment had been ordered to Canada, and his mother in her loneliness petitioned Mr. Armstrong for his daughter's company. Sir James and Lady Elston had given up their house in Portland Place, and were now residing in the south of France on account of the old admiral's health.

"You see, Edward, I am quite alone now," said Mrs. Herbert when asking for Mary to be allowed to spend a month with them in Park Lane during the season; "and Mary has seen nothing of society yet, you have made her too much of a bookworm and a homebird."

"Not a bit of it," cried the colonel; "and for my part I do not see the necessity for Mary to acquire a knowledge of London society; however, we shall be glad to have her with us, Armstrong, for a time, and I don't think there is any danger of Mary's head being turned; she's much too sensible."

This conversation took place in Mr. Armstrong's office in Dover Street, and he was ready at once to accept the invitation, even before consulting the wishes of his wife and daughter. It was just what he wanted; the niece of Mrs. Herbert was sure to attract suitors at the house of Colonel Herbert, and soon put an end to this nonsense about the young parson. For in spite of his confidence in these young people he dreaded a chance meeting which might upset all his plans.

A few days after this interview Mary Armstrong stood at the window of her uncle's house in Park Lane, looking out over the Park, now radiant in the glorious beauty of a June morning. There had been a strange contest in Mary's heart at the proposal to spend a month with her aunt in London. She was very fond of her aunt Helen, and ready to accept the invitation with great delight. The house, the arrangements, the varied appliances of taste and refinement which belong to society when composed of the well-bred as well as the rich, were all congenial to Mary. At home the influence of her father was still too strong to allow Mrs. Armstrong to carry out her own refined tastes even at the dinner-table. The early habits at a farm-house were not so easily overcome, and the exquisite and tasteful style of Mrs. Herbert's table was not yet tolerated at Lime Grove. Good, solid, and in profusion, but plain and homely, and without flowers or other ornaments, was considered more suitable for a dinner-table than what Mr. Armstrong called useless trumpery or expensive nicknacks.

And yet, with all that could satisfy her most refined tastes, Mary Armstrong, as she stood at the open French window, sighed at the memory of home. The country lanes which still remained near Lime Grove, the broad high road which passed Englefield Grange as well as her father's house, and along which she and her little brother Freddy had walked to school on that cold morning that seemed now so long ago; the carriage drive home after that fascinating evening at Mr. Drummond's, even the meeting in the road when her father offered hospitality to Mr. Halford, which he was never to accept—all this was connected with the rural suburb surrounding her home. Still onward flew the rapid thoughts to a pleasant hotel at Oxford, and all the happy hours of that never-to-be-forgotten week, the strolls from college to college, from chapel to chapel, the soul-stirring music of the choirs, the boat excursions on the Thames beneath a June sky as bright as that now casting a radiant but somewhat misty glow upon the Park, and that last evening in Christ Church meadows beneath the moonlight, when those trivial words were uttered which had stirred in her girlish heart thoughts and feelings before unknown.

Very lovely she looked as she stood in the reflected sunlight from the Park. The pretty lilac-sprigged muslin, finished at the throat and wrists with lace collar and wristlets, bows from the throat down the front of lilac ribbon, and one of the same colour in her hair, were truly becoming to the fair face and bright brown tresses. The only ornaments she wore consisted of a silver brooch and the chain belonging to her watch.

So deeply were Mary's thoughts occupied, that her uncle and his friend had reached the centre of the room before she was aware of their presence. She started as her uncle said—

"Why, Mary, my dear, what a reverie!"

"I beg your pardon, uncle, I did not hear your approach. Good morning, Captain Fraser," she continued, turning to the visitor with a laugh, and holding out her hand. "I am not in general so easily alarmed; did you and uncle enter purposely on tiptoe?"

The young officer cast upon the speaker a look of unmistakable admiration, which deepened the flush on her cheek, but he did not possess the tact with which to relieve the young lady and place her at her ease with a retort as playful as her own.

Colonel Herbert was, however, more ready.

"Well, upon my word, Mary, you must have a very vivid imagination to picture to yourself a stout old fellow like me tripping along the carpet on tiptoe;" and her uncle's merry laugh restored Mary's self-possession at once. "But now," he continued, "let me tell you the object which brought us here. Would you like to join us in a canter this morning in the Row? Captain Fraser and I have just been inspecting Daisy, she has quite recovered from the effects of her journey by train, and I have desired the groom to bring her round in half an hour; can you be ready?"

"Oh yes, uncle, thank you, I shall be delighted, if aunt Helen approves."

"Aunt Helen is here to speak for herself;" and Mrs Herbert entered the room as she thus announced her presence.

"Of course I approve; go, darling, and dress quickly; an hour's ride will do you good after such a long practice."

"Mary was not practising when we entered the room," said her uncle, "but lost in contemplation of our London landscape—quite a compliment to Hyde Park I consider it."

"I am afraid I was making comparisons in my mind not very complimentary to the Park, uncle, but I shall enjoy my ride nevertheless." And the young girl ran gaily out of the room without waiting for a reply.

During the time the gentlemen had been in the room Captain Fraser had not spoken; indeed, in reply to Mary he had only bowed a silent good morning. Now, however, he entered into conversation with Mrs. Herbert, showing that he could make himself in a certain sense agreeable as a companion.

Mary had met him twice already during the few days she had been in Park Lane, but while the memory of a gentleman who could fascinate her with his conversation on intellectual and poetical subjects was still fresh, the style in which Captain Fraser made himself agreeable was not likely to attract Mary Armstrong.

"I'm afraid—aw—we alarmed—aw—Miss Armstrong this morning," said the young man, pulling violently at his whiskers as he spoke.

"My niece is not easily frightened, Captain Fraser."

"No—aw—not exactly frightened, but startled I mean—aw—just for a minute, and she turned it off —aw—and laughed as she spoke in such a captivating manner that—aw—there was nothing left for a fellah to say."

"But you should say something, and not allow young ladies to have it all their own way, Captain Fraser."

"Oh dear me—aw—I couldn't possibly; besides—aw—Mrs. Herbert, I don't think—aw—I ever saw a handsomer girl in my life—aw—than Miss Armstrong; but now I don't mind telling you, she's so clever—aw—that I'm half afraid to speak to her."

"Ah, well, you can get better acquainted with her this morning during your ride; she is perfectly at home on horseback, and a fearless rider."

"I believe that Miss Armstrong is clever in everything that she does," replied the young officer, with another firm tug at his whiskers.

The appearance of the young lady in equestrian attire, and the announcement that the horses were at the door, aroused the young man to offer his assistance. He escorted Mary to the entrance, and was ready and eager to be allowed to mount her; but he got so confused, and appeared so awkward about the matter, that Mary felt afraid to place her foot in his hand, and said quickly, "Thank you very much, Captain Fraser, but I am so used to be mounted by my uncle, pray do not trouble yourself to help me."

He drew back instantly to give place to Colonel Herbert, and looked so intensely miserable that Mary's kind heart pitied him, and she determined during her ride to endeavour by her attention to him to restore his self-appreciation.

But Mary made very little progress towards the completion of her object. She addressed her conversation almost entirely to him while walking their horses; she tried various topics, but none proved of any interest until a friend whom they met admired Mary's beautiful grey mare, who pranced, and tossed her head, and curved her sleek neck as if she knew that she carried her young mistress, and considered herself and her rider the most attractive objects in the Park.

This notice of Daisy by the colonel's friend loosened Captain Fraser's tongue, and for the remainder of the ride he entertained his companion with descriptions of the turf, and advice about the treatment of horses, which to Mary were as incomprehensible as if uttered in Sanscrit. But this subject, so familiar to the young officer, set him at his ease, and by the time he reached home the shy awkwardness of the morning had quite disappeared.

When he joined them in the evening, Mary, whom he had taken down to dinner, found his loquacity almost as painful to endure as his shyness. The long drawn out words, the constant repetition of "aw, aw," and the affected lackadaisical style of manner and speech, annoyed Mary even while it amused her. Indeed, at last nothing but the recollection that he was her uncle's guest could influence her to endure his society.

Gladly did she hail her aunt's signal to leave the dinner-table, and had she been alone would have openly expressed to Mrs. Herbert her opinion of their visitor. But quietly leaning back in her chair while the elder ladies talked, Mary Armstrong began to reflect. Had she any right to despise this young captain because he had peculiarities and foibles? She had heard her aunt say that Reginald Fraser had been motherless from his birth, and to his father's neglect might be attributed much that was disagreeable or affected in his manners, which in other respects she was obliged to acknowledge were those of a gentleman. "Would my dear grandfather have approved of my treating this young man with contempt?" she asked herself. "With all his plain country manners he was a true Christian gentleman, one of those who would not for the world say or do anything to pain or mortify another. Again, how would Henry Halford treat Reginald Fraser?" she asked herself. The answer was plain; she knew how he would have acted, for Mr. Henry Halford would not forget the advantages of his own happy home, and the careful training he had received from his own mother. Thus reasoning, Mary Armstrong decided that during her visit to Park Lane she would bear with this weak-minded young man, and treat him kindly in spite of his foibles.

But too much crooked policy exists in the world for straightforward conduct and honest intentions to meet with a due reward.

Mary's innocent, unsuspecting proceedings were mistaken by Captain Fraser for a growing attachment to himself.

During the month of her stay in Park Lane she had been associated with many men and women belonging to the best society, and more than one of the former had been attracted by the

colonel's niece, and were ready to offer her a position in society quite sufficient to satisfy her father's pride.

But there was something in the manner of Mary Armstrong which repelled foolish flirtation, and completely prevented any attentions of a more honourable nature. These gentlemen were too greatly superior to Reginald Fraser for her to venture the kind of patronising notice she bestowed upon the tall, effeminate young soldier. And yet in her innocent ignorance of the world she was preparing for herself a bitter and unexpected trial.

On Mary's last evening at Park Lane no other visitor had been admitted excepting Captain Fraser, and after playing and singing, *to him* (as he thought), all the evening, she felt tired of his exclusive attention, and rose to retire, something in his manner of bidding her farewell made her say to herself as she ascended the stairs, "Well, I am glad that's over; I do not think I could endure Captain Fraser's society for another day; and then to think that he should have the impertinence to squeeze my hand! At all events, uncle and aunt can never accuse me of being rude to their visitor."

Poor Mary! had she been able to hear the conversation that took place in the drawing-room on that evening, great would have been her surprise and regret. Captain Fraser only stayed a few moments after Mary had left the room, and when he was gone Colonel Herbert returned to his wife with a serious face, and said—

"Well, Helen, what do you think Armstrong will say to this?"

"Do you suppose the young man is in earnest, Charles?" was Mrs. Herbert's reply in the form of a question.

"No doubt about it; why, after dinner he became quite eloquent, talked without any 'aw-aw,' and gave me quite a biography of himself and his family."

"I don't think Mary cares for him in the least," said Mrs. Herbert; "I'm afraid that young man we met at Oxford is the favoured one; and certainly, so far as intellectual and manly qualities are concerned, Reginald Fraser is not to be compared with young Halford for a moment."

"But, my dear Helen," replied her husband, "Charles told me before he left England that this Halford was a schoolmaster's son, and even after he has taken his degree can only hope to be a curate. Armstrong will never sanction such an intimacy."

"No, I'm sure of that: indeed, Mary has told me quite enough on the subject of her father's opinion of schoolmasters and curates to prove that she would have to relinquish all hope of being better acquainted with the Halfords, whatever her own wishes might be. But my impression is that she has no thought of marriage yet."

"Reginald seems to think she has encouraged his attentions, and is quite elated about it. Certainly, so far as money and position go, Armstrong could not hope for a better offer for his daughter. Why, the man has twelve thousand a year, and is the grand-nephew of a duke."

"And what does he intend to do? has he said anything to Mary?"

"No, I advised him not to do so until he had seen her father, and, poor fellow, he seemed glad enough of the respite. He's good and amiable, but not very wise, and he confessed to me that he dreaded popping the question more than undergoing a six hours' drill."

"Poor Mary," said Mrs. Herbert, "what a prospect for such a bright, intelligent, sensible girl as she is! I'm afraid Armstrong will never be able to resist the temptation of such an offer for his daughter."

"Not he, you may be sure; and Mary appears so completely under her father's control, that she will submit to his wishes without a word of complaint."

"And be miserable for life in spite of the money," said her aunt, with a shrug of the shoulders expressive of pity. How little Mrs. Herbert understood the character of Mary Armstrong will be seen in the sequel. On the morning of the next day Mary rose with the feeling that an incubus had been removed from her shoulders. At last she was set free from the unpleasant necessity of listening to the frivolous conversation of Captain Fraser. "How thankful I am that it is over!" she said to herself, while busily engaged after breakfast in packing her boxes with the assistance of Annette, who was *desolée* at the approaching departure of Mademoiselle Marie.

Her task was scarcely finished when a message from her aunt summoned her to the drawing-room.

"Should you like to ride Daisy home to-day, my dear?" said Mrs. Herbert; "your uncle has business at Harrow, and he can accompany you as far as the Limes."

"Oh, indeed, aunt, it would be delightful; I shall enjoy it beyond everything. When does uncle propose to start?"

"At about twelve o'clock."

"I shall be ready, aunt dear; and will you send my boxes? Annette has been helping me to pack them. Oh, aunt Herbert," she continued, "you have been so kind, I shall never forget this pleasant visit."

A few hours later Colonel Herbert parted from his niece at the Limes after a hasty lunch, the latter quite unprepared for the consequences of her kind and innocent attentions to Reginald Fraser.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DISCOVERY AND ITS RESULT.

Reginald Fraser left Park Lane after the last evening of Mary Armstrong's visit full of determination to call upon her father on the following day.

In spite of the effeminate and *nil admirari* style of the young officer, he had many amiable qualities, and was not quite deserving of the title of a "good-natured fool," which his brother officers applied to him.

Motherless from his birth, an orphan before he had reached the age of four years, the almost neglected child was placed by his grandfather at a preparatory school for little boys. From this he passed to Eton, and after studying at the Woolwich Academy entered the Guards, and at the age of twenty-four obtained his company.

At Woolwich he had formed an acquaintance with Charles Herbert, and this young officer before starting for Canada had said to his mother—

"Mother, I wish you would look after that easy-going young fellow Fraser, he's got more money than he knows what to do with, and the sooner he finds a wife the better, or he'll get fleeced and no mistake."

Mrs. Herbert remembered this request of her son's, and while in Park Lane she encouraged the young officer to make their house his home.

This report of his wealth had already made him a welcome visitor at the houses of scheming mothers, and many well-born but worldly girls were ready to *fall in love* with his money and his possessions, while secretly despising the owner for the shyness and indifference with which he treated their advances to a better acquaintance. He had, however, been introduced to very few families when Mary Armstrong made her appearance at the house of his oldest friends, the Herberts, and it soon became evident to every one but the young lady herself, that Reginald Fraser, when he had summoned courage enough to do so, would offer himself and his possessions to Mary Armstrong.

Such indeed was his intention, or at least to make known his wishes to her father, when he left Park Lane on that July evening; but on reaching his quarters in St. James's Park, the official notice that his regiment was ordered to Windsor on the morrow upset all his plans.

Strange to say, he felt relieved at the thought of a few days' delay; he dreaded the ordeal, although he had for hours been screwing up his courage to make the venture, so painful to his natural shyness and reserve. A few days would not matter; perhaps it was best to leave Miss Armstrong to prepare the way for his visit by mentioning his name, and so on.

If Reginald Fraser could have foreseen what would happen during these few days he might have recalled the proverb, "Delays are dangerous," in time to escape a new and formidable difficulty.

Mary Armstrong had arranged to return home in time for the commencement of her brother's holidays. Not all the pleasant attractions in Park Lane could have induced her to allow the anxiety and care which their presence would cause, to devolve upon her mother.

For three days, however—days which afterwards were never forgotten, although their memory was rendered painful by contrast—Mary Armstrong enjoyed the loving society of her parents alone. After an early breakfast with her father, during the day till dinner she devoted herself entirely to her mother, relieving her as usual of all domestic supervision; sometimes walking with her, reading to her, or painting, while she worked and talked.

And yet how dissimilar were the causes which made both parents receive their daughter on her return home with a proud affection which almost surprised her!

Not perhaps exactly at the moment of her return, but after the first evening, when she described to them with sparkling eyes and eager delight the scenes she had witnessed, the places she had visited, and the company she had met.

There was no reticence of manner now; persons and conversations were spoken of with ease; and among other names, that of Reginald Fraser, Charles Herbert's friend.

"And what sort of a young man is Captain Fraser?" asked her mother.

"Well, mamma, he is tall and rather handsome, but I am afraid not very wise: he was at uncle's house every day, but he had scarcely ever a word to say for himself, except once, when I happened to speak about horses, and then his talk was far beyond my comprehension. I used to avoid him at first, till aunt told me he had been motherless from his birth, and was an orphan

with few acquaintances in London, so I tried to amuse him and make him talk because he was aunt Helen's guest, but I must confess it was not a very pleasant occupation."

"But why did this task fall upon you, Mary?" asked her father; "were no other ladies present?"

"Oh yes, often; but they soon appeared to get tired of his society. I believe Captain Fraser is very amiable and good-tempered, but he is the shyest man I ever met."

"And who is this shy, reticent gentleman?" asked her father. "Is he worth all the trouble he gives to young ladies in society?"

"I suppose he is, papa, for aunt told me his great-uncle is a duke, and his grandfather, who died about six months ago, left him a beautiful estate in Westmorland, and twelve thousand a year."

After saying this in a tone of voice that showed how utterly indifferent she felt to the facts she had stated, Mary Armstrong without an effort turned the subject to one more pleasing to herself —the new music and songs she had brought home with her.

While she sat at the piano playing and singing those on which she wished to have her mother's opinion, thoughts were passing through the minds of her parents of a very opposite character.

"That young captain is no doubt the man I one day met riding with Herbert," said her father to himself, "a fine aristocratic-looking fellow. What a splendid match he would be for Mary! but I suppose it is too much to expect such a man as that to marry a corn merchant's daughter. How absurd all this nonsense is about high birth and good connexions! This sprig of nobility, who is lucky enough to possess riches in addition to his other attractions, will easily find a wife among the 'upper ten' in spite of not being very wise."

How different from these were the thoughts of the gentle mother!

"My Mary is not spoilt by this little peep into the world of fashion; and I doubt very much if even twenty thousand a year would tempt her to unite herself to a man who requires to be amused and has nothing to say for himself."

And so for two days Mary had her mother's gentle love and her father's unusually kind attentions all to herself. He had reasoned himself into the conviction that the young officer had been attracted by his daughter, although she was evidently not aware of it.

"I'll get Herbert to introduce me some day," he said to himself, "and then ask the captain down to dinner here. If such a position were offered to Mary, I do not suppose she would be fool enough to refuse, especially if supported by my authority. She seems to have forgotten that sentimental affair with the schoolmaster. I am very glad I settled him so completely in my reply to his letter. Maria tells me they have seen very little of the family since, excepting when the mother came for the character of a servant. And I can trust Mary; and—yes—well, the man himself; they are both above anything dishonourable."

Some such thoughts as these occupied the mind of Mr. Armstrong as he mounted his horse and rode slowly to town on the second morning after Mary's return to Lime Grove. How little he guessed that before they met at dinner his power over his daughter would be weakened by a painful discovery!

Mrs. Armstrong during the warm weather generally put off her walk till about four o'clock. The doctor had recommended walking exercise; and her husband to encourage this had delayed the purchase of an open carriage for his wife. The arrangement suited his purpose, and he was not far wrong in adhering to the old-fashioned opinion that walking is more truly conducive to health than driving.

Mrs. Armstrong enjoyed the country walk with Mary on the afternoon of which we write. The July day had been hot and sultry; but as they turned their steps homeward a pleasant breeze sprung up which was very exhilarating, and seemed to give Mrs. Armstrong additional strength.

As they passed Englefield Grange the schoolroom clock struck five, and almost at the same moment Mary saw coming towards them in an opposite direction an invalid chair, which she knew belonged to Mrs. Halford. More than once Mary and her mother had met the poor lady, now so completely a wreck of her former self, accompanied by Kate Marston, who in the midst of the tenderest care of her aunt could still manage to glance at the fair girl who had so fascinated her cousin Henry with genuine admiration.

Hitherto a kind inquiry respecting Mrs. Halford's health had been replied to by Kate with distant politeness; but to-day both mother and daughter saw with troubled surprise, that instead of her usual lady-friend, Mrs. Halford was accompanied by her son. Mrs. Armstrong intended to bow and pass on, for she had not forgotten her husband's angry remarks respecting the young man, nor her daughter's acknowledged admiration of his acquirements and talents.

To her astonishment, as they drew nearer, she saw the invalid lean forward and speak, and in a few moments the chair stopped, and Mrs. Halford held out her hand to Mrs. Armstrong, but her palsied head shook and her voice trembled as she said, "I am so glad to be able to speak to you again, Mrs. Armstrong; I am better, but I have been terribly shaken, as you can see."

All other emotions were lost in regret and sympathy, as Mrs. Armstrong for the first time saw the painful change which illness had made in the mother of Henry Halford; she pressed the offered

hand, and spoke her commiserations in a tearful voice. The invalid, while she retained Mrs. Armstrong's hand, described her sufferings and sorrows, and spoke of her daughter's death; and her listener noticed with pain that not only the physical but the mental powers of Mrs. Halford had received a shock from which it was scarcely possible they could ever recover. Presently, as Mrs. Armstrong withdrew her hand and moved to glance at her daughter, the invalid said—

"I have my son with me now; he came home from Oxford last week. He looks pale, Mrs. Armstrong. Don't you think so?"

Mrs. Armstrong turned and bowed to Henry Halford.

She almost started at his white face and trembling lips as he raised his hat and said—

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Armstrong."

Then she turned and looked at her daughter. Never in her life had she seen her so pale.

Quickly recovering herself for the sake of the young people, she said in a cheering tone—

"Mr. Halford is perhaps studying too closely, so we must expect him to look pale and——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the invalid, "but that is not all; he has never been well since your husband's reply to his letter about your daughter."

"Mother, mother, hush! you forget.—Forgive her, Mrs. Armstrong," he added, in a lower tone. "Her heart is broken about poor Fanny, she scarcely knows what she is talking about."

"But have any letters passed between you and Mr. Armstrong?" she asked with painful eagerness.

Mary had heard the invalid's words, and her pale cheeks flushed as she listened for Henry Halford's reply.

"One only from me," he said, "and Mr. Armstrong's answer, in which he refuses——" he stopped abruptly, and then said hurriedly, "But it is all past now. Pray excuse us, Mrs. Armstrong, it is time my mother was at home."

"Henry, I am very sorry, I did not mean it," exclaimed the poor broken-hearted mother, as she saw by her son's face and manner that he was painfully annoyed.

Mrs. Armstrong saw it also. She took the trembling hand in hers and said—

"Don't make yourself uneasy, my dear friend, it will all come right in time. We must trust and hope."

"Thank you, Mrs. Armstrong," said Henry, "you have helped me to trust and hope. I will never forget those words."

He took off his hat to the ladies as they turned to continue their walk, while the pallor which had so startled them had given place to the flush of hope which Mrs. Armstrong's words had excited.

For some moments neither mother nor daughter spoke, both were reflecting anxiously on what they had just heard. Mrs. Armstrong, although at first taken by surprise, could quite understand her husband's wish to conceal even from her the correspondence between himself and Henry Halford.

Her indignation at the evident pain it had caused to both mother and son made her utter those cheering words, which, however, she did not wish unsaid. She knew too well how bitterly her husband could write on a subject which irritated him, and she shrunk from the thought of what insults that letter might have contained.

But the daughter's feelings on the matter were far more intense and painful, not because Henry Halford had offered and been refused, not from any fear of what her father's letter might have said to cause pain, but from surprise and distress at the concealment.

Children whose parents are able to support parental authority have generally the greatest faith in their knowledge, their opinions, and their judgment.

"My father says so," "My mamma knows best," are often uttered or thought by young people; and on this account children who live entirely at home grow up narrow-minded, and under the influence of certain opinions which they consider right in contradistinction from all others.

Mary Armstrong had very narrowly escaped from such an influence, still her confidence in her father had been unbounded. He had taught her to be open, candid, straightforward, and truthful; and now she had found that while speaking of the schoolmaster as having forgotten the young lady to whom he had been so polite at Oxford, and now and then indulging in a joke about the impossibility of a student being able to love anything but his books, he had known of this young man's love for his daughter, and refused him without one word of reference to herself.

She had yet to learn the hardening effects produced by a growing love of money and the acquirement of wealth.

They had nearly reached the gate entrance to Lime Grove, when her mother said—

"Mary dear, what passed between you and Mr. Halford, while I was talking to his mother?"

"Only a few polite inquiries after my health, and remarks on the weather; indeed, I could scarcely make a commonplace reply, for his white face frightened me; but I understand it all now. Oh, mamma, I cannot tell you how distressed I feel at the discovery we have made, because it lowers my father in my estimation. Oh, if he had only told me!"

Mrs. Armstrong sighed as they entered the gate; she had tried for years to believe that her husband was the soul of honour; and though she could account for the concealment of Mr. Halford's letter from his daughter, yet she knew too well that he was not the strictly honourable man in many matters which he wished to appear.

Mother and daughter entered the dining-room on that memorable evening totally unprepared for the scene which was about to take place.

Mr. Armstrong appeared in the most exuberant spirits; he joked with his daughter, complimented his wife, and during dinner made himself altogether so very agreeable, that Mary's anger against him was fast fading from her heart, in which filial love had so long found a place.

The cloth had been removed, and the wine and dessert of summer fruit placed on the table in the style of olden times, before Mr. Armstrong ventured to refer to the subject which had so raised his spirits.

"I had a visitor in Dover Street to-day, Maria," he said, addressing his wife, "and I have asked him to dine with us to-morrow."

"Uncle Herbert, papa?" said Mary.

"No, my dear, but a friend of his who inquired very kindly after you."

"After me, papa? Who can it be? a lady or a gentleman?"

"Is there any gentleman friend of your uncle's who you think would be likely to inquire after you?"

"Well, papa, yes; several I met at Park Lane would ask for me, I daresay." Then suddenly she added, "Oh, perhaps it was Captain Fraser; he told me he should pay you a visit some day."

"Why did you not mention, this, Mary?"

"I forgot it, papa, till your remark reminded me of it. I never cared to remember Captain Fraser's sayings."

"You are not kind then, Mary, for he speaks of you in the highest terms. He has not forgotten you, most certainly."

"I am very sorry, papa," she replied, "but I cannot appreciate his praise as it deserves; he is so very effeminate and weak-minded, that had he not been the guest of uncle and aunt Herbert I should scarcely have been even civil to him."

There was a bitterness in Mary's manner and speech, occasioned by the discovery of the afternoon; for while her father spoke she could not help comparing the two young men, with very great loss to the subject of their present conversation.

All at once to Mary's memory arose the teachings of her dear grandfather. "I have no right to despise this young captain," she said to herself; "it is not his fault that he is so inferior to others in intellect;" and she was just about to speak kindly of his temper and disposition, when her father said, in a tone that startled her—

"You will have to be more than civil to Captain Fraser to-morrow, Mary, for he has asked me for the hand of my daughter, and I expect you to accept him."

"Father! What do you mean?"

The tone of voice, the calm yet determined utterance, startled Mr. Armstrong, yet he said firmly —

"I mean what I say, Mary. Here is a man connected with some of the highest of England's aristocracy, and in addition to personal advantages he possesses a noble estate and a rent-roll of 12,000*l.* a year. He comes forward honourably, and offers to marry my daughter, and make her mistress of all these honours and possessions, and she asks me what I mean!"

Mary did not reply, but with a will unbending as her father's she resolved that nothing should induce her to marry Reginald Fraser.

"Why do you not speak, Mary?" said her father at last, in a tone of voice that Mrs. Armstrong knew betokened an outburst of passion.

"Do not oblige Mary to decide to-night, Edward," said the gentle voice of his wife; "give her a few hours to think over the advantages of such a marriage, and——"

"No, mamma," interrupted Mary; and while she spoke her face was pale and her lips white, but her voice was clear and firm, "I do not require even a few minutes to decide. I have been associated with Captain Fraser daily for a month, and I could not marry him if he were fifty times more rich or more well connected than he is."

Mr. Armstrong rose from his chair, his face livid with passion.

"Do you dare to oppose my wishes? Am I to be defied by my own daughter? If you do not accept this gentleman who honours you by his preference, I swear——"

"Stop! stop, Edward!" and his wife's hand was placed on his arm, "why should you wish to force your child in a matter so important as marriage? Do not say anything now that you may afterwards regret."

The effort caused the gentle wife to sink back in her chair, faint with excitement.

Mary flew to her mother, and standing by her, she turned to her father, who said in a slightly subdued tone—

"I have a right to expect my own daughter to obey me when it is for her future good."

"No, my father," said Mary, who though deathly white was still calm, "you have lost that right. If you had told me of Henry Halford's letter to you openly and candidly, instead of concealing it and sending a refusal without one word of reference to me, I would then have given way to your wishes without a murmur, but now you cannot expect me to do so."

She assisted her mother to rise as she ceased speaking, and they left the room together in silence, Mr. Armstrong being too completely stunned by Mary's speech to utter a word in reply.

Surprise, not only at Mary's manner, but also at the discovery that she had by some means heard of Mr. Henry Halford's letter respecting herself, subdued for a time his rising anger, and presently he threw himself into an easy-chair and began to reflect.

Not for long, however, for Mary, after soothing her mother, and placing her on the sofa near the window, that the sweet calm of the summer evening might bring repose to her startled nerves, returned to the dining-room.

Mr. Armstrong scarcely noticed her approach till she threw herself on her knees by his chair, and exclaimed—

"Forgive me, my father, I forgot myself just now; I ought not to have spoken to you as I did; but why, oh! why did you not tell me of Mr. Henry Halford's letter?"

The words, the pleading tones for pardon, softened for a time the violent passions of the father; he placed his arm round his daughter, and said—

"My child, how could I consent to such a marriage for you, with nothing but poverty to look forward to, whether as the wife of a schoolmaster or a curate? The young man's letter proved that; and now you are mad enough to refuse an offer that even a duke's daughter might envy; why is this?"

"Papa, I could not marry to be ashamed of my husband; how could I honour and respect him if I found him inferior in knowledge to myself? Papa, if you intended me to marry only for money and position, why did you give me such a superior education? How do you suppose I could be satisfied with a man less clever than my own father? I know," she continued, changing her tone, "that Captain Fraser is good, and gentle; and amiable, but if you have seen him, and talked with him, you must know how far inferior he is in every way mentally to Mr. Henry Halford."

"And I suppose, then, you want me to consent to your marrying a man who expects me to advance sufficient money as your marriage portion to enable him to support his wife?"

"No, my father, I will never marry without your consent, and I do not expect you to give that consent to a man whom you treat as you would a beggar; but I want you to understand how impossible it is for me to accept any one else, even if he were as rich as Crœsus. Ah, papa," she continued, clinging to his arm, "suppose mamma's relations had treated *you* as you have treated Mr. Henry Halford!"

"But I had money, child."

"And can money make amends for the absence of everything else? are rich people always happy? Oh, papa," continued the young girl, who knew not with what a firm grasp the demon of gold had seized upon her father's heart, "you were not always like this; only promise me that I shall not be asked to marry a man just for money and position, and I shall not care about being married at all. I would rather live at home with you and dear mamma, for I am sure I shall never be happier anywhere else."

The pleading voice, the consciousness that he had not acted rightly respecting Henry Halford's letter, and that in many points his daughter's remarks were correct, softened the father. He drew her closely to his heart, and said—

"Mary, my child, although I cannot consent to your marriage with Mr. Henry Halford, yet I promise you that you shall not be troubled with any other suitors till you choose one for yourself of whom I can approve. And now," he continued, rising, "let us go to your mother."

But at this kindness on her father's part Mary felt her firmness giving way. Hastily returning his proffered kiss, she rushed upstairs to her room, and gave vent to her long-controlled feelings in a burst of tears.

Meanwhile Mr. Armstrong was cheering his wife's heart by relating what he had promised to Mary; and when she appeared on the announcement that tea was ready, there was a look of calm happiness on her face in spite of the reddened eyelids, which alone remained to bear testimony to the tears which had relieved her over-charged heart.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NEW ARRIVALS.

In a private room at an hotel near the London Bridge terminus of the South-Eastern Railway sat a party of five at breakfast.

The lady is a stranger, but we have met Arthur Franklyn and his two daughters before. Clara and Mabel have grown since we last saw them watching by the dying bed of their dear mother; indeed, Clara at the age of fifteen has the appearance and manners of a woman.

Between the sisters sits a boy of eleven, in whose dark eyes and delicate features can be traced a much stronger resemblance to those of his lost mother than in either of his sisters.

Arthur Franklyn looks more aged during the two years that have elapsed since his wife's death than might have been expected, and his face has a careworn expression, which greatly changes his appearance.

The door opens, and a respectable-looking woman enters the room, leading by the hand a beautiful little boy of about three years and a half old. The child runs towards his father, who lifting him on his knee, exclaimed—"What, come to have breakfast with papa, Ally?"

"Yes, papa; may I?"

"No, let him go to nurse, Arthur," said a fretful voice; "he's too young to breakfast with us after such a fatiguing journey. I wonder you wish me to be troubled with all the children at once."

Arthur Franklyn looked annoyed.

"Anything for peace," he said, as he placed the boy on the floor; and yet his heart misgave him as he saw the piteous look on the face of poor Fanny's youngest born, as the little one struggled to keep back the tears.

"Ally shall have breakfast with Clara," said the young girl, rising from her chair and casting a look of defiance at her stepmother; then lifting the little boy in her arms, she added, "papa, please send my teacup and plate by nurse," and she turned from the room as she spoke, little Albert clinging to her neck, his bright curls mixing with her dark hair in pleasing contrast.

"I'll fetch a tray, sir," said nurse, as she followed her young mistress to the stairs, and said—

"Oh! Miss Clara, I'm so sorry you've left the table; it will only make matters worse, and cause unhappiness between your papa and Mrs. Franklyn."

"I could not help it, nurse. Why should she interfere, and it vexes me so to see papa give way to her; he has a right to have his own children with him, I should think."

Nurse sighed; she had not forgotten her promise to the dying mother, that she would take care of her little Albert, and Mr. Franklyn for once was firm in opposing his wife's wishes to leave the nurse behind in Australia.

The first Mrs. Franklyn, soon after Clara's birth, had engaged as nurse Jane Simmons, an emigrant, who had been delighted to find in her young mistress the daughter of a gentleman who resided at Kilburn near her own native home. For nearly fifteen years, therefore, she had been the much-loved nurse of Mr. Franklyn's children, and during his widowhood they were almost entirely under her care.

Jane knew her master's character well; she was not surprised, therefore, when he told her about twelve mouths after his first wife's death that he intended to marry a lady of large property, and begged her to prepare his girls for the change. It was not, however, a very easy matter; indeed, Clara expressed herself in strongly rebellious terms, and Mabel shed many bitter tears at the prospect of having a stepmother.

A less sensible woman might have encouraged this rebellion, but Jane reminded them of what their mother would have said—not only that it was a duty they owed to their father to treat his wife with respect, but also for the memory of their mother to endeavour to increase his happiness.

Under such influence the children of Fanny Franklyn were ready to receive their stepmother with respect and even affection. But the lady Arthur Franklyn had chosen to supply the place of his lost wife, possessed none of her qualities to endear her to his children.

A native of Australia, a childless widow, who at the death of her husband became mistress of a large fortune, handsome, stylish, and accomplished, whatever could Arthur Franklyn wish for

beyond this. So he thought with his usual impulsiveness, but he soon found his mistake. Mrs. Franklyn was very unfit to manage a high-spirited girl like Clara, and far too selfish and harsh in her treatment of the little gentle Mabel, whom her father often found in tears of real distress. Altogether Arthur Franklyn felt that he would have to pay dearly for the money brought him by his second wife.

He was at last obliged to humble himself to his eldest daughter to obtain peace.

"Clara," he said one day when he found her alone in the drawing-room, "you appear to resent my second marriage; do you know that anxiety for my children is the sole reason for my marrying again."

"Oh! papa," said Clara, "how can that be? Mrs. Franklyn isn't in the least like our own dear mamma, and I shall never be able to love her."

"Clara," he said, "when I married your stepmother I was on the brink of ruin; you and your brother and sister would have been turned out of doors homeless and penniless; by my second marriage I obtained property which has saved you all. Clara, cannot you love your father well enough to forgive him for placing another in the position of your dear mother for the sake of her children?"

"Papa, O papa!" said Clara, "oh! I did not know all this;" and she threw her arms round his neck as she said, "you must forgive me, papa, and I will try to behave properly to my new mamma; I will indeed."

"Thank you, my daughter," he replied, as he pressed her to his heart, and thought with pain of her dead mother; "but, Clara, you must not mention to any one what I have told you of my affairs."

"Papa, I will not," she said, and Mr. Franklyn knew he could trust his eldest daughter.

This appeal to Clara, although not quite truthful, for a time brought peace, but new troubles were arising to show her father that a deviation from a straightforward and honourable path is sure, sooner or later, to bring its own punishment.

He had led the present Mrs. Franklyn to believe that his position was that of a man of independent means, and the ready cash she had at her bankers was given up to him with perfect confidence. But when he asked her to touch her capital on the plea of wishing to obtain a partnership in a lucrative business, difficulties arose which could only be overcome by a visit to England. Mrs. Franklyn had never yet drawn any but the interest of her money, and on examining her late husband's will it was found that to touch the capital without the consent of her trustees was out of her power.

One of these trustees resided in England. Mrs. Franklyn would not allow her husband to go alone. Indeed it would have been useless for him to do so, but he was only too glad of an opportunity to take his children to England and leave them in the care of their grandfather and uncle.

While they were discussing the matter came the news that Mrs. Halford, after several months of pain and suffering, had followed her daughter to the grave; yet this did not deter Arthur Franklyn from his purpose.

"There is Kate Marston still at Englefield Grange," he said to himself; "and she is quite as clever a manager as poor Fanny's mother was. If I get Louisa's money into my own hands, as I hope to do, I can pay the old gentleman handsomely for my children; and they are better away from their stepmother. I don't quite like parting with my little Al, but I suppose I must," and the father sighed at the memory of early days at Englefield Grange.

And now they are in England and at breakfast at the hotel, where Mrs. Franklyn's serenity has been disturbed by the appearance of little Albert.

"Clara will entirely spoil that child if you allow her to indulge him in this manner, Arthur."

"Never mind now, my dear," was the reply, "we have no time to discuss the subject. What do you wish me to do about a house or apartments? that is the first thing."

"I thought you talked of taking a house furnished," she said. "I hope not in London, however, it appears so noisy and crowded, and almost sunless, even on a May morning."

"There are some beautiful spots in the suburbs, Louisa, and I was going to propose that we have an open carriage, and drive down to Kilburn if you have no objection. We are sure to find furnished houses in that direction, and I should like to be near the children's relations. We can put off business till to-morrow."

Mrs. Franklyn readily agreed to this arrangement. Certainly it was a drawback to have all those children with her in the carriage, but that would not be for long, and perhaps they would remain at Englefield Grange, at least until Arthur had chosen a house.

After this, breakfast was quickly finished, a carriage ordered, and the young people, full of happiness, made hasty preparations for a delightful ride through wonderful London, of which they had heard so much.

On entering the room with her little brother before starting, Clara advanced to Mrs. Franklyn and said,—"Mamma, I did not mean to be rude when I left the breakfast-table this morning, but I am so fond of my little brother Ally, please forgive me."

"It is of no consequence, Clara, if you prefer to breakfast in the nursery you can always please yourself."

Clara turned away without a reply. She had not lost her power of self-control, yet she had great difficulty in repressing the tears or an angry reply. A feeling of mortification that she had so humbled herself for nothing arose in her heart. The time came when she remembered having done so with thankfulness.

What a delightful ride that was. Over London Bridge, with its crowds of vehicles, and its continued stream of passengers. Omnibuses, waggons, carts, carriages, every sort of conveyance delaying their progress through King William Street, Cheapside, Holborn, and Oxford Street, till they reached Hyde Park Corner, and turned up the Edgware Road.

Yet the frequent delays had been an advantage to them, especially at the Mansion House, with the Royal Exchange and the Bank in sight. Again before entering Newgate Street, the view of St. Paul's and the Post Office, and afterwards the grim prison itself, from which the street is named.

Arthur Franklyn could remember sufficient of London to enable him to point out objects of interest as they drove on, although the Holborn Viaduct and the Thames Embankment were not then in existence. But when they at last approached Kilburn, so many recollections crowded upon him that he became silent, scarcely replying to the eager inquiries of the children till the carriage stopped at the gate of Englefield Grange.

"I will go in alone first, Louisa," he said hurriedly. "I must prepare my aged father-in-law for such a large party."

He was gone before she could raise an objection, and in a few moments a strange servant opened the door, and, startled by his pale face, showed him into a small reception room, and went to call Mr. Henry.

He stood listening to the old familiar sounds; the clock had just struck twelve, and the eager voices in the playground at the back brought to his memory the time when he had been as happy and as eager as those he now listened to, and a little dark-eyed girl would stand watching for him at the garden gate with a flower, or a bon-bon, or a something which she had brought for "dear Arty." So deep, so painful were these memories, that when the door opened, and he turned his white face to meet his brother-in-law, the family likeness was so strong that he could only hold out his hand and say, "Henry, I know it is Henry!" and then burst into a violent fit of sobbing.

At first Henry Halford felt quite bewildered. He had not reached his eighth birthday when Arthur and Fanny sailed for Australia, yet a sudden flash of recognition, added to the letter received from Arthur that morning, recalled his brother-in-law to his memory.

"It is Arthur Franklyn," he exclaimed; "my dear sister's husband," and for a few moments Henry Halford was himself too much overcome to speak, or do more than press the hand of his brother-in-law as he held it.

"Everything here reminded me so strongly of *her*," said Arthur, at last rousing himself, and already ashamed of the impulse, which, like all his other impulses, was so evanescent. "My wife and the children are at the door," he added. "How is the dear old father? I came in alone to prepare him, and the old place and its memories knocked me over."

"You need not fear bringing them in," said Henry, as Arthur rubbed at his face and tried to remove all traces of his emotion. "My father is in feeble health, but his mind and memory are clear. He will be overjoyed to see the children."

A few minutes longer, and then the greyheaded old man had fondly welcomed his daughter's children, and kindly greeted her successor.

Mrs. Franklyn showed herself at her best, and won the good opinion of both father and son.

It was arranged that they should all stay and partake of the schoolroom dinner to give the horses a rest, and then Kate Marston made her appearance.

She was not slow to recognise Arthur, who was a few years younger than herself. The sixteen years had changed them both, but Arthur more than Kate Marston.

Old Dr. Halford was the first to remark this with the plain-speaking of age, which is almost childlike in its character.

"You are as comely as ever, Arthur," said the old-fashioned gentleman, "but you have changed more in the sixteen years than Kate."

"No wonder, uncle," exclaimed Kate, "only think of all he has gone through, besides having the care of these motherless children. I have nobody to be anxious for but myself; no husband for me, thank you." And while she spoke, with a deep blush on the still fresh complexion, and a bright smile, Arthur could not help owning to himself that Time had dealt very gently with Kate Marston.

"She has been anxious enough about me and my dear lost wife," said the old gentleman, in a querulous voice, "so you must not listen to Kate when she lays claim to a selfishness she does not possess. But really, Arthur, you are not looking at all well. You must comfort him, my dear," he added, addressing Mrs. Franklyn. "So much can be done by a second wife to soften down old memories in her husband's heart."

"I hope I shall be able to do so," said the lady, in a gentle tone, which pleased the old man, and made Arthur say—

"I am not afraid, father; Louisa has already proved herself a kind and affectionate wife."

He longed to add, "and a mother to my children," but at this moment a summons to dinner made any further remark unnecessary.

When they returned to the little breakfast parlour, in which the old gentleman had dined alone, Kate Marston said—

"Arthur, if you and Mrs. Franklyn are going househunting, suppose you leave the children here for a few days, they would like it, I suppose."

"Oh yes, indeed we should," exclaimed Clara, answering for the rest, whose bright faces confirmed what she said; "and I can take care of Albert, and dress and wash him if I may."

"If you stay longer than another day I will send nurse with your clothes," said Arthur.

"Oh, have you the same nurse here in England, of whom poor Fanny spoke so highly in her letter to me?" said Henry.

"Did she speak of a nurse?" exclaimed Arthur, concealing his surprise that his brother-in-law should have had a letter about the boy; "then it must be the same, for she has been with us more than fourteen years."

"Then send her down here as soon as you like, for if you can spare the children for a week we shall be glad to have them."

To this Arthur readily acceded, and then, as the carriage was announced, he said to Dr. Halford: "This has been such a hurried visit, Doctor, and I have so much to hear and so much to tell; but we must come again as soon as we have fixed upon a house and spend a long day with you all. You have taken your degree at Oxford, Henry," he continued, turning to the window where the uncle was amusing the little nephew who had been left to his care by his dying sister; "and I suppose you are soon going up for ordination?"

"Not till Trinity," he replied. "You know I am obliged to be here as much as possible now my father is disabled; I took up my Master's degree in June last year."

There were quick farewells and fond embracing of the children as they rose to leave. "Good-by, papa—good-by, mamma," was echoed from one to the other as the carriage drove off; and then Louisa Franklyn turned to her husband and said, "Well, this is a comfort, Arthur: at last I shall have your society all to myself for a week without the constant trouble and anxiety of those children."

But Arthur Franklyn's recollections of the past were too strong just then to make him thankful to get rid of his children. "I'm afraid I shall have to pay dearly for Louisa's fortune if I do get it," was his very uncomplimentary reflection.

CHAPTER XXV.

COUNTRY COUSINS.

Mr. Armstrong was seated in his private room one afternoon two days after the arrival of Mr. Franklyn and his family at Englefield Grange.

So deeply was he absorbed in calculating the profit and loss of some recent speculations that a knock at the door startled him, and he answered, in an impetuous tone, "Come in!"

The young clerk who obeyed the impatient command could only falter out, "A lady wishes to see you, sir," and the very next moment a middle-aged lady, with a youth of sixteen entered the room and stood before its irritable occupant.

Edward Armstrong rose from his chair too bewildered at first to recognise his visitor, whose attire, though good and expensive, could scarcely give her the right, in appearance to him at least, to be described as a lady.

"Cousin Edward, how glad I am to find you here," and Mrs. John Armstrong, as she spoke, advanced and seized her relation's hand in the demonstrative style he had learnt to consider a breach of good manners. He flushed deeply, but in the midst of his false shame and proud annoyance, he had presence of mind to return the warm hand-shake, and lead his cousin to a chair.

"I am very glad to see you, cousin Sarah. Sit down, my boy; why, is it really Jack? How you are grown, lad! When did you arrive in London?"

"About an hour ago," replied cousin Sarah, who detected beneath all those courteous inquiries ill-concealed annoyance. "We have come to London very unexpectedly on business, and at the Waterloo Station I felt so lost and bewildered that I could only take a cab and ask the man to bring us here; but if you will tell us where to find lodgings the cab is still waiting and we can go directly."

Now while cousin Sarah spoke there had been passing through Edward Armstrong's mind the memory of many happy days at his old home, in which the homely relative before him and her husband had loaded him with attentions and hospitalities. Could he hesitate to invite her and her son to his house at Kilburn? Had he any fear of the reception they would meet with from his wife and daughter?—No, not for a moment. Before the visitor had ceased speaking the foolish pride which exists so often in those who have risen from an inferior position was crushed down, and he said quickly and earnestly: "Sarah, what are you talking about? Do you think I should expect you to take lodgings? No, no, you must go down to Kilburn with me this afternoon, and then you can tell us the cause of this unexpected visit to London. I will have no refusal," he added, seeing her shake her head and attempt to speak. "Is your luggage in the cab? Stay, I'll send the man away, and manage all that for you." He sounded a gong as he spoke, and when one of the clerks appeared, he said, "Have this lady's boxes brought into the office, and pay the cab, Williams; it has come from the Waterloo Terminus."

"There is one box and a carpet bag," exclaimed Mrs. John, rising in haste.

"All right, Williams will manage. You'll remember, Williams, a box and a carpet bag," said Mr. Armstrong, as the young man turned away.

"Yes, sir," was the reply; and then Mr. Armstrong, turning to his cousin with a smile said—

"I'll find you apartments, Sarah, in my own house. What do you think Maria and Mary would say if I shut you up in dingy London lodgings after their pleasant visits at Meadow Farm? And now, tell me what has brought you to London so suddenly."

"Well, we've heard of a situation for Jack," she replied; "but, Edward, do listen to me for a moment, I never meant to intrude upon your lady-wife and fine house. Jack and I are too countrified and homely, but it's very kind of you to ask us," and the tears stood in the eyes of the sensitive woman as she spoke.

"Not another word, Sarah, I am sure of the warm welcome you will receive from my wife and Mary, and I should like to hear any one speak with disrespect of my father's relatives."

There was pride in the remark still, but Cousin Sarah passed it over, and entered at once into the matter that had brought her and Jack to London.

Mr. Armstrong listened with interest, and promised to make all necessary inquiries as to the standing and respectability of the firm in the house of business in which Jack had been offered an appointment.

"So you do not wish to be a farmer, Jack," said Mr. Armstrong, noticing with pleasure the refined face and erect bearing of the dark-eyed youth.

"No, sir," he replied, "I should prefer to be in a business."

"He is fond of figures, and his master at school speaks of him as a first-rate arithmetician," said the proud mother, "besides, Tom is just the boy for a farm, and one son will be enough to help his father for years to come, if he lives. Tom is a strong sturdy boy, who cares very little for books. But I'm taking up your time, Edward," she exclaimed, suddenly, "do you go to Kilburn every day?"

"Certainly I do," he replied laughing, "I generally leave here about five o'clock."

"And you must have business matters to finish, and I've been hindering you all this time; but if you will tell me how to get to Kilburn by-and-by, I'll take Jack out in the meantime and show him a little of London and the parks."

"I have very little more to attend to to-day," he replied, "but if you feel inclined to walk about for a while and return here by five o'clock, we can start together and reach home in time for dinner. If you lose yourselves call a cab and tell the man to bring you here."

Mr. Armstrong accompanied his visitors to the street entrance, treating them before his clerks with the most deferential and yet familiar politeness. As he returned to his counting-house he called one of his porters and said—

"Go to the livery stable, Milson, and tell them I shall leave Firefly till to-morrow, and order a carriage and pair to be here at five punctually, as I have friends who will accompany me to Kilburn this evening."

There was in Mr. Armstrong's manner a mixture of ostentatious pride with a real anxiety to show his visitors every attention and set them at their case. Plain and homely as they might appear in the eyes of his clerks, his manner and actions were intended to show that he considered these country cousins worthy of respect and attention.

Mary Armstrong stood at the window of her mother's dressing-room on the afternoon in which the arrival of visitors at Dover Street had caused such a commotion.

Nearly a year had passed since she made the discovery that her father had refused one offer for her, and she had refused another. More than once since then had the hand of the accomplished daughter of Mr. Armstrong been sought by men of wealth and position, but while it pained Mary to refuse them, she still held firm to her purpose.

Her father's displeasure was at times very hard to bear, but her patient and gentle endurance blunted the edge of his wrath, and often silenced him for very shame.

"You expect to induce me to give way at last, I suppose," he said one day, angrily, "but I never will consent to your marrying that parson fellow; you will be of age in a few months, I know, and then may do as you like, but you will find your name erased from my will if you do."

"Father, I will never marry without your consent, I have told you so often, and you cannot mistrust my word," was the gentle but firmly uttered reply, which silenced the angry father.

With all these excitements and anxieties, we cannot wonder that the nine or ten months which have passed away since she stood at the window in Park Lane, have changed her appearance.

Mary Armstrong, however, has lost nothing by this change. The face, though slightly thinner, still retains its delicate oval. The eyes are as large and bright, and the hair as glossy and luxuriant as ever. The rich colour on her check is softened down to the bloom of a peach, and the figure, though more fully developed, is still slender and graceful in every movement.

Mary Armstrong was happy in having a mother as her confidential friend; she was not likely to

> "Let concealment like a worm i' the bud,
> Feed on her damask cheek;"

and she possessed too much good sense to allow herself to become the victim of disappointed affection. She knew that the best remedy against such a disease was active employment of mind and body—consequently her books, her music, her studies were diligently followed, as well as more active domestic duties.

No day passed without a quick walk alone or a quieter one with her mother. The books she read were principally those requiring deep thought, and the study of languages was varied by scientific subjects. Poetry for a time she set aside, it too often touched upon a tender string, which she felt must not be allowed to vibrate, even her favourite Milton lay unnoticed on the shelf, its pages awoke memories too painful to be encouraged. Sometimes she would bring out her "Algebra" or "Euclid," and induce her father to work a few sums or problems with her during the evening.

There was a sad gratification when after one of these occasions, her father closed the book, and as she rose and wished him good night, he drew her towards him, and said—

"Ah, if my daughter would only be guided by me in other matters, as she has been in her studies, I should have nothing left to wish for."

Poor Mary, the kind and gently expressed words cost her sleepless hours of anxious thought while trying to satisfy her conscience that she was acting rightly towards her father. Only at last, when she answered the question, "Ought I to marry a man alone for the sake of money or position?" with an emphatic "No," could she close her eyes in sleep. She was ready to give up Henry Halford—her unselfish affection made her hope not only that he was learning to forget her, but also that he might soon meet with some one to supply the place of his dear mother in his heart, but to marry any one else herself, she felt to be an impossibility.

More than once lately they had met and bowed to each other as mere passing acquaintances. Often on leaving church on a Sunday Mr. Armstrong had raised his hat to the amiable and stricken old man, who passed them leaning on the arm of his son, but farther approach to intimacy was felt to be impossible.

And so the months had passed, and now the early summer was decking gardens, orchard, and meadow with its sweetest blossoms. Through the open window at which Mary stood on this May afternoon of which we write came the fragrant perfume of lilac and May blossom. The birds were tuning their little throats for a chorus of song, and a stillness in the soft air seemed to produce a feeling in the heart of Mary of calm submission to the will of "Him who orders all things in heaven and earth."

Suddenly she started; a carriage was approaching, and instead of passing by as she expected, it drew up and stopped at the gate.

"Mamma," she said, entering her mother's room from the dressing-room, "there is a carriage at the gate, whose can it be?"

Mrs. Armstrong joined her daughter at the window. They saw with surprise Mr. Armstrong and a youth alight, and then turn to assist a lady.

"Who can it be, Mary?"

"Mamma! I can see her face, it is cousin Sarah; oh, how glad I am, shall we go down and receive

her, mamma, and I suppose that is one of her sons."

The ladies were in the hall to receive the guest, who forgot her surprise at the appearance and style of the house, in her pleasure at meeting Mrs. Armstrong and Mary.

They both drew her into the drawing-room followed by Jack, who seemed more surprised at the cordial and even affectionate welcome his mother received from these elegant ladies than by the luxuriantly furnished room into which they had been taken. In fact poor Sarah was quite overcome by her reception, and when Mary offered to take her upstairs and to show Jack into her brother Edward's room, she said, "My dear, I never expected you would be so pleased to see such a homely old body as I am."

"But we are pleased to see you, cousin Sarah, and I don't forget how very nice it is to be homely as you call yourself at Meadow Farm—and is it Jack you have brought with you?"

"Yes, my dear, he has been offered a situation in London, and that is my reason for coming."

"I am very glad something has brought you here at last, cousin Sarah, and I'm sure mamma is also, we so often talk about you; but you want your box, I daresay—Oh, here it is," continued Mary, opening the door in answer to a knock; "and now I'll leave you, and when dinner is nearly ready I'll come for you, it wants twenty minutes to six."

Cousin Sarah, when left to herself, quietly opened her box, feeling glad that she had brought a best dress, in which she might venture to show herself amidst all this elegance. She glanced round the bedroom, so luxuriously furnished, with large Arabian bedstead and silken hangings, marble washstands, rich carpet, luxurious sofa, massive wardrobe and numerous mirrors, and said to herself, "all these are bought with Edward's money; but money does not bring happiness even to such a charming girl as Mary Armstrong. She is as beautiful as ever, I can see that, but there's a look in her sweet face that no young girl with all these comforts and luxuries around her ought to have; I'll find out what it means while I'm here, and see if I can't set matters straight."

Cousin Sarah dressed quickly, and then found her way to her son's room.

"I've put on my best suit, mother," he said; "why how rich cousin Armstrong must be; I never was in such a fine house in my life. I hope I shall behave properly at dinner."

Cousin Sarah laughed, but finding her son ready she turned towards the stairs and met Mary coming to fetch them. Mary Armstrong saw at a glance that with all Mrs. John Armstrong's homeliness she had natural good taste in dress. Her grey silk dress, though not very fashionable, was well made, and of rich material; while the real lace of which cap, collar and sleeves were made, might have excited the envy of a duchess.

Jack, too, in his new black suit, was a son of whom a mother might well feel proud, and Mary, passing by his mother, held out her hand, saying, pleasantly, "I must shake hands with you, cousin Jack; I have often heard cousin Sarah talk about you, but we never have met till to-day, and now I hope we shall be friends."

"There is no doubt of that," said his mother, coming to the rescue, for Jack seemed unable to speak, such a fairy vision as cousin Mary, in her pale blue silk and lace, was something new to the youth of sixteen, and so different to the buxom damsels on his father's farm, that he was for a time struck dumb.

Mr. Edward Armstrong led his father's niece into the dining-room with no little satisfaction at her appearance.

Mary took the shy youth under her care so effectually, that in a very short time his shyness had vanished, and he could reply to the remarks addressed to him with intelligence and ease.

She was amused to observe the strong likeness in the youth to her own father, and greatly interested in finding that he possessed the same mathematical and scientific tastes. This was discovered after dinner when Mr. Armstrong examined the boy, and delighted cousin Sarah by his commendations, not only of the correctness of his answers to various questions, but also for the intelligence and modesty with which they were given.

Jack never forgot that happy evening, everything around him was new, strange, and delightful.

The nicely furnished dining-room, the table glittering with plate and glass, the dinner itself, Mr. Armstrong's kind notice, the soft voice and manners of Mrs. Armstrong, of whom he felt a kind of awe, his fairy-like cousin, and last, but not least, the beautiful music and singing with which she entertained them, all combined to make this evening the happiest of the happy week he spent at Lime Grove.

On Sunday cousin Sarah and her son accompanied the family to church, and circumstances occurred which gave her the opportunity she sought in her anxiety about Mary.

Dr. Halford's boys occupied the two front seats in the gallery in front of the organ, and on each side the clock, for the church was very old-fashioned, Mr. Armstrong's family sat in a front seat of the side gallery, and under that gallery was the private pew of Dr. Halford's family.

Henry generally sat with his father, the boys being always under the supervision of two of the masters, but now the pew was occupied by poor Fanny's children.

On this Sunday, therefore, Mary saw with surprise and uneasiness, Mr. Henry Halford seated at the end of a pew occupied by the boys, and only one of the masters present.

She could not avoid seeing him, and she knew that her parents must have noticed him also.

The presence of two strangers in Mr. Armstrong's pew attracted for a few moments Henry Halford's looks towards them, to Mary's great discomposure; but when the service began these two young people seemed to remember that they were present to join in the sacred services of God's house, and not to look about them.

There was something in the manner, not only of Mr. Armstrong, but also of Mary and her mother, which directed cousin Sarah's eyes more than once to the gentleman seated with those superior-looking schoolboys, many of whom appeared older than her son. Jack also seemed so fascinated to watch them, that more than one glance from his mother was necessary to remind him of the place and the hour.

Altogether it was a most perplexing position, and Mary was glad to see her father rise quickly when the service ended, as if anxious to avoid a meeting with the schoolmaster and his son, but he failed in the attempt.

Henry Halford, remembering that his nieces now required attention as well as his aged father, left the boys to be marshalled home by the assistant, and hastened to the lower door to meet them.

Another surprise therefore awaited Mary. On reaching the church entrance they met face to face Old Doctor Halford, supported on one side by the arm of his son, and on the other by a tall handsome girl, apparently about eighteen years of age. Mary did not at first notice another younger girl, dressed in exactly the same manner, who walked behind Dr. Halford and his supporters, with a boy nearly as tall as herself.

The usual formal courtesies passed between them as they met; but the sudden shock at seeing, as she thought, a strange young lady on such friendly terms with the doctor and his son, deprived Mary for a moment of self-possession. Recovering herself with an effort she returned the notice of the gentlemen, and hurried on to join her mother with an aching at her heart.

Cousin Sarah had seen the fair face turn white even to the lips, and she drew Mr. Armstrong forward, leaving Mary with her mother and Jack.

"Who is that very pleasing looking young man, Edward?" was her first question.

"What young man?" was the half-irritated reply.

"I am speaking of the gentleman we met just now, who was supporting, I suppose, his aged father; Edward, he reminded me of dear uncle."

Edward Armstrong winced. The good and intelligent old yeoman, his own father, was in position and education far inferior to Dr. Halford, and yet he despised the latter because he was a schoolmaster and poor. He at last replied with an effort,—"Father and son are schoolmasters, and the son is going to be a parson."

"But they are as much gentlemen as your wife is a lady, Edward; I can tell by your manner that you dislike them, but why?"

"Why?" he asked impetuously, "because they are poor, and the son had the audacity to ask me for Mary."

"And you refused him."

"Of course I did; do you suppose I was fool enough to give up to him the money I have worked so hard for, as my daughter's marriage portion? and no doubt that was all he wanted."

"Does Mary know of this?"

"Unfortunately she does, although I kept it from her as long as I could; but it slipped out in some way."

"Ah! then now I can understand what has changed her so much," said cousin Sarah, quietly.

With a startled expression Mr. Armstrong turned and looked at the speaker.

"What!" he exclaimed, but, before she could reply, Mrs. Armstrong, Mary, and Jack joined them. Cousin Sarah noticed at a glance that Mary had recovered her colour, but there was a quivering of the lip very painful to see.

On reaching home Mary hastily escaped to her room. She stood for a moment, with her hands clasped and her eyes uplifted, asking for help and strength; realising Montgomery's description of prayer:—

> "The upward glancing of the eye,
> When none but God is near."

"I must expect it," she said to herself; "I ought to have been prepared. How can I be so selfish—so dog in the manger like; I cannot be his wife myself, and ought I to object to his choosing any one

else? But ah! it is very painful to think of," and then as she sunk into a chair the restrained tears burst forth unchecked.

In a few minutes she remembered the visitors; the tears had relieved her, and hastily preparing for an early dinner she bathed her eyes, controlled her feelings, and joined the rest in the drawing-room. So like herself did she seem that no stranger would have discovered the traces of tears, but the keen anxious eyes of the mother and cousin Sarah were not to be deceived. Mrs. Armstrong, however, knew too well what had happened to distress her patient and much loved daughter, and for her sake made no remark on her looks.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT THE STATION.

The three years of Mr. Armstrong's residence at Kilburn had produced great changes in this suburb which bid fair after a time to destroy its rural aspect. The London and North-Western Company had opened a station, and around it a town of bricks and mortar had risen with almost as much rapidity as at Bayswater. Lime Grove and Englefield Grange, however, were at least a mile from the station, and for the present, therefore, safe from the invasion of the pickaxe and the hod.

A few days after the arrival of cousin Sarah and her son at Kilburn, Mr. Armstrong proposed that they should accompany him to town to make the necessary arrangements for leaving Jack in London. Inquiries had been made, and interviews had taken place with the head of the firm, who had offered a situation to the youth, and his friends were as anxious to place him in such a respectable house as the firm were to receive him.

"Mary, my dear," said her father while at breakfast one morning, "you can drive us to the station in the pony carriage if you like."

"I should like to do so, papa;" she replied, and glancing at her mother she added, "the ponies will not be too tired for mamma's drive when they return, I suppose."

Mr. Armstrong laughed. "Certainly not," he said, "after a mile to the station and back, unless you intend to take them a twenty miles' journey."

"Twenty miles, papa! no, indeed, not more than four," she replied.

"Six miles altogether; well, the sturdy little animals will manage that I daresay without very great fatigue or inconvenience; so ring at once, and order the pony carriage to be ready in half an hour."

"I have not yet seen this pony carriage, Mary," said cousin Sarah.

"No," she replied, "you have been such business people since you arrived in London, going off in the morning by the omnibus, and returning with papa in the evening, so I have had no opportunity to offer to drive you; and even this morning you are going on matters of business."

"I shall enjoy the drive all the same," said cousin Sarah, "and so, I am sure, will Jack."

"You can come and meet us at the station by the 5.20 train this afternoon, Mary," said her father, with a smile; "another two miles wont hurt the ponies. I have not yet ventured upon the expense of an open carriage," he continued, addressing cousin Sarah, "principally because the doctor advises walking exercise for Maria. Besides, till my elder boys are out in the world I am unwilling to increase my expenses. I must have a groom for the saddle horses, and Mary can drive a pony carriage without the expense of coachman and footman."

"A very wise arrangement," replied cousin Sarah, "but," she added, rising, "I think it is time to get ready, if you will excuse us, Mrs. Armstrong." She had not yet been able to address her cousin Edward's lady-wife by her Christian name.

Mrs. John Armstrong, while dressing for a drive on that pleasant May morning, recalled a statement made by Mary that her father had bought this pony carriage as a present to herself.

"He is trying to bribe that dear girl into forgetting the superior young man we met on Sunday, but she never will," was cousin Sarah's reflection.

The spirited white ponies and pretty low carriage attracted all eyes as they trotted along the Kilburn Road lashing their tails and shaking their fat sides as if eager to perform their work to the best of their ability. After setting down her companions at the door of the station Mr. Armstrong dismissed his daughter; and, although foolishly proud of the admiring gaze cast upon her by passengers, he more than once regretted not having listened to his wife's suggestion: —"Had you not better let the groom drive you, Edward? I do not like the idea of my daughter acting the part of coachman to a railway station; it is all very well in country roads."

Mr. Armstrong laughed at his wife's scruples, but he afterwards saw the justice of her remark—at least in those days before young ladies had acquired the habits of independence which so

distinguish them in the present day.

One, however, of the party had greatly enjoyed his drive; Jack would have felt no surprise at any admiration his cousin Mary excited. He watched her as she skilfully turned her ponies out of the station-yard, and then, while following his mother and Mr. Armstrong into the station, he said to himself, "I don't believe there's another girl in London so clever and so pretty as cousin Mary."

Mrs. Armstrong was ready to join her daughter in her morning excursion as she drove up to the gate, and when they were fairly off Mary said—

"Why, mamma, I believe these little animals are enjoying their work as much as we shall our ride. I have to keep a tight rein to prevent them from going too fast. No fear of fatigue on their part, I can see."

"I suppose you have perfect command over them, my dear," said Mrs. Armstrong, rather nervously.

"Oh yes, mamma, I hope what I said in joke has not alarmed you; they are the most docile little creatures in the world." And to prove her words and calm her mother's fears she checked the rapid trot, and for some distance allowed them to go at an easy pace.

When Mrs. Armstrong regained confidence in her daughter, Mary loosened her hold on the reins, to the great satisfaction of the spirited ponies, and when the groom took charge of them on their return to the Limes, they showed no signs of fatigue.

It wanted a very few minutes to five when cousin Sarah and her son met Mr. Armstrong at the Euston terminus. They were walking up and down the platform waiting for the train, which was being shunted from a siding, when they saw a lady and gentleman come hastily from the booking office.

"You have hurried me for nothing, Arthur," said the lady, almost gasping for breath, and yet angrily; "you see we are in plenty of time."

"My watch must be fast," he replied, "and I knew how important it was for us to catch this train in order to meet Mr. Norton at the appointed time."

"You might have waited till to-morrow," she said; "I cannot understand the motive for all this haste. But see, the passengers are taking their places; let us get into a carriage at once, for running so quickly has exhausted me."

Arthur Franklyn—for it was he—hastily assisted his wife into a first-class carriage, already occupied by Mr. Armstrong, cousin Sarah, and her son. Arthur placed his wife in the centre seat, and seated himself next her, near the window, and opposite Jack. The other corner, facing Mr. Armstrong, was the only vacant seat, the two centre divisions being now occupied by Mrs. Franklyn and cousin Sarah.

Kilburn was the first station at which this train usually stopped, and for some minutes after it started, no one spoke. Arthur almost turned his back on his wife, and looked out of the window with a very gloomy face. He was, in fact, brooding over her remark. "She thinks I have some motive for all this haste," he said to himself; "of course I have; does she suppose I should have chosen a woman so utterly selfish and proud, so unfit to be a mother to the children of my dear lost Fanny, if it had not been for her money? Of course I have a motive. I cannot tell her of my difficulties. And if I don't get a thousand pounds very quickly I shall be a ruined man."

Mrs. Franklyn on entering the carriage had thrown herself into the seat and leaned back with closed eyes. Cousin Sarah was attracted to watch her. The evident want of cordiality in the manner of husband and wife towards each other, the pain the latter appeared to suffer from the effects of hurrying to the station, and her husband's apparent indifference, aroused the pity of the warm-hearted countrywoman. She was about to ask her if she felt ill, when a sudden pallor spread over her face, she stretched out her arms and exclaimed convulsively, "Arthur, Arthur, save me!"

There was a sudden rush forward of both gentlemen, but cousin Sarah, had already caught the drooping figure in her arms as she exclaimed, "Open the windows, stop the train, she is dying!"

In the confined space of a first-class carriage little could be done; Arthur, pale as death, offered to relieve Mrs. John Armstrong of the insensible form which she supported on her bosom, but she refused to do so.

"Unfasten her dress," she exclaimed, "untie her bonnet." And while Arthur obeyed with trembling, almost useless fingers, he called upon his wife by name, lavishing upon her the most endearing terms in tones of the bitterest woe—how bitter none but himself knew. Was she dying? would she really die? Ah yes, Arthur Franklyn, less than five minutes have elapsed since you were disturbed from your gloomy reverie, and the woman whom you flattered into marriage for the sake of her money lies a lifeless corpse in the arms of a stranger!

Mr. Armstrong, who has been in vain endeavouring to attract the notice of the guard, looks once more from the window, and exclaims, "Thank God we are slackening speed, we are nearing the station;" but even as he utters the comforting words to the apparently heart-stricken husband he knows it is too late.

Presently the train enters the station. Again he looks out. A porter approaches running with the train. "A doctor! a medical man, quick!" he exclaimed; "a lady is ill, dying."

The train has come almost to a standstill. Mr. Armstrong jumps out even at the risk of his life. There is a running to and fro of porters. A crowding of passengers to the carriage door, and a general commotion as the eager inquiries for a doctor are passed from lip to lip.

"Go for Dr. White." "No, Dr. Harris is the nearest." But Mr. Armstrong had been already successful. Within a few steps of the carriage he left so hastily he came upon a gentleman alighting from the train, and looking with eager inquiry at the confusion on the platform.

"Dr. West! thank God you are here; come quickly, a lady is dying or dead in our carriage."

With hasty steps and a serious face the doctor followed Mr. Armstrong. Scarcely two minutes had elapsed, yet the porters were preparing to remove the lifeless burden from the arms of cousin Sarah, who still held her tenderly, for the train could no longer be delayed.

Roused from the shock which had at first stunned him, Arthur Franklyn hastened to relieve Mrs. John Armstrong of his wife, and gently setting aside the porters, he and Mr. Armstrong lifted her from the carriage to the ladies' waiting-room, and laid her on one of the couches.

The door was closed to all but the doctor and those who had been in the carriage with Arthur Franklyn and his wife, and then Dr. West prepared to examine the patient before uttering the so often dreaded words, "It is all over."

He saw the agonised look in the husband's countenance as he covered the face and straightened the limbs of his dead wife, and placing his hand on his arm he said—

"You are the husband of this lady, I presume?"

Arthur could only silently assent.

"My friend," he said gently, "nothing that I or any one else can do would avail now, your wife's sufferings are over in this world."

"Sufferings!" exclaimed Arthur, "in what way, doctor?"

"Has not this lady been afflicted for some time with disease of the heart?" asked Dr. West.

"I don't know; she has never complained to me. I have only been married six months."

"I fear there must be an inquest, then," replied the doctor; "where does your own medical man reside?"

"In Melbourne," replied Arthur, in agitated tones; "we only arrived in England last week. Doctor, will you do all that is necessary for me in this terrible matter? here is my card; we were on our way to visit a relative in Kilburn; you will find me at Englefield Grange tomorrow."

"Englefield Grange!" exclaimed Dr. West, "are you related to our good old friend Dr. Halford?"

"He is the father of my first wife, and my children are with him now."

"My dear sir," cried the doctor, "I will do my best for you in this sad affair, but we must secure the help of my friend Armstrong and this lady also," he added, turning to cousin Sarah, on whose cheeks tears of pity and sympathy were quietly stealing.

At this moment Mr. Armstrong, who had been called from the room by the station-master, entered quickly, and advancing to Arthur he said gently—"I am sorry to pain you, but it will be necessary to remove the poor lady to the hotel before the arrival of the next train."

"I must submit to whatever is necessary," he replied as the porters entered the room; "I feel too bewildered to act for myself."

Meanwhile Mary Armstrong, in obedience to her father's request, had driven to the station, and drew up to the entrance three or four minutes before the train was due. She heard it arrive, and looked for her father and his companions among the numbers who passed out of the station much too anxiously to notice the glances of admiration cast upon herself; and yet the passengers seemed to linger, and some were conversing with great seriousness, to judge by their faces.

At length two gentlemen paused at a little distance from the pony carriage, and Mary heard her mother's name mentioned, and then the ominous words, "Death in a railway carriage."

Too startled at first to decide what to do, Mary allowed the speakers to move forward, so that the opportunity for questioning them was lost. Then she checked her fears; she had only heard detached sentences which might mean nothing; yet as the train moved out of the station, and a few straggling passengers made their appearance, a dread of she knew not what fell upon her.

What could she do? To leave the ponies was impossible, and yet she must ascertain what had happened. So painful had the suspense become that she was about to send a boy for a railway porter, when she saw a gentleman enter the station yard and advance towards her.

He started and flushed as he recognised Miss Armstrong, and was about to pass with the usual formal recognition, when, to his utter amazement, she exclaimed—

"Oh, Mr. Halford, I am so glad to see you! there has been an accident or something; I heard the passengers speak of a death in one of the carriages. Papa and my cousins were to arrive by this train, and I have been waiting here for them more than twenty minutes."

"What do you wish me to do, Miss Armstrong?" asked Henry Halford, who with the most intense pleasure at the prospect of doing anything for the girl still so truly loved, yet shrunk from encountering Mr. Armstrong.

Mary understood his hesitation. "If you would kindly make inquiries for me, and if papa has arrived by this train, please tell him I am waiting. I should feel so much obliged if you will do this, Mr. Halford."

The earnest, anxious tones and the pleading voice were too much for Henry Halford. Without another word he entered the station.

Meanwhile after starting the train the porters had obtained a covered litter on which the lifeless form of Louisa Franklyn was carried from the waiting-room, followed by Mr. Armstrong, cousin Sarah, Jack, and Arthur Franklyn.

To avoid the stairs leading from the platform the men turned towards a side gate which opened nearer to the hotel. They had scarcely reached it when a gentleman, evidently in a state of excitement, approached the group and exclaimed—

"Pardon me, Mr. Armstrong, your daughter who is waiting for you in the pony carriage has been alarmed by the remarks of passengers, and she is becoming anxious on account of the delay in your appearance."

For a moment Mr. Armstrong had looked at the speaker with almost indignant surprise; but a flush of anxiety and shame spread over his face at the thought that he had literally forgotten his daughter, and allowed her to sit in her little carriage alone at a railway entrance.

His hasty reply was cordial and polite.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Halford; I am ashamed to say I had forgotten that my daughter was waiting for us."

"Come, Sarah," he added, "I must hasten to relieve poor Mary's fears; this gentleman will excuse us, I know."

"Oh, pray do not let me detain you," said Arthur, "but may I be allowed to call and thank you and this lady for your great help and sympathy?"

"Most certainly; here is my card," said Mr. Armstrong, hastily placing in the hands of Henry Halford's brother-in-law the cardboard invitation to visit his house, for which Henry would have given half he possessed.

He had drawn back in mute surprise during the conversation between Mr. Armstrong and Arthur, but no sooner had the movements of the former gentleman and his companions discovered Henry Halford to the stricken man than he started forward, and seizing his hand, told him what had happened, in a voice so choked with sobs and tears as to be scarcely audible.

Henry led him away to the hotel, to which the body of his dead wife had been carried, and calming down his excitement encouraged him to relate all that had occurred.

"And were Mr. Armstrong and his friends in the carriage with you?" asked Henry, in astonishment.

"Yes, we occupied all the seats but one, and the lady held my poor wife in her arms with the greatest tenderness. Is she Mrs. Armstrong?"

"No," exclaimed Henry, in a tone that savoured of indignation. "Mrs. Armstrong is a very different person. This lady to whom you refer is no doubt a relative from the country." He little thought that the relative of whom he spoke was his best friend.

After a while Arthur Franklyn became calm enough to walk with his brother-in-law to Englefield Grange, dreading the ordeal in which a detail of what had happened would involve him. Of other and more painful consequences to him which would result from his wife's death he could speak to no one, although he knew they would cause him a sleepless night.

Mr. Armstrong's first words as he and his two companions made their appearance relieved Mary of a certain dread. She could not control her fears that her father would be a little angry with her for sending a message by Mr. Henry Halford.

"My darling," he said, "I am so sorry! I forgot I had asked you to come for us; have you been waiting long?"

"Nearly half an hour; but, papa, what has happened?"

"I will tell you presently, Mary; drive home quickly, your mother will be getting anxious."

The sad story was soon told in a few words during the drive, and Mary became silent from awe and sympathy.

Presently her father asked,—"What brought Mr. Halford to the station, Mary?"

"I had not time to ask him," said Mary, gently, "neither had I any right to do so. The instant I saw him I begged him to go and find out what detained you."

"No doubt he came to meet his brother-in-law," said cousin Sarah. "I heard the gentleman whose wife has died so sadly speak of his father-in-law as Dr. Halford of Englefield Grange."

Mr. Armstrong did not notice this remark, and the silence at last became so painful to Mary, that she was about to break it by attracting notice to her ponies, who seemed by their rapid movements to look upon a journey of eight miles a day as merely an amusing pastime.

Cousin Sarah diverted her from her purpose by a sudden remark.

"Jack, my boy, you look pale; in the midst of the confusion and sorrow I almost forgot you were present."

"Oh, I'm all right, mother," he replied, "but I own I did feel queer at the time."

"Don't talk about the affair too strongly at home, Jack," said Mr. Armstrong, "at least not in the presence of Mrs. Armstrong."

At this moment Mary drew up her ponies at the gate. Mr. Armstrong and his companions entered the house, the painful event of the last hour occupying every thought, more especially from its connexion with the residents at Englefield Grange.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TEMPTED.

"Man is the creature of circumstances," is a remark that few will deny. Those, however, who remember that "not a sparrow falls to the ground without our heavenly Father's knowledge" name these said circumstances "providences." If even a sparrow cannot fall unnoticed, will not the great Creator trouble Himself about the movements and actions of His creatures in a higher state of being, and for whom Christ died?

It was a mysterious providence which in so sudden and painful a manner removed the second wife of Arthur Franklyn from the evil to come, but it led to important results, and influenced the future of more than one of the persons mentioned in our story.

The *pendule* on the mantelpiece of the drawing-room pointed to ten minutes to six on the day of this sad occurrence, and Mrs. Armstrong, who had still some misgivings about Mary and her pony carriage, began to feel very anxious. She rose and entered the dining-room, where the parlourmaid was laying the cloth. "Margaret," she said, "I fear something has happened to detain your master and Miss Mary. Where is Rowland? send him at once to the station; they ought to have been home half an hour ago."

The girl turned to obey, but she had scarcely left the room, when Mrs. Armstrong saw the pony carriage drive to the gate, and hastened out to meet its occupants. "What has detained you? Oh, how glad I am to see you here safe and well!"

"Of course we are all safe and well," said her husband, in a cheerful voice, as he led her to the drawing-room, "but the fact is, a lady was taken ill in our railway carriage, and this caused some delay; so make yourself comfortable, dearest, while we get ready for dinner; you shall hear all about it by-and-by."

Jack had recovered himself during the drive home, but he hastened at once to his room, and remained there till he heard his mother go downstairs, for he feared being questioned by Mrs. Armstrong after her husband's caution to him.

Although unaccustomed to give way to fine lady nervousness, Mr. Armstrong knew that his wife had not quite lost the natural timidity which once nearly cost Maria St. Clair her life.

But Mary knew her mother best: after the rest had left the drawing-room she placed her arm tenderly round her neck, and said, "Mamma darling, you need not wait for 'by-and-by,' I will tell you the worst at once. A poor lady who sat opposite cousin Sarah in the railway carriage was taken ill on the journey and died before they arrived at the station."

"Oh, how very shocking!" said Mrs. Armstrong. "Was she alone?"

"No, her husband was with her, but he appeared too stunned to do anything, so cousin Sarah held the poor dying lady in her arms till the train stopped, and then papa went to find a doctor."

"I am glad you have told me, my dear," said Mrs. Armstrong, "anything is better than suspense, and I should have pictured to myself all sorts of horrors."

"Yes, mamma, I knew that, or I should not have told you, but I must go and prepare for dinner; I have only three minutes, so it is well I changed my dress before I started for the station."

No one at the table noticed the effects on cousin Sarah of the shock she had received; yet she was a woman of warm deep feelings, railway travelling was a comparative novelty to her, and the terrible delay from the impossibility of stopping the train, added to the awe she felt when the poor woman died in her arms, had greatly shaken her nerves.

Very little, however, was said on the subject during dinner, but in the evening, when Mrs. Armstrong listened with painful interest to her description of what had occurred, she could perceive how acutely cousin Sarah felt the effects of the scene she had witnessed.

By degrees the conversation turned upon the persons mixed up with these sad circumstances, and then Mrs. Armstrong heard with surprise the name of the messenger Mary had sent to look for her father, and his close relationship to the husband of the lady so suddenly deprived of life.

"Mr. Henry Halford had but one sister living when we first became acquainted with his family," remarked Mrs. Armstrong, "and she died in Australia two years ago."

"This must be a second wife, then," said cousin Sarah, who had her own reasons for wishing to know all that could be learnt respecting Mr. Halford's family; "do you remember the name of Miss Halford's husband, Mary?"

"Here is his card," said Mr. Armstrong, looking up from his newspaper and throwing the harmless missive on the table as he spoke; "you will receive a visit from him to-morrow, no doubt; he asked to be allowed to call and thank me for my kindness, and so forth; so you can accept these thanks, cousin Sarah, they belong to you by right."

"Franklyn," said Mrs. Armstrong, taking up the card and reading it, "is that the name, Mary?"

"Yes, mamma," she replied, in a quiet voice, for her father held his paper on one side to look at her while she spoke. "I read a notice of Mrs. Franklyn's death in the *Times*, and it also stated that she was the daughter of Dr. Halford of Englefield Grange."

Mr. Armstrong then continued his reading. Cousin Sarah had noticed the look of fierce inquiry on his face as his daughter spoke, and recalling Mary's troubled countenance and her father's remarks about the Halfords, she felt more than ever determined to interfere.

She made one remark, however, which brought a sudden flush to Mary's face—

"This Mr. Franklyn told Dr. West in my presence that he and his wife had recently arrived in England from Melbourne, and that they were on their way to visit the father of his first wife, Dr. Halford, at Englefield Grange, with whom his children were now staying, so no doubt this gentleman was the husband of Dr. Halford's daughter, and the father of the young people we saw on Sunday."

In spite of a look of disgust which passed over the countenance of Mr. Armstrong, his wife could not resist a few approving remarks about the young people referred to, till at length Mr. Armstrong exclaimed, "Come, Mary, give us a little music, we have heard quite enough of our unfortunate fellow-passenger and his antecedents; if he comes to-morrow you can treat him with politeness, and there the matter will end."

Mary rose hastily to obey, she was glad to turn her back on those present, for the explanation respecting the young visitors at Englefield Grange had lifted a weight from her heart and made her eyes brighter, and the colour on her cheeks deeper than they had been for months. Yes, she could sing now; and as Jack listened, and remembered that this was his last evening at the Limes, he inwardly resolved that when he was old enough, and had made a fortune like Cousin Armstrong, he would marry a wife exactly like Cousin Mary.

Altogether it had been a day of excitement; and when Mary entered her bedroom a feeling of hope—the foundation of which she could scarcely account for—seemed to fill her heart. She lay awake for some time, trying to realise certain causes from which this hope seemed to spring. Her meeting with Henry Halford at the station—the absence of displeasure in her father's manner, which she dreaded would follow her sudden impulse to send him as a messenger—above all, the discovery that she had mistaken one of Mr. Henry Halford's nieces for perhaps his intended wife—and last, but not least, an impression that Cousin Sarah was favourable to the Halfords, and in some way able to influence her father—these reflections, added to the certainty in her own mind that Henry Halford had taken his degree and would soon go up for ordination, seemed so full of hope that they acted with a soothing influence on the young girl's heart, till at length she slept.

Very different from the innocent hopes of Mary Armstrong were the reflections that haunted the chamber of Arthur Franklyn that night at Englefield Grange. The painful event of his second wife's sudden death, and the necessity for an inquest, had spread consternation over the household, and excited great sympathy.

To his surprise, no one sympathised with him more deeply than his eldest daughter, for he remembered how openly she had resented his second marriage. But to the memory of this resentment he now owed Clara's sympathy; remorse for having been at times rude and unkind to the woman who must have suffered so much to cause such a sudden death, filled the young girl's heart.

But even her gentle cares and attentions could not soothe the father's sorrow till he observed that this apparently great grief for his second wife created some little surprise among the relatives of Fanny Halford, who was the mother of his children.

On discovering this he roused himself, and as some excuse for his sorrow, acknowledged the fact of his having hurried her to the train.

"I feel almost as if I were Louisa's murderer," he said "for I remember now how she gasped for breath when we reached the platform."

"No, no, Arthur, do not think anything so painful," said Dr. Halford; "she had never spoken to you of her heart being diseased, or I am sure you would have been more careful, yet I can quite understand how the circumstance troubles you."

Troubled him! Yes, we must do Arthur Franklyn the justice to own that the recollection pained him greatly, but what was that memory compared to the fact that his wife's death before signing certain documents would inevitably cause his utter ruin?

He had that day obtained from his lawyer a document signed by the two trustees of his wife's property, authorizing her to draw out 2000*l.* for her husband's use.

On the strength of this he had taken furnished apartments for three months, and he and his wife were on their way to fetch the children from Englefield Grange on the day which had ended so fatally.

The lawyer, Mr. Norton, to whom Henry had introduced his brother-in-law, resided at Kilburn, and an arrangement had been made for him to meet his clients at the Grange and for Henry to witness Mrs. Franklyn's signature.

All this Arthur Franklyn remembered as he paced his bedroom long after midnight, and knew that the fortune, to obtain which he had married a second time, was lost to him for ever.

Had he only secured for himself the 2000*l.* he might have been saved from ruin, but now even that was denied him—that which had already cost him so much. To obtain the consent of the trustees he had made false statements of his position in Melbourne, and of the merchants whom he affirmed were ready to receive him as a partner.

Mrs. Franklyn had herself proved at first his greatest difficulty. She was a woman who thought only of self; she had been a widow for six years, and during that time had saved from her income several hundred pounds, which in the first happy days of her marriage she had made over to Arthur, and afterwards regretted the generous impulse. She had concealed from him the fact that her property was vested in the power of trustees, and when the hundreds in the Melbourne bank were being transferred to her husband's name she had said laughingly, "There is nothing to thank me for, Arthur, what is mine is yours now."

Arthur Franklyn would never have made a good lawyer, even had he continued to follow his profession; but he knew well enough that his power over the property of his intended wife should have been secured before their marriage, and this he dared not attempt to do in an open and straightforward manner, because his own affairs were in a state of hopeless insolvency.

Not only so, but he quickly discovered that he had a rival in the affections of the lady he wished to marry, and that rival was money. To ask her the question whether her property was at her own disposal was one he dared not venture upon. With his usual want of prudence, therefore, he determined to chance it, and trust to his own power of persuasion to obtain money when he wanted it, even should there be trustees looming in the distance.

And now, just as all difficulties had been overcome, and his most sanguine hopes realised, comes this terrible destruction to all his schemes.

"Had Louisa only lived another day," he said to himself, "all might have been well; but now—ruin, poverty, and disgrace are all that are left for me and my children." Yet even at this critical moment, had he been truthful and candid instead of trusting with his usual self-sufficiency that he should overcome this difficulty as he had done others before—had he made a confidant of his brother-in-law, and told him the whole truth, what a terrible amount of sorrow and remorse he might have been spared.

But no, he could not so humiliate himself to his first wife's relations. What! own his real position, and ask for help and sympathy after boasting of the style in which he and Fanny had lived, and of the superior education he had given his children?

No, never! Something he must do to prevent this, but what?

Is there an evil spirit at hand ready to answer such a question from the man or woman who hesitates to follow the right path?

Alas! too often yes. At least, it was so in the case of Arthur Franklyn; at this moment an evil suggestion arose in his mind from which he recoiled with a shudder. Ah! had he then fallen on his knees and prayed for power to resist the fearful temptation that now presented itself, that power would have been given him, and by peaceful sleep the nerves which were overwrought after the exciting events of the day would have been calmed and soothed.

But Arthur Franklyn had yet to learn the weakness and treachery of his own heart, through a

fiery ordeal which he was now about to prepare for himself.

A gas burner projected from the wall on either side of the dressing-table; one of these only he had lighted on entering, and shrinking from the glare, he had lowered it nearly out while pacing the room in an agony of thought.

Now he approached the dressing-table, turned the one gas burner on full, and lighted the other. Then he started back at the reflection of his own face in the glass; pale and haggard, eyes aflame with excitement, and lips reddened and parched with fever. For a moment fear made him pause—only for a moment. Flinging sober thought to the winds, he drew a chair to the table, pushed aside pincushion, toilet-cover, and ornaments, and took from his pocket a pencil and two letters.

For at least an hour he continued to write on scraps of paper torn from his pocket-book.

The dawn of a May morning was stealing through the staircase windows as Arthur Franklyn descended cautiously to the hall. On a table, near the entrance, as he well remembered, stood an inkstand and pens; these he carried upstairs and re-entered his room, in which the gas still burnt brightly, and closed the door carefully, to exclude the fast-increasing light of day. He was white now even to the lips as he again seated himself at the table, and drew from his breast coat pocket a document on which he signed, two names with different pens.

Even in the midst of his evident excitement his hand was firm. Then he dashed down the pen, to the great detriment of the toilet-cover, turned off the gas, and threw himself on the bed dressed as he was, to try and lose in the sleep of forgetfulness for a time a memory of what he had done.

The old school-bell for breakfast woke him next morning from a heavy sleep, and also awoke in him painful memories of olden times, when a happy innocent lad, he had so often answered its summons.

He rose hastily, bathed his face, and battled for a time with the emotions that overpowered him. Strange to say, the memories of his youthful days strengthened, his determination to carry out what he had last night begun.

"Could he allow the children of his lost Fanny to starve in poverty, or to feel that their father could support them no longer?"

No! impossible! he must carry it through—she, his second wife, would have done it had she lived; no one would be injured, the money was his morally, and if not quite legally, that was of no consequence.

This decision produced a kind of calm, like the effects of an opiate, so that when he appeared at breakfast the haggard look of excitement was gone; the pale, calm face created a feeling of sympathy, more especially in the warm heart of Kate Marston, whom Fanny's children had already learnt to love.

During the day when he attended the inquest he listened with almost stoical indifference to a detail of the circumstances attending his wife's death. He answered the questions put to him by the coroner calmly and truthfully; not even the examination of the medical man, from whose evidence he learnt that a *post-mortem* examination had taken place, could rouse in him the slightest interest.

Yet the pale and sorrowful expression of his face excited the sympathy of those present, especially while being questioned by the coroner.

"You were then not aware that your wife was suffering from disease of the heart, Mr. Franklyn?"

"No," he replied, "not in the least; she never gave me reason to suppose that such was the case, even by a hint."

"And I believe you hurried to the station on the day of the occurrence?"

A kind of spasm passed over the face of Arthur Franklyn, and his lips quivered as he replied—

"I have reason to remember that we did so, owing to my watch being five minutes too fast."

"We will not pain you with any further questions, Mr. Franklyn," said the coroner; and Arthur bowed as he moved to give place to Mrs. John Armstrong, feeling conscious that he did not deserve the sympathy too evident in the looks of those around him.

What did they know of the terrible results to him of that hurried run to the train? What could any one know of the one absorbing thought which seemed to banish all others from his mind, and make him speak and move like a man in a dream?

Nothing, not a shadow of the truth; and yet, while conscious that, like the somnambulist, he was steadily making his way to certain destruction, all power to stop his downward progress seemed to have deserted him; he had taken the first false step, and the result appeared inevitable.

During that sad week, in the darkened rooms, with the coffin containing the lifeless form of his second wife occupying the room which once belonged to Fanny Halford, he still wore that look of forced submission which is so much like despair.

On the day of the funeral, when the playground voices at Englefield Grange were silent and subdued, when the children of his first wife shed tears of childish sorrow by the coffin of the

second, when his father-in-law and Henry looked with pitying eyes for the last time at the shrouded form of Louisa Franklyn, still beautiful even in death, Arthur showed no sympathy, no change in face or manner; not even when he saw Kate Marston weeping over the little Albert, the motherless boy of her lost Fanny.

Indeed, Mrs. Halford's death had been too recent for any in that house to look with indifference so soon after on the insignia and trappings of woe. Arthur alone seemed callous and indifferent, while all around were in tears. Yet although they pitied him, not one in that family circle could have guessed his secret.

In the midst of all these exciting events and mournful surroundings Henry Halford did not forget that the appointed day for his ordination was drawing near. He avoided all reference to it, however, although Arthur Franklyn had more than once missed him, and knew that an efficient substitute had been provided to take his place in the schoolroom during his absence at the bishop's examination.

A week's respite from school duties occurring at Whitsuntide, Henry had previously promised to spend that time with his friend Horace Wilton. He had hesitated, in consequence of recent events, to speak of leaving home till after the funeral, and still felt reluctant to desert Arthur while he remained at the Grange. From one of the children, however, the matter became known to Arthur on the Friday evening before Whit-Sunday. Henry had tempted his brother-in-law to a walk round the garden, and was speaking to him of his approaching ordination, and other matters connected with it, when they were joined by Mabel.

The little girl had become very fond of her uncle, and as she clung to his arm while they slowly paced the garden walk she listened to the conversation between the gentlemen with great interest.

Presently, in a pause, Mabel said—

"Uncle Henry, are you not going to Oxford tomorrow?"

"Well, my dear," he replied, "I have not quite made up my mind; the truth is, Arthur," he added, turning to his brother-in-law, "my friend Horace Wilton has invited me to spend a few days with him during Whitsuntide."

"Then why not go?" said Arthur; "the change will be of benefit to you, and brace up your nerves for the ordeal on Sunday week."

"It seems so ungracious to leave you in your trouble for the gratification of myself; perhaps, however, I may run down to Oxford to-morrow and return on Monday."

"No, Henry, pray do not shorten your visit on my account; I shall very likely be in London nearly all next week—go in, Mabel," he added, observing his little daughter's earnest face; and as she obeyed, Henry replied earnestly to his remark: "Indeed, Arthur, you ought not to think of leaving us yet—you require a week or two longer of perfect rest before returning to business. I suppose there is nothing that requires immediate attention?" he asked, without a shadow of suspicion that the question would inflict a pang on the heart of his brother-in-law.

Controlling himself, he replied, "Nothing more important than examining poor Louisa's papers. I have put off the ordeal for a week, I had not sufficient fortitude even to think of it. But it must be done very shortly, and her desk and other matters are at our apartments in London. I shall perhaps only stay a few days this time, but I must rouse myself soon and return to business for the sake of my children."

"Then shall I find you at the Grange on my return?" said Henry.

"I shall no doubt remain in town at least a week," replied Arthur, "therefore you need not put off your visit on my account; and there is the summons to tea," he exclaimed as Mabel reappeared. "Your uncle and I are coming presently, my dear; go in and tell Miss Marston," and then, in a low hurried voice as soon as they were alone, he said: "Henry, pray don't speak of my visit to London before your father or Kate; I could not endure to discuss the subject with them."

Henry promised to be silent, yet wondering at the request. To him no relief could be greater than to unburden his heart to a true friend in any pressing anxiety. But Arthur's anxiety was not of a nature to be confided to another, and as they walked to the house he inwardly resolved that he would escape as quickly as possible from the scrutiny of the anxious eyes at the Grange, and from the memories which were revived by its associations, and rendered more painful by recent sad events.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

COUSIN SARAH.

Arthur Franklyn had not been in a mood to call upon Mr. Armstrong during that sad week, nor, indeed, to pay visits anywhere. But he wrote an appropriate letter, saying all that was necessary

of grateful thanks for the kindness and sympathy he had experienced, especially from Mrs. John Armstrong.

Perhaps, on the whole, this was a more satisfactory proceeding in Mr. Armstrong's estimation, but Cousin Sarah was disappointed. She had been introduced to Mr. Henry Halford at the inquest, by his brother-in-law, and the half-hour during which she had conversed with him confirmed her good opinion of his manners and character.

Cousin Sarah was a few years older than Edward Armstrong; they had known each other from children, and in spite of the pride which had grown out of his increased wealth and aristocratic connexions, he had still a great deference for cousin Sarah's opinions. She possessed that very rare quality, plain common sense, and notwithstanding her homeliness she had intellectual tastes sufficient to enable her to appreciate knowledge and learning in its higher developments, as seen in her cousin Edward and Henry Halford. That a man of such intellectual power as Edward Armstrong could prefer for his daughter's husband the weak-minded captain whose history had been told to her to the intellectual young schoolmaster, because the former was rich and the latter poor, was to her a mystery.

Cousin Sarah, with all her good sense, had yet to learn the hardening, withering effects on the human heart which a love of gold produces.

She was brave, however, and she determined before she left Kilburn to bring the matter face to face with Edward Armstrong, and plead the cause of the young girl whom she was convinced by various signs was really attached to the intellectual young schoolmaster.

She had quickly discovered Mrs. Armstrong's opinion on the subject, and when she mentioned her wish to be alone with cousin Edward, she found in Mary's mother a strong ally. Soon after dinner, on this the last evening of her visit, cousin Sarah found herself alone in the drawing-room at Lime Grove, with a man who prided himself upon his indomitable will and unbending opinions.

But she was not daunted. There were two strong points in her favour, and upon these she rested her hopes of success. One was Edward Armstrong's love for his daughter, and the other his often acknowledged confidence in cousin Sarah's judgment. She sat at work near the open window. May was passing into June, and the open country which still held sway near Lime Grove seemed redolent of summer. The sun, still high above the horizon, was tinting the fleecy clouds that softened his brightness with crimson and gold, and from myriads of little throats came the warbling songs of joyous birds waking the echoes with their sweet melody.

"So you leave us to-morrow, cousin Sarah," said Mr. Armstrong, laying down his newspaper, and placing himself at the window near which she sat.

"Yes," she said, "and I do so with great reluctance; it has been a most happy fortnight excepting that sad affair in the train, but I shall never forget your kindness and your wife's."

"I don't forget your care and attention to my poor father," he replied, in a tone of deep emotion; "no kindness on our part can ever repay that, Sarah."

There was silence for a few moments, and then Mr. Armstrong spoke again:—

"I suppose you will leave Jack with perfect confidence?"

"Yes, quite; he seems very happy, and I think he will try to do well and get on in his business. He is delighted at the prospect of spending his monthly holiday here as you have proposed."

"Yes, poor fellow, it will be a change for him; I am glad Maria thought of it."

With all cousin Sarah's bravery, she found some little difficulty in commencing the subject uppermost in her thoughts, but there occurred another pause, and then Edward Armstrong led the way to it himself.

"Do you think Mary is looking well, Sarah?" he said, "you told me last Sunday week that she appeared changed, but I have not yet had an opportunity to ask you in what way."

"I must tell you the truth, Edward; Mary is as pretty and graceful as ever, but there is a delicacy of complexion, and at times a sad look, which makes me fancy she is not quite happy."

"They have been telling you a fine tale, I suppose, about my cruelty in not allowing my daughter to marry a man who has not a sixpence to call his own;" and as he spoke cousin Sarah could detect the old boyish temper, and the will that would brook no opposition. "I thought the girl had more sense," he went on; "why, she has refused offers that were unexceptionable, all because of that boy,—you have seen him, Sarah."

"I do not consider Mr. Henry Halford a boy, Edward," she replied, for now the ice was broken the impetuous tone did not daunt her. "He told me on Wednesday that he was going up for ordination on Trinity Sunday, the rector of Kilburn having given him what he called a title to orders."

"Yes, yes, I daresay; however, that is of little importance to me, but what has been told you, Sarah, about this matter?"

"Mary has told me nothing, Edward; Mrs. Armstrong certainly described the splendid offers her daughter had refused, and acknowledged that her refusals were no doubt caused by her attachment to Henry Halford;" and cousin Sarah spoke in that calm, quiet manner which so often

carries weight with it.

"Absurd nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Armstrong; "I thought my daughter was above such lovesick foolery, to refuse a man with 12,000*l.* a year, and the nephew of a duke, for a penniless schoolmaster, descended from nobody knows who."

"Have you no anxiety for your daughter's future happiness, Edward?"

"Happiness! There's no happiness in the world without money."

"Oh, Edward, how you are changed! money was not the source of your dear father's happiness, you never learnt that opinion from him; besides, your own wife was without fortune."

"Ah yes, I had the money, and I chose Maria St. Clair for that sweet character which has never changed; besides, she was well born and well connected, which the Halfords are not."

"Who gave you that information, Edward?"

"Why, I formed the opinion from my own judgment. Who would be a schoolmaster if he could help it?"

"At all events a schoolmaster is equal to a tradesman in position, and often far above one in education, but for once, cousin Edward, you have failed in your judgment. Henry Halford, you must own, is a gentleman, and a man of education, and I *know* that both his parents are as well born and as well connected as your own wife."

"I may ask *you* now where you obtained that information?" said Mr. Armstrong, in a sneering tone.

"You remember my father's farm, Edward?"

"Of course I do," he replied wonderingly; "I am not likely to forget the pleasant old homestead where you and John and I spent so many happy days in our childhood."

"And you remember Englefield, the beautiful estate of Lord Rivers, about two miles distant from Holmwood Farm, which my father tenanted from his lordship?"

"You are bringing back childish memories, Sarah, that are painful yet pleasant, but what has all this to do with the Halfords?"

"Dr. Halford was tutor to the present Lord Rivers in his young days, and from that circumstance he named his house at Kilburn, Englefield Grange. I had a long talk with young Mr. Halford on Wednesday, when we were waiting in the inquest-room at the hotel for you and the coroner. Mr. Franklyn introduced us. I was speaking of the beautiful scenery between Farnham and Basingstoke, and he asked me if I knew Englefield, and so one thing led to another——"

"But this has nothing to do with Mr. Halford's birth or connexions."

"Indirectly it has, for during our conversation I discovered that Dr. Halford's father was for many years and till his death a surgeon in Basingstoke, with a first-rate practice; his two sisters are well married, and his brother is an army surgeon in India."

"You seem to have obtained from this young man the history of himself and his connexions, Sarah,"—was the scornful remark of Mr. Armstrong,—"rather an unusual topic for a gentleman to enter upon on a first introduction."

"It arose entirely from my remark about the country round Basingstoke, but I will own that when he mentioned Englefield and Lord Rivers I drew from him other facts for the sake of our dear Mary. I tell you candidly, Edward Armstrong, that I admire your daughter's good sense in preferring such a man as young Mr. Halford to one of those who think they can purchase a wife with gold, feeling sure that she will be given up by her parents to the highest bidder, like the articles in an auction-room."

Edward Armstrong felt rather startled by cousin Sarah's plain speaking, in which there was too much truth to be pleasant, yet he said in a kind of deprecatory tone—

"I have promised Mary not to force her into the acceptance of any offer again, and if she is determined to marry no one but the schoolmaster, she must remain single all her life, for she has expressed her determination not to marry him without my consent, and that she will never have."

"Mary possesses the real source of happiness," said cousin Sarah, "even if you continue to withhold that consent. My uncle's teachings during the week of her visit at Meadow Farm have not been thrown away."

Again Edward Armstrong was startled. He had been surprised at the gentle submission of his high-spirited daughter, and the unaltered love and respect she had shown to the father, whose love of gold had blighted her youthful hopes; but now he understood the cause, and across his memory passed the words he had read at his father's knee long before the demon of gold had hardened his heart—

> "Godliness with contentment is great gain."

After a few moments' pause he said in a softened tone, "I should be glad, and so I know would

Maria, to keep our only daughter at home with us always, but it seems an unusual fate for a beautiful and accomplished girl such as she is, and with 20,000*l.* which I could give her on her wedding-day—I am sure I have no wish but for her happiness."

"Then consent to her marriage with Henry Halford; I could tell by certain signs when I mentioned her name that he still loves your daughter. Wait till after his ordination, and than give the young people 10,000*l.* to enable them to live independently of the school till Mr. Halford obtains a living."

"Not much chance of that, I expect."

Cousin Sarah smiled.

"I have one more little piece of information to give yon, Edward," she said; "when speaking of his ordination Mr. Halford told me that his father's old pupil, Lord Rivers, had promised that the first vacant living in his gift should be given to his tutor's son, if he took orders, after his ordination. The young man, however did not appear to put much faith in the promise, in consequence of the number of years that had elapsed since it was made, he the only surviving son, being his father's youngest child."

The entrance of the tea-tray put a stop to the conversation, but Cousin Sarah could observe in the manner of Mr. Armstrong towards his daughter an unusual tenderness, and now and then a wistful look, as if conscience were upbraiding him as the cause of the sad expression which at times passed over her face.

Mary Armstrong drove Cousin Sarah and her father to the station next morning, for the first time since the sad death of Louisa Franklyn. Warmhearted and loving farewells had taken place before leaving the house, for Cousin Sarah had endeared herself to every one of the family, servants included, by her gentle ways, and quiet yet unreserved manners.

To Mrs. Armstrong she had become a true friend and comforter about Mary, although no opportunity occurred for her to hear what had passed between Cousin Sarah and her husband.

A few words only on the morning she left, while dressing for her journey, gave the loving mother hope.

"I repeated to Cousin Edward all I had heard of Mr. Halford, of his parents and connexions, and of his hopes about the Church, but I could obtain no promise that he would alter his mind on the subject. I think it would be unwise to say anything to Mary, and perhaps excite hopes only to be disappointed."

To this advice Mrs. Armstrong readily agreed, and when the elegant and refined lady and her homely sensible cousin kissed each other with real undisguised affection the latter said—

"We have done all we can, Cousin Maria, and we must leave the result to God, He will order all things for the best."

No word passed respecting the conversation which had taken place between Cousin Sarah and Edward Armstrong. Not even to his wife could the money-loving husband confess how much that conversation had roused his conscience.

And so the merry month of May gave place to leafy June, with its roses and lilies, its long days and short nights, and the perfume of new-mown hay.

With the first Sunday in June came the Whit-Sunday which reminds us of the day when the converts of early Christian times wore white garments, after the first baptismal rite, as a token of purity—fit emblem of that pure and holy Spirit which descended upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

The rector of Kilburn, whose long and faithful ministration had endeared him to his parishioners, was on that day assisted by a stranger. Henry Halford's place in the gallery with the boys being occupied by another of the masters.

Both these circumstances Mary noticed, but no idea arose in her mind that they were connected with Mr. Henry Halford's movements. When they left the church, however, Mary saw the gentleman, whom she now knew to be Mr. Franklyn, supporting his aged father-in-law on one side, with Clara on the other, and followed by Kate Marston and three other children, the youngest a beautiful little boy nearly four years old.

The dejected looks of the father, and the deep mourning worn by the children, brought tears to her eyes. For Mary, in her innocence, could only think of the second Mrs. Franklyn as a second mother to Fanny's children, and to her mind, therefore, they were doubly motherless.

Mrs. Armstrong had remained at home on the Sunday morning, and as Mary walked towards the gate leaning on her father's arm, she was surprised to see him leave her, and advancing towards the group accept the offered hand of Mr. Franklyn.

Not being aware of the slight acquaintance, Arthur turned to the old gentleman and introduced his father-in-law, Dr. Halford. Mary could not help noticing a certain dignity and reserve in his manner as he returned Mr. Armstrong's recognition. But Arthur was slow to observe these shades of manner, and quite ignorant of any motive for reserve, he introduced his children by name, as well as Kate Marston, without discovering in the least that he was making three of the

party very uncomfortable.

"We are walking too slowly for you and Miss Armstrong," said the old gentleman gently, "I trust Mrs. Armstrong is well."

"Not quite well enough to attend church this morning on account of the heat, thank you," said Mr. Armstrong, glad of the opportunity to escape, "but not otherwise indisposed."

And then after the usual polite salutations, Mr. Armstrong and his daughter left the mournfully attired group, and hastened towards home.

"I must be polite to the people with whom I have been so unfortunately mixed up, Mary," said her father, "and I feel for the poor man, left with all those motherless children. I hear he is well off, besides inheriting his second wife's fortune; otherwise it would be a sad burden upon the poor old grandfather to have to support them upon school keeping."

"The youngest is a beautiful little boy," said Mary, quite unable to reply to her father's speech.

"Yes, I noticed a fat, rosy child, led by a lady in mourning; is she the wardrobe-keeper?"

"No papa," said Mary, and with all her efforts she could not restrain a slight tone of indignation, "that lady is Mrs. Halford's niece."

Mr. Armstrong would have questioned his daughter a week previously as to the source of her information, but a recollection of Cousin Sarah kept him silent.

On the way home they overtook Mr. Drummond, and while he and her father talked, Mary walked by his side meditating with surprise on the events of the morning—the earnest looks of Mr. Franklyn's eldest girl, the evident restraint in the manner of Kate Marston and Dr. Halford, and, above all, the absence of Henry Halford.

Suddenly a thought struck her—she knew he had taken his M. A. degree, she had seen his name in the *Times*—was he gone up for ordination, and where? All this was at present unknown to her, and she could only console herself with the recollection that the *Times* would have every particular about the ordinations whenever they took place, and Henry Halford's name was sure to be mentioned if he were among the candidates.

Mary told her mother of the encounter in the churchyard, and the absence of Henry Halford, without any comment.

Mrs. Armstrong listened with interest to her description of the children, and especially about the little boy. She thought well of this meeting to a certain extent, but she said not a hopeful word to her daughter.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONSCIENCE.

"I must rouse myself to attend to business, doctor," said Arthur Franklyn, while at breakfast the morning after meeting Mr. Armstrong in the churchyard. "I may be absent a week or more, can I leave the children with you for that time? I shall feel such perfect comfort in the reflection that they are under your roof, and managed so kindly by Kate."

"Of course they can stay, my dear Arthur," said the old gentleman tremulously, "it is a great comfort to me to have dear Fanny's children here. I have only one regret, that is, that her dear mother did not live to see her grandchildren. Clara reminds me greatly of her grandmother;" and he looked fondly at the young girl whose womanly appearance and manners had so startled Mary Armstrong.

"Would you like to stay with us a little longer, my child?" continued the old man, laying his hand on Clara's shoulder as she sat in her usual place by his side.

"Oh yes, grandpapa, I should indeed, we all should be glad to stay;" and she looked at her sisters and brothers as she spoke. Mabel assented timidly; the gentle little girl was becoming daily more dear to Kate Marston, who at the same time lavished upon her cousin Fanny's youngest child, Albert, the tenderest fondness.

Albert seemed to consider himself required in some way to answer Clara's questioning look, so he said—

"Me too, grandpa, me stay with you and Kate."

"Papa, am I to go to school in England?" asked James.

"Yes, my boy, certainly, and if grandpapa consents you shall stay and be a pupil at Englefield Grange."

"Oh, jolly!" said the boy, "it's ever so much better being here than at my school in Melbourne. Oh! I shall be happy, especially when uncle Henry comes home."

And so it was settled that during their father's absence his children should remain at Kilburn under their grandfather's roof.

"I must make a home for them as soon as I can turn myself round," he said a few hours after, when talking the matter over with Kate Marston. "I have to settle the business which brought me to England, and to ascertain what claim I have on my wife's property."

"What! did you not do so before you married her?" asked Kate, in astonishment.

"No," he replied, "she was very reticent on the subject, and I did not like to question her, or indeed her friends—she appeared to have perfect control over her property. However, she may have left a will. At all events, I must go to the apartments I have taken for three months, and look over her papers. Unfortunately, her lawyer is in Australia, and he may have a will in his possession. But, dear Kate," he continued, with a shudder, "her death is so recent, and the money subject too painful to be talked about yet. I know you will take care of my children, and that is a great relief to my mind."

"Indeed, indeed I will," she replied in a tone of sympathy; the paleness and the shudder had not escaped her. Had she known the pangs of conscience which caused that shudder, horror instead of sympathy would have filled her heart.

And yet the conscience of Arthur Franklyn could only at times arouse him to doubt the rectitude of his own conduct. By fallacious arguments, and false reasoning with himself, he had acquired confused ideas of right and wrong. He had still at times the appearance of being under the effects of some powerful sedative; and at others the flashing eye and the flushed face would have denoted the presence of some strong stimulant to less unsuspecting people than the residents at the Grange.

Arthur Franklyn with all his faults had never given way to intemperance, therefore the brandy flask which he now carried in his pocket or kept locked up in his bedroom was more potent in its effects, leaving behind it, after the first moments of excitement, an opiate-like stupor and stolidity of manner, very unlike that of the bright and fascinating Arthur Franklyn of former times.

When he left the little breakfast-parlour, in which we first met three of the residents of Englefield Grange, Dr. Halford and Kate Marston were alone.

"Uncle," said the latter, "Arthur is very much changed since the death of his second wife."

"Well, my dear, perhaps he is, but it's very natural under the painful circumstances in which she died. I cannot be surprised at his marrying again; of course he wanted a companion, and a mother for his children. The lady he chose appeared to me very pleasing and agreeable, and perhaps her money was a great temptation, although I do not think a marriage for money alone can ever insure happiness."

Kate said nothing; she had seen enough of the second Mrs. Franklyn to create a doubt respecting her suitableness to be a second mother to any children, especially to one so high-spirited as Clara, and she could not tell her uncle of the difficulties already in the way respecting Louisa Franklyn's fortune.

Arthur came in presently with his carpet bag in his hand, to wish them farewell.

"I have said good-by to the children, Kate; I am glad I sent nurse to you; they are with her now, and seem quite happy; you will find her very useful."

"I have found her so already, Arthur," she replied, "and Clara manages her little brother famously, so make yourself quite comfortable about the children."

"Arthur is going, uncle," she said gently, for the old gentleman sat dozing in his arm-chair.

"Eh? what?" he said, "Arthur going? Good-by my son; God bless you and keep you in the right path."

A few more hasty farewells, and then Arthur Franklyn started at a quick pace to catch the four o'clock train to London, with the last words of his poor Fanny's father—"Keep you in the right path"—ringing in his tars.

The sad and sudden death and the inquest on Mrs. Franklyn had appeared in most of the daily and weekly papers, therefore when Arthur knocked at the door of the house in which he had taken apartments, the landlady met him with a doleful face.

"Oh, sir, is it true? have you lost your dear lady as we read in the papers?"

"I am sorry to say it is true," he replied as he entered, "and it will make a great change in my arrangements; however, you shall not be a loser, Mrs. Mills; and now if you will bring me some tea I shall be glad of a cup to refresh myself, I can't get over such a shock all at once."

"No, sir, I should think not; and indeed you're not looking at all well, and no wonder. Yes, sir," she added quickly, seeing a look of impatience pass over his face, "I'll go at once and see about your tea, it will be ready in no time."

Very glad indeed was Arthur Franklyn when, the tea being removed and his landlady's restless tongue banished from the room, he could feel himself alone. He first drew the table near the

window, which he closed notwithstanding the heat; then he emptied his pockets of various letters, and at length drew forth an ominous-looking document tied with red tape, which he opened and spread on the table. Yes, there the name stood, clear and distinct, in his wife's handwriting, "Louisa Ellen Franklyn. Witness—Henry Halford."

For some minutes Arthur Franklyn seemed fascinated to the writing before him. He turned the leaf and read the legally worded document through. There was no hesitation necessary there, Louisa had intended him to have this two thousand pounds, her trustees had consented and signed. Morally it belonged to him if not quite legally; what moral law would be transgressed by claiming it? None. Then for the sake of his own credit, for the sake of his children, he was justified in this act. It would injure no one; the bulk of his wife's fortune might go to another, and virtually this two thousand pounds had been already taken from it and placed in the bank till the document before him should be properly signed. Yes, it was all right, and as he thus thought he folded it carefully, re-tied it and placed it in his pocket-book.

On a table near stood Louisa's desk—her keys had been given into his hands, with her rings and jewels and a few other articles found in the pocket of the deceased lady. He took the small bunch of keys from his own pocket, but as he rose to fetch the desk, there flashed across his memory the words of the old doctor, "God bless you, my son, and keep you in the right path."

Conscience awoke and made itself heard. "You are out of the right path already, Arthur Franklyn," said the small still voice. "All your false reasoning, all your absurd sophistry is vain; you have no right to that money, and if you claim it on the document in your possession, you know by what name the laws of your country will call you it you are found out; and even if you obtain the money undiscovered, you will never know another happy hour. Burn the paper, Arthur Franklyn, and throw off the power of the evil spirit that entices you."

The conscience-stricken man staggered to his seat; he drew the paper from his pocket, and forgetting for a moment that it was summer-time, he turned towards the empty fireplace. Then an impulse came upon him to tear the document to atoms, and throw from his mind the fearful incubus; but his hand was arrested by a sudden memory of his debts in Australia, which if not paid must, he knew, end in the disgrace of bankruptcy. Again the tempter reminded him of his children, his eldest daughter growing into womanhood; poverty, disgrace for her portion. No, no, it could not be, he must risk all. There was nothing to fear. He would arrange all matters of business in England, a few days or a week would suffice for that, and then he would return to Melbourne. Where he was so well known he could easily get the papers cashed by paying a good amount of interest. His children were safe for the present. He should be able to send over payment for their board. Yes, this plan must be adopted, it was the best and the only one; and with this resolution strong in his mind conscience was crushed, its voice silenced for a time, and Arthur Franklyn left to follow the downward road on which he had made the first false step.

He again rose to fetch Louisa's desk, and placing it on the table before him, eagerly examined its contents. Letters from friends, a banker's book, a cheque for seventy-four pounds which he had given her at the time of the transfer of her ready cash to his name, about fifty pounds in ready money, and at last a little packet of his own letters written before their marriage, carefully and neatly tied together, several little articles of jewellery, and others of no importance, but no will.

Arthur Franklyn as he made this discovery knew that all hope of his late wife's fortune was lost to him, unless she had left a will with her lawyers in Melbourne, and this appeared another urgent reason why he should return thither.

The money he had found, with the balance of a few hundreds still lying at the Australian bank in London, would pay his passage, and help him to carry out his plans. He replaced the various articles in the desk excepting the jewels and the money; her watch and chain he had left at his father-in-law's for Clara. But as he placed his hand on the packet of his own letters a pang of remorse shot through his heart, which almost threatened him with another attack of conscience. He hastily drew the flask from his pocket, and seizing a wineglass which stood on the sideboard filled it nearly to the brim with the so often fatal stimulant, and drank it off.

For a time it produced a false courage which enabled him to finish his search of the desk; and after closing and locking it he remained at the table and proceeded to sketch out his future movements, made a list of the boxes to be sent next day to Kilburn, and also of the articles he wished to take with him on his voyage. By this time the twilight of a June evening was fading into night; Arthur looked at his watch and rang the bell, it was nearly half-past nine. The landlady herself appeared with what she termed a nice little supper, to tempt Mr. Franklyn's appetite. She lighted the gas and uncovered the tray for his inspection, but the supper failed to produce the result she expected. Mr. Franklyn could eat nothing but a biscuit, and she left the room in great distress of mind to expatiate in the kitchen on the dreadful event which had "so altered the gentleman upstairs and quite took away his appetite."

Arthur Franklyn, totally unmindful of her sympathy, escaped to his bedroom soon after the clock struck ten. But there was no thought of Him on whom we are told to cast our burden. There arose in his heart no prayer for guidance in the right path. It might be said of him at this period of his life that "God was not in all his thoughts." To him in this hour of fierce temptation there was no solace but the fiery spirit, so valuable as a medicine, so dangerous as a stimulant. He took another supply before seeking his pillow, and sunk at once into an unhealthy sleep, from which he awoke in the morning unrefreshed and with a throbbing headache. During the next three days Arthur Franklyn, with a kind of unnatural energy, went through the tasks he had allotted to

himself. From the lawyer to the banker's; from the West End to the City, in cabs and in omnibuses; to the shipping offices to secure a berth; to the railway station to send boxes to Kate Marston and his daughter, and to write letters in the evening—so passed the next three days.

One discovery he made while at the lawyer's office. From a remark made by Mr. Norton, to whom Henry Halford had introduced him, he found that gentleman had made a mistake, and here he took the second step in the downward path.

After expressing his regret and sympathy, Mr. Norton said—

"You are fortunate in one thing, Mr. Franklyn; I hear that Mrs. Franklyn signed her name to the document on the morning before she died at her own lawyer's, so the two thousand pounds are yours to all intents and purposes."

"It may be so," replied Arthur, languidly; "but I have been so upset and so full of business I have not had time to examine it."

"Well, do so, my dear sir, when you get home; no doubt you will find it all right."

This mistake of Mr. Norton's, which will be hereafter explained, sent Arthur from the lawyer's office in a tremble of excitement. He had nothing to fear now; all would end well, and he should overcome every difficulty.

The fact that he had spoken falsely to Mr. Norton, and helped to mislead that gentleman, he entirely overlooked.

And so the time passed on, and the morning of the Friday on which he was to sail for Melbourne rose in its summer brightness.

But the excitement, the at times clamorous voice of conscience, and the unusual amount of stimulant he took, were together combining to produce fever of the blood and irritation of the brain in Arthur Franklyn.

When he started in a cab from his lodgings his landlady remarked, "Well, if this rushing about every day don't soon kill that poor gentleman, he must be made of iron."

No idea of the truth entered her mind. To conceal his intention of leaving England it had been necessary for him to invent and prevaricate and deceive in a way that twelve months before he would have shrunk from with shame and disgust. But principles of truth, honour, and rectitude, without the foundation of religion and the fear of God, are never to be relied on. In the hour of fierce temptation they had proved to Arthur Franklyn no stronger than a broken reed.

He reached the landing-place just below London Bridge at about noon, wishing to get on board early, as the vessel was timed to sail at seven in the evening.

He had been unable to resist another supply of the fiery fluid, early as it was, consoling himself with the reflection, "When I am on board I shall get over this unnatural craving for stimulants, and give up taking it."

But he had taken it once too often. His boxes were all on board, and he carried in his hand a carpet bag, containing among other things the fatal document which had already worked him so much evil.

He alighted from the cab, paid the driver, and proceeded towards the Australian packet, which lay alongside the wharf at a little distance from the shore. A plank stretched across from the gangway of the vessel rested on land, and men with boxes and other packages were passing to and fro upon it. Arthur Franklyn waited till the way was clear, then he placed his foot on the plank and approached the vessel. A very small portion of this frail bridge passed over water, the shore end resting on rising ground, and to a man with clear head and steady step there could be no possible danger.

But Arthur Franklyn's head was not clear, neither was his step steady, and as he approached the middle of the plank many persons on the bridge and about the wharf saw him totter and turn pale.

Speechless from alarm, and fearful of hastening a catastrophe by a warning word, no one moved or spoke as he raised his foot to go forward. The next moment, amidst the screams and shouts of the lookers-on, Arthur Franklyn lost his balance and fell with his carpet bag into the water, which closed over him pitilessly, as if in his helpless condition every effort to save him would be useless.

There were running to and fro, cries for ropes, and many eager hands stretched out when he rose to the surface; but the drowning man had neither sense nor power to help himself or seize the offered aid.

By this time more than one swimmer was in the water diving for the drowning man. Minutes which seemed hours passed, and then amidst the crowds of excited spectators Arthur Franklyn's apparently lifeless body was drawn from the water, hastily placed in a cab, and carried off across London Bridge to Guy's Hospital.

But the carpet bag had sunk to the bottom, to be drawn up weeks after by the Thames' searchers; while in one corner, soaked into a pulp by the action of the water, lay the fatal document which had brought upon Arthur Franklyn such terrible results.

CHAPTER XXX.

UNCONSCIOUS RIVALS.

June again at Oxford, and the year for grand Commemoration is again attracting numbers to the famous old city.

Three years have passed since Charles Herbert walked down the High Street with his friend Horace Wilton on his way to the station to meet Mary Armstrong.

The Fellow of Balliol is now wandering in Christ Church meadows with another very old friend, whom he is vainly trying to persuade to remain at Oxford till after Commemoration.

"You have seen so little of the place, Reginald," said Horace; "and if you have decided to exchange into a regiment going to India, you should not miss being present for once on such an occasion."

"It's no use, Horace," was the reply, free from the "aw-aw" so detrimental to Reginald Fraser's speech when addressing ladies, or suffering from nervousness. "It's no use; I couldn't remain now after all you told me last evening about Miss Armstrong's visit; perhaps she may be at Oxford again this year, and I wouldn't meet her for the world. How strange it seems that you should be acquainted with her."

"It was scarcely a week's acquaintance," he replied; "and in all my visits since to the home of my friend Charles Herbert, in Park Lane, I have never met Miss Armstrong there, which is still more singular. But do you really consider your case hopeless?"

"Indeed I do, although, as I told you, Mr. Armstrong gave me every encouragement."

The young man paused, and then exclaimed, with a sudden effort—

"Wilton, I'll tell you all about it. I wanted to do so last night, but I thought an old bachelor like you would not care to listen to a love story."

Horace Wilton stifled a sigh. The man of thirty-five was generally supposed to be wedded to his books, and to avoid the society of women from choice.

The youthful undergraduates of the University would have wondered greatly had they been told some little of the romantic history attached to the erudite student's early days. Only a very few of his most intimate friends, Charles Herbert amongst the number, knew any of the circumstances. Yet, while reticent respecting his own experiences, his manner with his friends excited confidence, and in none more readily than Reginald Fraser, whom Horace had known from a child.

"I am quite ready to hear the whole story," he said, with a slight smile; "probably it will be a relief to you to confide in one upon whose silence you know you can safely rely."

"Indeed it will," said the weak-minded but amiable young officer. "You know our fellows would chaff me awfully if I talked to them as I did to you last night. But you know I felt sure of winning any girl if I could only muster up courage enough to pop the question, because of my money and all that. And when I'd got over what I thought was the worst bother, it was hard to be refused."

"And what was the worst bother?" asked his friend, with a smile.

"Well, I hardly know, but I spoke to Mr. Armstrong first; he invited me to dinner, and made me believe it was all right, and the next morning came a letter from him, advising me to wait a few months, and then write to Miss Armstrong. Oh, I say, old fellow, writing that letter was the worst bother, and no mistake. I declare I'd rather face the enemy on the field of battle than write another."

"Of course the young lady answered you?"

"Oh, yes; but I almost wish she hadn't, for her letter made me more wretched than ever; I knew it was all over then. It is a kind letter, though, and she tells me how sorry she is, and all that. You may read it if you like, if only to show you how clever she is."

And as he spoke he took the letter from his pocket-book.

Horace Wilton would have refused to avail himself of similar confidence from most of his young men acquaintances, but Reginald Fraser was associated with many of his youthful memories, and he could not grieve him by refusing. He therefore held out his hand for the letter which had caused Mary Armstrong so much pain to write, as well as tears of regret.

The character of the young girl with whom he had associated during that week at Oxford three years before presented itself clearly to his mind as he read—kind and regretful was the tone; yet the refusal, though couched in gentle and courteous words, was too plainly expressed and too decisive to admit of future change.

"Well," said Horace, as he folded the letter and returned it to its owner, "nothing can more

completely destroy all hope of winning Miss Armstrong than this letter, kindly as it is written. But, Reginald, take my advice—do not grieve over what is inevitable. You are still young, and the change you contemplate to a foreign land may eradicate a little of that *mauvaise honte* which places you at such a disadvantage in society, in spite of your wealth and position. But come," he added, rising from the seat they had occupied in Christ Church meadows, and looking at his watch, "we had better wend our way homewards, it is nearly five o'clock."

For some little distance the gentlemen were silent. Reginald spoke first.

"Wilton, I'm so glad I've told you all; I feel more easy on the subject already, and I hope, as you say, that going abroad will drive the nervousness out of me. But please don't ask me to stay; I'm awfully afraid of meeting any one acquainted with Miss Armstrong, for if her name should be mentioned I am certain to betray myself."

"You shall go to-morrow or the next day, if you wish, but on condition that you neither think nor speak of the subject again while you stay with me. When you were a little frightened boy at Eton, Reggie, you always did as I bid you!"

"Ah! yes, no wonder," he replied. "I have not forgotten the great boy who pretended to make me his fag because the other fellows shouldn't ill-use me. You were my best friend then, Wilton, and so you are now, and I mean to take your advice."

As the young man spoke Horace Wilton's memory flew back to the time when a small delicate boy of ten was committed to his care by one of the masters:—

"Wilton, I wish you would look after this little chap; he is evidently a nervous, timid child, and much to be pitied. He has never known a mother's care, and his father died about three years ago. I fear he has been harshly treated and neglected at the house of his maternal grandfather, who has never forgiven his daughter for marrying against his wishes."

The youth of seventeen had glanced at the fair, delicate child, who looked up at him with awe, not unmixed with alarm, and in his heart he formed a resolve that the boy thus placed in his care should be protected from the overbearing oppression to which a fag at a public school was in those days so frequently subjected.

Perhaps the rougher discipline might have tended to harden and strengthen the character of Reginald Fraser, and yet the cold neglect and harsh treatment he received in the house where his mother had once been the only and cherished daughter had increased the natural timidity of the boy. The highly nervous temperament which he inherited from his mother had developed into mental weakness and painful reserve, which even the experiences of a public school could not eradicate.

Some such reflections as these passed through the memory of Horace Wilton, and caused him to pause ere he replied—

"I do not forget old days, Reginald, and I am glad we have had this opportunity of talking over matters, but you must learn to rely upon a higher strength than your own if you wish to gain the power of bearing earthly disappointments with patience and submission."

Reginald Fraser, in his dread of meeting Mary Armstrong, or any one who knew her, evinced a nervous anxiety to leave Oxford by an early train the next day, but this very anxiety defeated his purpose.

It was increased by a letter from Henry Halford, which Horace on that morning had received, stating that he hoped to reach Oxford by the train which arrived there at 2.15.

Reginald had put off so many little matters to this last morning that he failed to be in time for the 12.30 express, and there was no other alternative than for him to remain with the new arrival till the evening, or leave by the 2.25. He chose the latter.

A desire, for which he could not at first account, that the young men should remain strangers to each other haunted Horace Wilton on that Saturday morning.

Suddenly, as the memory of a week so eventful to Mary Armstrong arose before him, a thought flashed across his mind that Henry Halford might be the successful rival who had unwittingly caused so much unhappiness to Reginald Fraser.

On reflection, however, he dismissed from his mind any apprehension of awkwardness should the two gentlemen meet at the station, as each would be quite unconscious of the position in which they stood to each other, even if his own suspicions had any foundation.

As they walked to the station Horace said—

"I should like to introduce you to Mr. Halford if there is time, Reginald, but not against your wish."

"I shall be glad to know any of your friends," replied the young man, who was quite unacquainted with the fact that this friend of Wilton's had been associated with Mary Armstrong during her visit to Oxford. "Is this Mr. Halford an Oxford man?"

"Yes, he took his degree about a year ago, and is going up for ordination on Trinity Sunday. The rector of Kilburn had given him his title to orders."

"Kilburn!" exclaimed Reginald; "why, that is where Mr. Armstrong resides. Is he acquainted with the family?"

"I believe he has met some of them, but I do not imagine there is any great intimacy," replied Horace, inwardly blaming himself for having mentioned the name of Kilburn—"but here we are at the station."

Only just in time, however, for as the two gentlemen reached the platform, the train by which Henry Halford travelled came slowly into the station.

Amidst the numbers who alighted, Horace Wilton could not at first distinguish his friend; but Henry's quick eye singled him out almost immediately, and making his way through the crowd, he advanced towards him.

"How kind of you to come and meet me!" he exclaimed, as they shook hands. "How could you relinquish your beloved books for such a purpose?"

"I must not take more credit to myself than I deserve," he replied, with a laugh. "The truth is, I had to welcome the coming as well as speed the parting guest;" and as Wilton spoke he turned towards Reginald, who stood at a little distance, and said, "My friend, Captain Fraser,—Mr. Henry Halford."

The former advanced and bowed, but Henry, while returning the salutation, held out his hand, saying—

"I am sorry to hear you are a parting guest, Captain Fraser. I have heard of you so often from my friend Mr. Wilton, that I should have been glad of the opportunity to improve our acquaintance;" and while he spoke the unconscious rivals shook hands warmly with each other.

As usual when introduced to a stranger Reginald Fraser, though attracted by the genial manner and pleasant smile of his new acquaintance, suffered from an attack of nervousness which was greatly increased by the sound of the five minutes bell announcing the approach of the train for London.

"I—aw—am sorry—aw—I must—aw—leave you so soon," he stammered out, "but my train goes—aw—from the other side, and I—I have—aw—to cross the bridge."

"Oh, pray excuse me for detaining you," said Henry; "Wilton, do not leave your friend on my account," he added; "I will wait here, or walk on slowly while you see him off."

"No, no—aw—I could not—aw—allow you to do so," cried the young officer, with such painful nervousness that Henry Halford drew back in surprise, and Horace Wilton came to the rescue.

"We will not detain you any longer, Reginald," he said; "you have only just time to cross the bridge. Good-by, good-by," he added, as they hurriedly shook hands, while Henry, who had been taken aback by the young officer's manner, merely raised his hat in token of farewell. The two gentlemen stood for a few moments watching his progress till he was lost to sight among the passengers on the opposite platform. Then Horace Wilton took the arm of his friend, and as they left the station together Henry remarked—

"Your friend's manner is peculiar; does it arise from pride or nervousness?"

"Pride!" exclaimed his companion, "what in poor nervous Reginald Fraser? no, indeed, yet to-day he appeared worse than usual; I cannot account for it."

"This young officer, then, is identical with the timid child at Eton, of whom I have heard you speak," said Henry. "He has evidently not outgrown his nervous timidity. I hope I did not offend him by what I said."

"No, indeed, he is as amiable as ever, and not easily offended. This nervousness is constitutional, and is always less under control in the presence of a stranger."

"Will not this interfere with his duties as a soldier!"

"I think not, for Reginald is far from deficient in physical courage. I have told you of the harsh treatment he received in early childhood: I wonder the boy was not made an idiot."

"His grandfather intended to atone for this, I suppose, by leaving him all his wealth; I have been told he has done so; is this a fact?" asked Henry.

"It is a fact which, after the early training of the boy, might have proved a curse to his manhood instead of a blessing," and then to the young officer's unconscious rival Horace Wilton detailed his history, his position, his wealth, and all the circumstances with which the reader is already acquainted, save and except his hopes and aspirations respecting Mary Armstrong.

But while Horace Wilton carefully preserved from Henry Halford the secret which had been confided in him, he little imagined how much pain one incautious word of his had occasioned to his nervous friend Reginald Fraser.

It is said with truth that one distinguishing mark between men and women is that the latter possess quicker perception, and the former clearer judgment. In the almost feminine character of Reginald Fraser existed a keenness of perception which resembled what is termed instinct; and this instinctive power often caused him great mental pain from his extreme sensitiveness, more

especially so because he concealed his opinions from those with whom he associated, even while these opinions increased an outward display of nervousness.

Something of all this occasioned the strange manner which had so surprised Henry Halford. The incautious mention of Kilburn by his friend had been like a stone cast into the water; it caused a tumult in the young man's mind which did not cease during the whole journey to London.

The fact that Wilton's friend resided at Kilburn had aroused in his heart new ideas, which had scarcely time to form themselves into a tangible shape before he was introduced to Henry Halford. As he encountered that genial, easy manner and smiling intellectual face, at once like a lightning flash came the firm conviction that the man before him was the cause of Mary Armstrong's refusal to himself.

He had therefore, as we know, met him with painful nervousness. Like one who walks in his sleep, he had crossed the bridge and waited for the train. Still absorbed with the same conviction he chose an empty first-class carriage, threw himself back on its cushions, and gave himself up to an hour of mental torture.

Mortification, regret, and a depreciation of his own qualities when compared to Henry Halford agitated him much more strongly than a feeling of jealousy, although this for a time so powerfully affected him that even the tears rushed to his eyes.

At length he regained control over himself. Other passengers entered the carriage, gentler thoughts arose in his heart—yes, he would give up all hope; if Mary Armstrong really loved another, could he not deny himself to secure her happiness?

Perhaps this young clergyman would have only his stipend as a curate to live upon, and should he with all his wealth wish to deprive him, not only of such a wife as Mary Armstrong would make him, but also of the fortune which her father proposed to give her?

No! The conflict was over, it had been a sharp discipline for the amiable but weak-minded young officer, but it was necessary; it had not only deepened the effect of Horace Wilton's advice, but when Reginald Fraser left the train at Paddington, he felt like one who has passed through a fierce conflict and gained strength by victory.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE NEW CURATE.

There is something in the calm of a Sunday evening in summer which seems to cast a halo over the worshippers in a country church. The gradual decline of daylight, the perfume of flowers which pervades the building through open doors and casements, the slanting beams of the setting sun shining through the western windows, radiant in crimson and gold, and the joyous song of the birds chanting their evening hymn of praise, all combine to impress the spirit with a sense of the presence of God, not only among those who do not neglect the assembling of themselves together to worship and to praise Him, but also in His "glorious works."

On such an evening two days after the Friday which had been so fatal to Arthur Franklyn's schemes, Mr. Armstrong proposed to accompany his daughter to the old parish church at Kilburn, which was at that period merely a country village.

It was not often that Mr. Armstrong attended the evening service, therefore excepting during her brother's holidays Mary was obliged to remain at home also, for she could not go to church alone. Most readily therefore she hailed the opportunity offered by her father, and hastily arrayed herself in walking costume, a process by no means so troublesome to a lady in summer as in winter.

They had scarcely taken their usual places in their pew when the chimes ceased and the single five minutes bell began to toll.

Mr. Armstrong's pew was in the north gallery; therefore when the organ pealed forth its introductory music, and the clergymen issued from the vestry, Mary could see that one of them entered the reading desk and the other within the communion rails, seating himself on the north side and therefore hidden from their pew by the pulpit.

She paid but little attention to this circumstance, except to feel glad that the old rector would have help for this evening at least, the whole of the preceding Sunday services having been performed by him alone.

The fact of it being the first Sunday after Trinity suggested to Mary Armstrong no cause for Henry Halford's absence from the boys' pew at church. With all her cleverness in other subjects, she had very little knowledge of clerical matters. The prayers used in what is called Ember Week she had noticed and understood, but of their connexion with certain Sundays in the year, among others Trinity Sunday, she knew nothing.

Following the service as it proceeded with true devotional feeling, neither Mary Armstrong nor

her father was prepared for the surprise that awaited them.

During the singing of the hymn, and while standing in the pew, she could see that as the rector left the reading desk to proceed to the vestry, he was joined by a stranger; but only his white surplice was visible, the vestry being on the same side as the gallery on which she stood, and the entrance under it.

Those were the days when clergymen changed the surplice for the black academical gown for preaching. Mary, quite engrossed with the music and the words of the last verse of the hymn, did not glance towards the pulpit till the preacher raised his head from his hands, and faced the congregation.

He was very pale, this strange young clergyman, and as he laid his Bible on the desk his hand trembled perceptibly.

He had seen at a glance as he entered the pulpit the figure in white standing by Mr. Armstrong in the gallery near him. The unexpected appearance at the evening service of any of the family took him by surprise, and it required all the self-control he possessed to bring himself to a proper frame of mind by the time the congregation were ready to listen to him.

But the effort was successful, and as the full-toned young voice gave out the text his natural power of concentration resumed its sway, the glorious subject before him absorbed all his thoughts, and the natural fluency with which Henry Halford expressed his ideas did not forsake him now.

He had determined, long before his ordination, that he would adopt extemporaneous preaching, and as the subject he had chosen fired the intellectual powers and Christian principles of the young clergyman, his hearers sat mute with surprise and admiration.

The sermon might have been styled an exposition of the thirteenth chapter of the First of Corinthians, for not one of the attributes of charity did he omit to notice; but his text contained only these words—"The greatest of these is charity."

For more than half an hour did the congregation sit in breathless attention to the sound reasoning, the clear explanations, and the bursts of eloquence which almost electrified them; and when they rose as he finished his sermon, there was not one who did not feel sorry it was over.

But we are forgetting our friends in the front pew of the gallery. When Mary Armstrong bowed her head in the short prayer before the sermon, she had not particularly noticed the face of the new curate, as she supposed him to be. The voice, at first low and indistinct, presently sounded familiar. Yes, she had heard it before, but where? It ceased, and as she rose from her knees and directed her attention to the preacher, she recognised in the pale young clergyman before her, Henry Halford! One glance at her father, and she saw by his returned glance, that he also knew the name of the stranger who now as the servant of God stood forth fearlessly as the instructor of the man who loved his money better than his child's happiness.

Mary in her startled surprise felt the colour forsaking cheek and lips, and a tendency to faint; but with a strong effort she roused herself. To be carried out of church fainting was an ordeal she dreaded, and therefore struggled against with all her strength.

More than once Mr. Armstrong looked at her anxiously, but she did not flinch. No; she would stay and brave it all.

The conduct of Henry Halford also tended to restore her self-possession, and before long she as well as her father became too deeply interested in the sermon and the subject to think much of their surprise at finding who was the preacher.

The attentive congregation, the summer evening associations to which reference has been made, all had an influence upon the young girl's mind, and for years after she never attended a summer evening service in a country church without recalling this evening at Kilburn.

But when they rose to leave the church, there was a dread at Mary's heart of what her father might say or suspect.

Mr. Armstrong, as we know, had a foolish prejudice about clergymen, and although he attended church for the sake of appearances, and respected the old rector because he could not help it, still he did not cultivate his acquaintance, nor indeed the acquaintance of any families in Kilburn, except the Drummonds and one or two others.

But for this exclusiveness he would have heard not only that the rector had parted with his late curate, but also that he had engaged another, and that other the son of his old friend Dr. Halford. More than this, had not the heat formed an excuse for Mr. Armstrong, and a reason for his wife to remain at home on that Sunday morning, they would have heard Henry Halford read the forms which are necessary at the introduction of a newly ordained curate, and also the prayers as his first clerical act.

"Did you know young Halford was going to preach this evening, Mary?" was her father's first question as they proceeded homewards.

"No, papa; I did not even know that Mr. Halford was ordained."

Mr. Armstrong said no more, although while he asked the question he suddenly remembered

Cousin Sarah's information, and knew that Mary was too truthful for him to doubt her assertion for an instant. The remainder of the walk was continued in silence, both father and daughter busied with their own reflections.

"Cousin Sarah is right," said the money-loving father to himself; "there is great intellect, and a wonderful power of language and argument in that young schoolmaster, and he knows how to take up a text too, and interest his hearers. Once or twice in his definition of charity I fancied he was preaching *at* me, and in truth his arguments were very strong, although rather Utopian in theory. What would become of trade, and commerce, and money-getting in England or elsewhere, if we were to possess the 'charity that seeketh not her own, that thinketh no evil, or that suffereth long and is kind?' Where are the men of business who seek not their own? What would be thought of the tradesman who trusted those with whom he dealt without suspicion of evil? How would such conduct agree with the maxim, that 'every man is a rogue till you have proved him honest?' Where is the man, even with thousands at his banker's, who 'suffers long and is kind' to a debtor, before he punishes him with legal proceedings? And yet these are the words of the Bible, which we as Christians profess to believe. There must be something wrong at the root of *our* Christianity, if it cannot carry out the precepts of its Founder." And then the memory of Edward Armstrong presented to him a real proof that the precepts he had that evening heard were not so directly opposed to the spirit and tenor of good business habits and conduct as he imagined. No example of the charity spoken of by St. Paul more truly existed with active business habits than in the character of his own father; and then by a common association of ideas he remembered that in a few weeks Mary would be of age, and entitled to receive the legacy of 1000*l.* left her by her grandfather. "Why, even that sum would help her and the young parson to marry in comfort," he reflected. "It would at least insure a partnership for him in his father's school, and I have made Mary domestic enough, even for a schoolmaster's wife; and after she is of age I shall have no right to interfere with her." Mr. Armstrong sighed as the approach to his own gates put a stop to these reflections, yet he could not help saying to himself, "It would be a terrible downfall to all my ambitious projects for my daughter; I do not think I can give my consent after all."

The reader will understand what must have been the influence of Henry Halford's first sermon, to produce such reflections in the mind of Edward Armstrong.

The secret thoughts of his daughter may be summed up in a few words.

"Will my father change his mind now he sees how very clever Henry Halford is?" said the young girl to herself, in the pride and joy of her heart at his evident success in securing the attention of his hearers. "Can he ever expect I could give him up, even for a duke with 50,000*l.* a year?"

And then as she followed her father in, and listened with surprise as he described what had occurred to her mother, and even praised the subject and style of the sermon, a new feeling of hope arose in her heart which flushed her cheek and brightened her eye for the rest of the evening. Mrs. Armstrong noticed the look of happiness on her daughter's face, and when she wished her good night she whispered—

"You must tell me all about the sermon to morrow, darling."

But there were others in a quiet pew under the gallery at church who were really more personally interested in the first efforts of the young clergyman than even our friends at Lime Grove.

Kate Marston, Clara, Mabel, and James Franklyn were delighted listeners to the sermon which had so roused Mr. Armstrong. But to the aged father of Henry Halford came the memory of his dear wife's words, when they had consulted on the means and advisability of educating him for the Church. "We may hope to live to see our son a useful minister in the church," had been the mother's words, and that privilege had been denied her. Mrs. Halford had gone to her rest, and the old man's first words when he reached home and shook his son's hand warmly were, "In the midst of my gratification, Henry, I have only one cause for regret, and that is that your mother did not live to see this day."

"Better perhaps as it is, father," he replied. "You would not wish my dear mother back, especially when such trouble has fallen upon Arthur."

"No, no; ah, I forgot, you are right, it is all for the best, 'He doeth all things well.'"

Kate Marston stood by with tears of joy in her eyes; a true daughter and sister was she in heart to the bereaved husband and only child of her dear aunt Clara.

They had scarcely seated themselves at the supper-table, when a ring at the front gate startled every one, and presently the housemaid appeared with a pale face, and beckoned Henry Halford from the room.

"Oh, please sir, it's a telegraph boy, and he's brought this and he's to wait for an answer."

Henry closed the dining-room door as she spoke, and took the missive in his hand, feeling almost as alarmed as herself.

It was still twilight out of doors, and the hall gas not being lit, Henry walked to the glass door entrance to read the telegram, dreading he scarcely knew what.

He gave one hasty glance at the words, and read—

> "Dr. Gordon, Guy's Hospital, to Mr. Henry Halford, Englefield Grange.
>
> "A gentleman, with the initials A. F. on his clothes, is here dangerously ill; has asked for you. Come at once."

In a kind of bewilderment he looked round the hall, and saw the boy who waited for the answer.

"There is no answer necessary, my boy," he said, "you need not wait."

Then as the telegraph messenger sallied out at the still open door, Henry Halford turned hastily to the housemaid:—

"Go in quietly and tell Miss Marston she is wanted, Rebecca."

The girl obeyed, and presently that lady appeared with a startled look on her face.

"What is it, Henry?" she asked anxiously.

"Something that must not be mentioned suddenly before my father or Arthur's children," he replied; "read that, Kate."

He placed the telegram in her hands, and lighted the gas that she might read it.

"Rebecca," he said, as the girl passed from the dining-room, "I can trust to you, not to say one word to alarm any of the young people until Miss Marston has given a reason for my absence. I am going to London to-night; Mr. Franklyn is ill."

"I wont say a word to any one, Mr. Henry, I promise you," she replied.

"What can have happened?" said Kate Marston when they were again alone.

"It is impossible to say," he replied, "but I must not delay a moment; break the news gently to my father and the children, while I put a few things together in a carpet bag."

"But, Henry, you have had no supper, and after such a day of excitement too; oh! I am very sorry, let me bring you a glass of wine."

"No, no," he said, going upstairs two steps at a time, "I can get something in London, but you may find Bradshaw if you will, Kate."

Henry Halford was back again to the hall ready for his departure almost as quickly as Kate with the time-table.

"You have plenty of time," she said, "there, is a train at 9.40, and if you miss that, another at 10.5."

"Oh, thank you; all right, I can easily catch the 9.40. Good-by, Kate, make the best of it till you hear from me."

And so ended at Kilburn the Sunday on which Henry Halford entered upon his duties as a clergyman.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT GUY'S HOSPITAL.

While the train is speeding on with Henry Halford to the Euston Station, we will go back to the Friday afternoon when Arthur Franklyn was carried in an apparently lifeless state to Guy's.

When dragged from the water many voices were raised in eager haste. "Send for a doctor!" "Carry him to the hotel!" "No use, the man is dead!" "Nonsense, he hasn't been five minutes in the water." This and other confusing advice was, however, set aside by the appearance of two policemen with a cab. Putting back the crowd, they lifted in the apparently drowned man, and bidding the driver make haste, jumped in with him.

The rapid movement produced an unexpected effect. Before they were half over London Bridge the policeman who sat opposite to Arthur was startled at seeing the eyes of the supposed dead man open suddenly, and after a heavily drawn breath came the words, "My carpet bag! where is my carpet bag?" The wild eyes, the unexpected recovery, and the firmly uttered words took these officers of the law by surprise.

"All right, sir, don't you go worritting yourself about carpet bags; yours is all safe, I daresay," was all one of them could reply in a soothing tone before the cab stopped at the hospital entrance, to the great satisfaction of Arthur Franklyn's companions.

The medical officers were quickly in attendance, but the shock of the accident had so increased the feverish excitement of Arthur Franklyn, that on being taken out of the cab he struggled with those who held him, and exclaimed frantically, "I must go back! You shall not detain me! Where is

my carpet bag?"

Regardless of his almost frenzied manner, which they judged to arise from incipient disease, the attendants quickly relieved Arthur of his wet clothes; he was placed in bed, and the remedies against the consequences of a cold bath while in such a heated state vigorously applied.

But there were other causes at work in that excited brain at present unknown to the hospital doctors, and before night the patient was tossing from side to side of the bed in the alternate delirium and stupor which attends brain fever. His clothes were eagerly searched to find a letter or address which might give some clue to his friends, for he was evidently a gentleman, but with no success.

Arthur's great anxiety to conceal his name and his movements, now bid fair to elude all attempts to discover his relations. He had booked himself for the voyage under a false name, and the initials A. F. on his linen were of very little use.

In the midst of his delirium his words were so incoherent that none could be distinguished but the constant cry for the "carpet bag." At last, during the afternoon of Sunday, although still insensible to surrounding objects, his muttered words became more distinct.

Dr. Gordon was standing by his side listening anxiously to the wandering expressions of the patient, when Arthur Franklyn half-rose in the bed and exclaimed, "I must go to Kilburn! Ah! Henry Halford, what have I done! And you will tell Fanny." He sunk back exhausted as he uttered these words in a low piteous tone.

But this was enough for Dr. Gordon. He went to the county directory and quickly finding the name of Halford and Englefeld Grange, sent the telegram at once.

"I have telegraphed to the gentleman named by the patient," he said to the nurse; "he cannot be here before ten at the earliest, I will return by that time."

It was within an hour after receiving the message that the cab taken by Henry Halford at Euston Square reached London Bridge and drove to Guy's Hospital.

He was admitted at once to the presence of Dr. Gordon, who received the gentleman, whose clerical dress denoted his office, with great cordiality.

"I presume this gentleman is my brother-in-law," was the young clergyman's first remark, "by the initials A. F.; if so, his name is Arthur Franklyn: is he too ill to recognise me?"

"I fear so; he has been delirious ever since he was brought here, and until to-day he has not uttered a name with sufficient distinctness to be understood."

"What is the nature of his complaint?" asked Henry.

"Brain fever," replied the doctor; "and we have been obliged to have his head shaved, so that perhaps you may find a great difficulty in recognising him."

"We have almost feared he would have some attack of this kind," said Henry; "he has had a great amount of excitement during the last fortnight, since the sudden death of his wife in a railway carriage."

"What!" exclaimed Dr. Gordon, "are you referring to the case of Mrs. Franklyn? Of course, yes, that was the name. I read an account of it in the papers, and indeed such a painful occurrence was almost sufficient of itself to produce irritation of the brain, if this gentleman is Mr. Franklyn."

"I have no doubt of it, doctor; but my brother-in-law had apartments in London at the West End—how came he here?"

"I cannot ascertain the correct facts, but it appears that our patient was crossing a plank to go on board a steamer lying in the Thames at London Bridge, and fell into the river. He was recovered from the water quickly and brought to the hospital; a few minutes longer would have proved fatal to him. I have no doubt he lost his balance from giddiness, for this brain fever had been coming on for days."

"I suppose we cannot remove Mr. Franklyn yet?" said Henry.

"Remove him! my dear sir, no; impossible, till we can ascertain what turn the disorder takes; but you shall see him and judge for yourself."

Henry Halford followed the surgeon up the stairs in silence. He had never before entered an hospital, and through the open doors of the different wards as he passed, he caught glimpses of sufferers in the various stages and forms of disease, which reminded him of Milton's lines—

> Dire was the tossing, deep the groans; despair
> Tended the sick, busied from couch to couch;
> And over them triumphant death his dart
> Shook, but delayed to strike.

Yet the cleanliness and calm of the place made him thank God in his heart for these noble institutions, where the suffering poor can obtain every comfort and care in times of sickness, as

well as the most skilful medical advice. On a bed separated by a screen from the other patients lay Arthur Franklyn, but so changed in appearance that for a moment Henry Halford could scarcely recognise him.

The stricken man who lay tossing to and fro on the bed had nothing to remind us of Arthur Franklyn but his features, and even these were drawn and distorted. The shaven head, on which lay cloths steeped in vinegar; the flushed and heated face; the wild, dilated eyes, from which mind and soul had departed, leaving a blank look which seemed to mock their brilliance—all presented to the pitying eyes of the young clergyman a sight never to be forgotten.

"It *is* my brother-in-law, Dr. Gordon," he said at last; "but what a wreck of himself! He does not appear to know me in the least."

"Try what your voice can do," replied the doctor; "speak to him, Mr. Halford."

"Arthur! Arthur Franklyn!" he exclaimed, bending over the patient, "do you know me?"

The eyes turned towards him with a vacant look, but no recognition; and presently the muttering of delirium again commenced, in which Henry could now and then distinguish his own name and his sister's, as well as those of his children and his second wife.

"Is there any hope of his recovery, Dr. Gordon?" said Henry, almost in tears. "He has four motherless children."

"Well, I cannot deny that there is hope," he said; "for Mr. Franklyn has a good constitution, and may perhaps battle with the disease, but his recovery will be followed by a period of painful exhaustion. There is evidently something on his mind in addition to the excitement caused by the death of Mrs. Franklyn. He seems also to be in great trouble about the loss of his carpet bag, which fell with him into the water, but has not yet been recovered."

Dr. Gordon had spoken in a low tone, yet the ear of the sufferer caught the word. He started up in bed.

"Where is Henry? Tell him to find the carpet bag. I'll tell him what is in it. They cannot touch me; there's nothing they can prove. Ah, let me go for it. I must save my children!" and he attempted to get out of bed, but fell back, too much exhausted to resist the doctor in his firm efforts to prevent him.

"I can do no good by staying here, doctor," said Henry, after a pause; "but if you will kindly describe the spot where the accident took place, I can make inquiries about the carpet bag to-morrow. In the meantime, as Mr. Franklyn cannot be moved, I am sure we may leave him safely here, and pay whatever expenses are incurred for him while in the hospital."

"If his friends wish to do so, it can be easily arranged," said Dr. Gordon, as he and Henry descended the stairs; "and you may depend upon having a telegram from me should a change for the worse take place."

The two gentlemen parted at the door of the hospital, the one to wend his way homeward after his arduous duties, and the other to find himself in the streets of London on a Sunday night within half an hour of midnight.

He had left his own carpet bag at an hotel near Guy's, and here, after a day of excitement and fatigue, he was at last able to take some slight refreshment. Although almost without appetite he felt it as a duty he owed himself to try to eat a little.

"I must telegraph home and to the rectory in the morning," he said to himself as he sought this pillow; "if I stay in London till to-morrow I may perhaps hear something of this carpet bag which appears to disturb poor Arthur's mind so terribly."

Early next morning Henry was down at the wharf described by Dr. Gordon, and, without acknowledging his relationship, questioned those on the spot about the gentleman who had fallen into the water on the previous Friday.

Full particulars were soon obtained of the accident, and then his informant remarked—

"I suppose you see'd an account of the haccident in the papers, master?"

"No," he replied, almost with a start; "what paper is it in?"

"Oh, pretty nigh all on 'em, for you see we thought for sure the gentleman were dead; but he frightened the two bobbies that went with him in the cab above a bit by jumping up and crying out about his carpet bag. I suppose there was some valuables in that 'ere bag, but the Thames searchers have been a-looking for it ever since, and they ain't seen nothing on it yet."

Henry gave the man a gratuity, which made him touch the brim of his hat in token of approval.

Henry turned again as he moved to go—"Do you know the men who are searchers of the Thames?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, I knows 'em well."

"Tell them, then, that if they find this bag, and will send it to the Terminus Hotel, London Bridge, I will take care they are paid well for their trouble."

"I'll tell 'em, sir, all right," said the man.

Henry Halford returned to the hotel, and made an arrangement with the waiter respecting the missing bag.

"You can telegraph to me when it arrives," said Henry; "and if the men refuse to leave it, tell them to bring it again in a few hours and wait for me. Here is my card and address. You will be sure to attend to this, for it is very important."

"You may depend upon me, sir," said the man.

And then Henry turned his steps once more to Guy's Hospital.

Dr. Gordon was absent, but the house surgeon sent for Mr. Halford to his private room.

"I do not consider Mr. Franklyn worse or better," he said, in answer to Henry's inquiries. "He is quieter to-day, but with no lucid intervals. I think, however, that the disease is working itself out, and there is nothing for us but patience. Will you see him?"

"No, thank you, I think not to-day; but you will let me know when a change takes place?"

"Without fail, Mr. Halford, you may depend upon that."

The gentlemen parted cordially, and Henry, calling a cab, was driven to the Euston Station, almost dreading the return home, where he should appear as the bearer of such painful tidings.

While in the train Henry Halford reflected anxiously on what could be deposited in this carpet bag to cause his brother-in-law such painful anxiety. He had also not been able to discover to what steamer he was proceeding when attempting to cross the plank. All he could ascertain from the men about the wharf was that two or three steamers were moored alongside each other, one of them being a large Melbourne packet.

"Arthur could not have intended to leave England, or his children," said Henry to himself, "without informing us of his intentions, or taking leave of them."

This idea seemed so utterly improbable that Henry dismissed it from his mind as absurd.

"I will say nothing to excite suspicion at home," he thought. "There is real trouble enough in his illness without adding to it by conjecture of evil. We must wait patiently, and hope and pray for the poor fellow's recovery."

Henry Halford did not know that Arthur's boxes had been carried on shore from the Melbourne packet at Gravesend because the passenger whose name they bore was not on board when the ship arrived there. But the name on these boxes was not Franklyn.

Henry's appearance at Englefield Grange was hailed with trembling anxiety.

"Oh, uncle Henry," exclaimed Clara, with pale lips, "how is dear papa? We know all about the accident—it's in the *Times*."

"Stay, Clara dear," said Kate Marston; "your uncle looks tired and anxious. Only tell us one thing, Henry: have you seen Arthur, and is he still living?"

"Yes, Kate; he is in Guy's Hospital, and receiving every attention and kindness, but he is indeed most seriously ill. Don't grieve, my dear Clara," he continued, putting his arm round his niece as she burst into tears at his words, and leading her into the little breakfast parlour; "for grandpapa's sake, and your sister and brothers, keep up a brave spirit. Your dear father is in God's hands, and we must pray and hope."

Clara dried her tears and listened with painful interest to her uncle Henry's description of her poor father's accident, and the illness from which he now suffered.

But her uncle's words had aroused her usual calm self-possession, and she determined to subdue her own sorrow for the sake of those whom she loved so well.

Henry Halford, during the first few days of this sad week, was making himself acquainted with his duties as a curate, and while thus engaged, or busy in the schoolroom, he could banish from his mind the vague suspicions about Arthur which still troubled him when unemployed.

He was mourning over the impossibility of obtaining time to visit the hospital more frequently, when he was one morning surprised soon after breakfast by the appearance of Mr. Drummond and a gentleman whom he introduced as his nephew, George Longford.

On entering the drawing-room, Mr. Drummond came forward with eager sympathy, and taking Henry's offered hand, he exclaimed—

"My dear Henry, I am indeed grieved to hear of these overwhelming troubles which have fallen upon your family in such quick succession, and I and my nephew are come to offer our services if agreeable."

"Pray be seated," said Henry, placing chairs for his visitors.

"Thank you, no; we have only a few moments to stay, and our business is soon told. My nephew George, who is staying with us for a short time, is walking the hospitals. He will be at Guy's every

day, and will gladly bring you news—good news, I hope—respecting Mr. Franklyn on his return each evening to my house."

"It is indeed a very kind proposal," said Henry, "I shall be most grateful, for we have my brother-in-law's four children here, and the elder ones are of course very anxious about their father. Unfortunately, it is my first initiation into parish work this week, and as we are within a fortnight of the midsummer vacation my presence is required in the schoolroom almost constantly, and I cannot visit the hospital as often as I could wish."

"I had some idea of all these difficulties," said Mr. Drummond, "but my nephew's reports will relieve you of this anxiety, so make yourself easy on the matter."

"You may depend upon me," said George Longford, as the gentlemen hurried away after shaking hands warmly; "you shall have the latest information every evening. I will call here on my way home."

Henry Halford parted from the gentlemen with cordial and earnest thanks. It would be a great mental relief to him as well as to Kate Marston to receive daily information respecting Arthur. They already began to feel the responsibility which the care of Arthur's children involved, not so much on account of the additional expense, but from their motherless condition.

"I do hope poor Arthur wont die and leave these poor children fatherless as well as motherless," said Kate Marston on the day Mr. Drummond had called, "but I suppose there will be plenty of money to support them in case of such a sad event."

"No matter if there is not, Kate; my father would never forsake dear Fanny's children. Neither would I, even if they were left penniless."

"I know that well," she replied, her eyes filling with tears. "Uncle has been a second father to me for half my life—since I was left an orphan."

"We must not anticipate evil, Kate," said her cousin. "I hope all will end well with poor Arthur, although it would grieve you painfully to see how he is changed. But where is the *Times*? I have not read the paragraph Clara spoke of yesterday."

Kate fetched the paper, and pointing to the paragraph, placed it in his hands.

Henry took it nervously. The mystery of the carpet bag still haunted him, and seemed ominous of evil. He glanced hurriedly over the account, which ran as follows:—

"Dangerous Accident.—On Friday afternoon a gentleman, in attempting to cross a plank from the shore near London Bridge to reach a distant steamer, lost his footing and fell into the water. With great difficulty he was brought to land by the activity and energy of those around him. He was immediately taken in a cab to Guy's Hospital, but recovering animation before he reached there, he showed by evident signs that he must have been under the influence of incipient brain fever, for he called frantically for his carpet bag, which had fallen with him into the river. He is now lying in a very precarious state at the hospital. We understand from good authority that the gentleman who has had such a narrow escape from drowning is Mr. Arthur Franklyn, whose wife died suddenly in a railway carriage a few weeks since. His present state, and the accident that preceded it, may therefore be easily accounted for under such painful circumstances."

"It is no more than I expected," said Kate, as her cousin threw down the paper. "Arthur has looked dreadfully ill since poor Louisa's death. Do you know, Henry, I fear he has no claim on her property after all."

"What makes you think so?" asked Henry, in surprise.

"Oh, the remark he made to me on the day he started for London after you left. I understood him to say that he had taken no steps to ascertain his position with regard to his wife's property before his marriage."

"I had some suspicions that such was the case," replied Henry, "when he asked me to recommend him a lawyer; and I believe he had been with Mrs. Franklyn to call on Mr. Norton for the purpose of arranging for him to witness certain signatures on the day of her sudden death. It certainly will be a disappointment to Arthur if his second wife's property is all lost to him; but from his own account of his position and means I do not suppose he will feel it much—at all events we must hope so."

Kate made no reply. She had seen more of Arthur Franklyn during his visit than her cousin, and she could not get rid of the idea that a great deal of the uneasy and perturbed state of mind so evident in his manner and appearance was caused by anxiety about money.

George Longford, according to his promise, brought to Englefield Grange daily accounts of Arthur Franklyn's state—at times alarming, at others hopeful.

More than once Henry visited the hospital to obtain personally the opinion of the surgeons, yet nearly a week passed before his brother-in-law was able in a lucid interval to recognise him.

But this recognition was attended with painful results. For a few minutes the sick man spoke calmly to Henry, and listened to his kind and hopeful words. Suddenly, as if stung by some painful recollection, he exclaimed—

"Go, go; you are come to reproach me! O Fanny, Fanny, what have I done! My children, my children! Don't revenge yourself on them, Henry, by letting them starve!"

Poor Henry was hurried away, and returned home agonised by the thought, not only that his presence at the hospital might have hastened his brother-in-law's death, but also by the terrible fear which his words had suggested. What, oh! what had poor Arthur done?

Nothing now remained but patience and hope, yet as week after week passed by all hope seemed to die in the hearts of his children and the loving friends in whose care they were placed.

Not till the second week in July could Arthur Franklyn be pronounced out of danger; and in this hopeful condition we will leave him, to return to our friends at Kilburn.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CHARLES HERBERT GIVES HIS OPINION.

Mrs. Armstrong had seen very little of her eldest sister for years, nor of Mrs. Herbert since Mary's visit to Park Lane. Sir James Elstone, the old admiral, still resided with his wife in the south of France. He was, as we know from Mrs. Lake's information to Edward Armstrong before his marriage, more than thirty years older than Louisa St. Clair, and was now eighty years of age. Louisa, although she bore the title of Lady Elstone, performed the office of a kind and faithful nurse to her aged husband, who was fast sinking into the grave.

Her sister Helen, Mrs. Herbert, possessed the good health and sunny temper which made her society always welcome at the homes of her two sisters. Maria had a family to care for, and she was naturally a home bird; and besides, she had a sweet companion and comforter in her daughter Mary.

Mrs. Herbert, while her son was away, had no home ties, and the colonel, who had spent more than half his life in India, preferred the beautiful climate of the Mediterranean to the fogs and uncertain weather of England. All these facts were turned into arguments in favour of her request by Lady Elstone when she wrote and asked her sister Helen and the colonel to join them at their *château* on the shores of the Mediterranean. This invitation arrived soon after Mary's visit to Park Lane, and a year had elapsed since Mrs. Armstrong had seen her sister Helen, who, however, kept up a constant correspondence with Mary.

On the Tuesday morning, at the time when Kate Franklyn placed Monday's *Times* in the hands of her cousin, Henry Halford, Mary sat reading to her mother a letter of many pages from her favourite aunt. She had already on the previous day read and commented upon the paragraph referred to with earnest sympathy. Not even her mother could guess the longing in her daughter's heart to be able to show that sympathy to the children of the suffering father, and the nieces and nephews of Henry Halford. But another subject occupied her now. Charles Herbert's regiment was on its way to England from Canada, and Mrs. Herbert in her letter stated that they hoped to be in Park Lane to receive their son before the end of July, and that Mrs. Armstrong and her daughter were to expect a very speedy visit to Lime Grove after their arrival.

"We were sorry to leave poor Aunt Louisa just at this time," wrote Mrs. Herbert, "for the old admiral cannot last long. However, your uncle has promised to go to her at a moment's notice, for at her husband's death there will be too much for a woman to manage, especially with lawyers."

All Mary's pity for her aunt Louisa could not serve to control her pleasure at the prospect of seeing her aunt and uncle and cousin Charles.

"O mamma!" she said, as she refolded the crinkly sheets of foreign paper, "is not this delightful news—at least all excepting that about poor Aunt and Uncle Elstone? but Aunt Louisa is a much greater stranger to me than Aunt Helen, she has lived abroad so long with uncle. But I shall count the days till Aunt Helen comes; are you not pleased, mamma?"

"Indeed I am," said Mrs. Armstrong; "but, Mary, if you are invited again to Park Lane, are you prepared to accept the invitation?"

"Not for longer than a day or two, mamma, and I don't think Aunt Helen will ask me; she was too much annoyed about the consequences of my visit last year; you remember what she said about it."

"Yes, Mary; but, my child, you will be one-and-twenty next month; have you made up your mind to remain single all your life?"

"Yes, mamma," said Mary, with a merry laugh; "*I* mean to be a useful old maid, attending to my dear mother, and that 'blessing to mothers,' a kind maiden aunt to the children of my brothers when they are married——"

"Unless——" said Mrs. Armstrong, with a smile.

"Unless what, mamma? An impossibility?"

"What is impossible, Mary?"

"Why, for papa to change his mind. After he has once made a resolve he adheres to it, even when he has been convinced that he is in error."

"He considers that adherence to his resolve is a manly firmness of purpose," said her mother.

"Well, mamma, this firmness of purpose puzzles me sometimes, for a great writer has said that the man who changes an erroneous opinion after being convinced that it is wrong proves that he is wiser when he changes it than he was when he formed it."

"A little bit of philosophy, Mary," said her mother, smiling; "and so I suppose you consider the *unless* an impossibility?"

"Indeed I do, mamma, so we will not talk about it;" and rising hastily as if to strengthen her determination, she seated herself at the piano, and commenced practising a somewhat difficult sonato of Beethoven's.

The weeks passed away, and the morning of the 15th of July dawned in summer glory, giving a promise that for once St. Swithin would be propitious. There was a strange sense of happiness in Mary's heart as she entered the dining-room, and looked out upon the distant hills of Highgate and Harrow, which appeared almost transparent beneath the purple haze that rested upon them.

The source of Mary's happiness was a slight one, it is true, but it augured better things, and was therefore tinted with the rainbow hues of hope. She had driven her puny carriage to the station the evening before to meet her father, who, having encountered Mr. Drummond on the platform, invited him to take a seat in the carriage as far as the Limes.

The offer was accepted, and Mr. Drummond, quite unaware that he was touching on dangerous ground, remarked, as soon as the carriage started—

"What a narrow escape from death that young man, Arthur Franklyn, has had! but he is so much better to-day, that they are going to remove him to the Isle of Wight on Tuesday or Wednesday. I am heartily glad of it, for the sake of those poor motherless children."

"Yes, indeed, it would be a great burden and expense to their grandfather to have to provide for four children, which I suppose he can ill afford."

"I don't know that, Armstrong, even if their father was not in a position to make provision for their maintenance. Of course it would add to his expenses, but not beyond his means. What made you think otherwise?"

"Oh!" replied Mr. Armstrong, who already began to regret having offered his friend a lift, "well, schoolmasters are always poor as a rule, and in some cases half-educated; but," he continued hastily, "Dr. Halford is certainly an exception to the latter assumption."

"Schoolmasters in provincial towns and villages are not as a rule men of education; it was especially so when we were boys," said Mr. Drummond, firing a shot at a venture, which made Mr. Armstrong wince; "but my friend Dr. Halford is also an exception to your first assertion. Why, he gave his daughter 1000*l.* on her wedding-day, and I know it has cost him nearly another thousand to educate his son for the Church."

"Was not that a waste of money, if he intended him to be a schoolmaster as he now is?"

"No, certainly not; with a university education, a man who has been accustomed from his boyhood to teaching and school routine is beyond all others most suitable to conduct a school. And besides," continued Mr. Drummond, "what are the head masters of Eton and Harrow, or Rugby, but schoolmasters and gentlemen? and how often have the masters of these schools been chosen for the office of bishop! and some eventually have attained to the position of Archbishop of Canterbury."

"Well, I confess," said Mr. Armstrong, "I have been too much engrossed in business matters to acquire a knowledge of these particulars, and perhaps I have gained my ideas from my experience in youth, and from the general opinion of business men. The idea that a schoolmaster could give his daughter 1000*l.* on her wedding-day would have appeared to me years ago an impossibility."

"There are hundreds of educated clever men who are as successful as Dr. Halford," replied Mr. Drummond, "and he only began with a small capital, left him at his father's death, and with the recommendation of the late Lord Rivers, father of his pupil, the present earl. He has good but not exorbitant terms, his boys are all of the better class, the family live in a comfortable but not extravagant style, and I know that the doctor's income, not net of course, has averaged from two to three thousand a year for many years."

They were drawing near Lime Grove as Mr. Drummond spoke, and for a few moments silence ensued, then he remarked suddenly—

"Setting aside the subject of schoolmasters, Armstrong, what do you think of our new curate?"

In spite of the firmness with which Mary had restrained the inclination to glance at her father, who sat by her side during this conversation, she could not resist doing so now.

The movement of the head was, however, unnoticed by her father, who, with all his foolish prejudices and stubborn will, had a keen sense of justice.

His answer came, spontaneous and candid—

"I consider Mr. Henry Halford a clever, intellectual, and gentlemanly young man, and one of the finest preachers and readers I ever heard in my life."

"Well done, Armstrong, that is a testimony worth having, for you are a good judge, and so are the people of Kilburn, for the old church is filling tremendously; and now we are at your house. Thank you very much for this lift on the road."

"Let Mary drive you home, Drummond," said her father as the gentleman alighted, "or Rowland can do so if you like," for Mary's old protector in childish rides is still Mr. Armstrong's groom.

But Mr. Drummond refused. "No, no," he said, "I shall like the walk home, thank you, Miss Armstrong, all the same," for Mary sat still holding the reins, waiting for his decision.

He assisted her to alight as he spoke, and then after a pleasant farewell Mr. Drummond turned towards home, and father and daughter entered the house.

Mary went upstairs to her room to prepare for dinner, with sunshine at her heart. It had been pleasant to hear Mr. Drummond combat her father's opinions with so much energy, but what was that compared to his evidently truthful testimony respecting Henry Halford?

How every word of that praise was echoed in her own heart! more especially because she knew that her father would not have uttered such an opinion in her presence had he not truly felt what he said.

She had described the conversation and its delightful termination to her mother, who smiled, but said nothing either to damp her joy or encourage her hopes.

But the word *unless*, and the remarks it occasioned, arose from what had passed between Mr. Drummond and her father on the preceding evening.

On the morning of the day on which her uncle, aunt, and Cousin Herbert were expected, we left Mary standing at the window of the dining-room and looking out on the summer landscape, while waiting for the urn to make the tea and prepare breakfast as usual.

During this meal the conversation naturally turned on their expected visitors, who had promised to remain till Monday or Tuesday.

"They called at Dover Street yesterday," said Mr. Armstrong, "to give notice of their arrival, and to tell me not to expect them to-day till about four o'clock. They will drive down in the open carriage, for Helen says she means to explore the country with you, Maria; and the horses can travel farther than Mary's ponies."

"Aunt Helen does not know the capabilities of my ponies," said Mary, laughing, "and three days will not give us time enough to do much. Poor old Boosey, he is quite discarded now; but he does not appear in the least jealous because the other horses work and he is allowed to be idle."

"Very likely not," said Mr. Armstrong, laughing; "but he must expect to work all the harder when the boys come home."

Mr. Armstrong rose at the sound of his horse's feet at the gate. He still at times rode Firefly to town; he could not part with the horse on which he had accompanied his daughter so often in her evening rides, although the railway, when Mary drove him to the station, was a great convenience.

Mary's lively remarks about her ponies had produced a twinge of conscience in her father; her manner reminded him of olden times, before he had crushed her girlish hopes by refusing a young man of whom he knew nothing, and without any inquiries as to his family and position, also while under the influence of prejudices which Mr. Drummond had flung to the winds.

These foolish prejudices had induced Mr. Armstrong to place his two elder boys at a public school, and Freddy with a lady who took little boys under ten. But Mr. Drummond's remarks had proved that there existed private schools, with masters equally clever and gentlemanly. He knew also that the bright looks and cheerful tones of his daughter arose from his clearly expressed opinion of Henry Halford the evening before.

"I am afraid I shall have to give way at last," he said to himself as he rode slowly along the Kilburn Road; "but it will defeat all my schemes for my daughter's future. What a splendid match such a girl as she is might have made but for this unfortunate acquaintance with the son of a schoolmaster! However, the Herberts are coming by-and-by. I must get Helen to talk to Mary. Mrs. Herbert's mother was proud and ambitious enough about her daughters, and had I not had money"—and he paused as a memory arose, and then added, "and the love and gratitude of Maria St. Clair, I should have had but a poor chance."

Such reflections as these always aroused conscience in Mr. Armstrong's heart. He loosened Firefly's bridle, and the spirited though well-trained animal started off at a trot towards town, scattering his rider's painful thoughts with every movement.

But Mr. Armstrong's hopes of gaining allies in his wife's relations were very quickly crushed.

When he returned home he found the colonel and his wife seated in the drawing-room with Mrs. Armstrong, and Mary walking round the garden with her cousin.

"Come and show me the garden, Mary," had been the request of the captain after she had laughingly joked him on his large black whiskers and generally fierce appearance, and she had readily complied with his wish.

"So you are not married yet, Mary," were his first words, as they stood for a moment on the steps leading into the garden to admire the prospect; "why, I heard such accounts from my mother of your conquests and splendid offers, that I almost expected to find my pretty cousin a duchess or at least a countess."

"Oh, don't joke about these things, cousin Charles," she replied, with a flush on her face and a quivering lip, "you cannot think what pain it gave me to refuse these gentlemen who so kindly preferred me to others, but I could not have married any of them."

Charles Herbert observed the flush and the trembling lip, and for a short distance they walked on in silence. "There is something hidden under all this," he said to himself; "my mother wont tell me anything, but I mean to find out."

They continued their walk, now and then pausing to notice the beautiful flowers that bordered their path. Mary, who had quickly recovered herself, soon convinced her cousin that she knew more of botany than he did.

They turned into a pleasant walk bordered with shrubs and overshadowed with trees, and reached the shrubbery.

"Mary," said her cousin suddenly, "tell me the truth; I have a reason for asking; is Henry Halford at the bottom of all this indifference to wealth and position and that sort of thing?"

Mary's eyes filled with tears; the presence of her cousin Charles had recalled to her memory the happy week at Oxford, and the reminiscences thus aroused were more than she could bear unmoved. She turned very pale, but she had no wish to disguise the truth from her cousin, the playmate of her childhood; and she said—

"I will tell you the truth, Charles. Henry Halford wrote to papa, but I never saw the letter. Papa wrote a refusal without asking me, and I knew nothing of these letters till nearly a year afterwards."

"Who told you then?"

"Poor Mrs. Halford. She became paralysed and weak-minded after the death of her daughter, and used to be drawn about in an invalid-chair. One day when I was walking with mamma we met her, and then in some way she slipped it out. It was the very day that Captain Fraser called upon papa and asked him for me."

"And was this the real cause of your refusing Captain Fraser?"

"I could never have married him, Charlie," she said. "You know what he is; nor could I if he had been worth 50,000*l.* a year instead of twelve; so I should have refused him at all events; but hearing about Henry Halford's letter made me more decided. Oh, Charles, don't remind me of that time; I never saw papa so angry in my life, but I kept firm."

"And this Mr. Halford—do you think he is still attached to you?"

"I don't know; don't ask any more questions, Charlie. I'm sure I've told you quite enough." And Mary spoke with her usual vivacity: she had dried her tears and decked her face with smiles, but her cousin had touched upon too tender a string to be made the subject of cousinly conversation.

The sound of the dinner-bell happened opportunely at this moment, and Charles entered the dining-room with his cousin on his arm, to receive a warm welcome from the uncle who had once saved him from a watery grave.

The conversation at dinner turned upon Mrs. Herbert's recollections of her pleasant stay at Lady Elstone's on the shores of the Mediterranean, but she very quickly gave place to her son. Her recent visit to the Château de Lisle was not her first, but Charlie's description of Canada and its inhabitants had all the freshness of novelty, and was listened to with great interest.

During dessert, however, as they sat trifling with the summer fruit, and enjoying the sweet evening breeze that fluttered the muslin window curtains, Charles made his first plunge.

After what Mary had told him he had braced his nerves to expect an outburst of anger from his irascible uncle, but he knew Mary too well to fear a scene on her part.

"So my friend Henry Halford is ordained, I hear," were the words that covered Mary's face with blushes, and threw a silence on every one present except Mr. Armstrong, who said with a flushed face and a look of contempt—

"*Your* friend, Charles? Ah, yes, I remember, I have been told you had that honour."

"It has not been a constant or intimate friendship," he replied; "but I was a fellow-pupil with him

at Dr. Mason's for two years while he was preparing for the university. I did not at first recognise him when we met at Oxford, but as the intimate associate of Horace Wilton I consider the friendship of such a man as Henry Halford a very high honour."

There was a pause, during which Mrs. Armstrong would have given the signal for leaving the table, but she wished to hear what Charles had to say, and she did not fear an outbreak on the part of her husband in such company.

"I have heard Charles speak of this young man while with Dr. Mason," said the colonel; "he was then a youth of remarkable powers and intellectual tastes; his relations are neighbours of yours, Armstrong?"

"Yes; father and son are schoolmasters," was the curt reply.

Edward Armstrong, finding all his preconceived notions and objections slipping from under his feet, began to feel slightly irritable.

Mrs. Armstrong saw it, and gave the signal, of which her sister and Mary very gladly availed themselves, leaving the three gentlemen alone.

"There is nothing detrimental in a man of education filling the place of a schoolmaster," remarked the colonel, taking up the subject again after the ladies had left; "besides, this young man is now a clergyman, and admissible to the highest circles in the kingdom."

"I've heard all that over and over again lately," replied Mr. Armstrong, quietly; the presence of his daughter had been the chief cause of his rising irritation. It appeared to him as if every one was endeavouring to counteract in her mind the mean opinion which he wished her to form of the man whom she placed in the way of her most brilliant offers.

"The truth is, colonel," he continued, "I cannot deny the talents and other estimable qualities of this young parson; he is good-looking, gentlemanly, and a preacher of remarkable powers, but I cannot forgive him for aspiring to the hand of my daughter, and preventing her from marrying into a position which her talents, her education, and her personal attractions would obtain for her, independently of the 15,000*l.* or 20,000*l.* I could give her as a marriage portion."

"Well, if the young people like each other I'm very sorry for them, that's all I can say; however, you know your own affairs best, Armstrong, so we've nothing to object to on the matter."

This acquiescence on the part of the straightforward old soldier did more to shake Mr. Armstrong's stubborn will than a large amount of opposition. The responsibility of securing his daughter's happiness or misery for life rested now on his own shoulders, and he shrunk from its weight; therefore when Charles ventured to say—

"I suppose, uncle, you wont object to my going to church to-morrow to hear my friend preach?"

"Of course not, my boy," was the reply, in a kind tone; "we attend the parish church regularly, where Mr. Halford is curate."

"Not a very wise plan, I should imagine," said the colonel, "to allow a young girl to sit and listen to the eloquence of the man you wish her to despise and forsake, and to know also that crowds of hearers are brought to church to listen with breathless attention to the words of one who, because he is not rich, is to be set aside for those that are, however inferior in intellect or appearance."

"I am inclined to think Mary has got over all her lovesick nonsense about this young man. I'm her father, and she has from a child been accustomed to give up her own wishes to mine; she has done so now, and therefore I have no hesitation in allowing her to attend the church, more especially as I know her religious feelings will enable her to forget the reader and preacher in his subject."

The colonel changed the topic of conversation; these fallacious arguments of the self-willed, prejudiced man irritated him, and after a short time a summons to coffee took them into the drawing-room.

Next day at church, after the morning service, Charles Herbert renewed his friendship with Henry Halford, the colonel and Mrs. Herbert also warmly recalling the pleasant visit at Oxford, and expressing their pleasure at meeting him again.

Mr. Armstrong and Mary drew back after the distant bow which now formed their only recognition of Dr. Halford and his family, but Henry was only too glad to introduce his venerable father and his sister's children to his friend Charles Herbert and his parents.

Mr. Armstrong led his daughter forward till they were joined by the colonel and his wife.

"Charles is walking home with his friend," said Mrs. Herbert; "what a clever young man Mr. Halford is! I observed that he preaches extemporaneously."

"There is no doubt of his cleverness," said Mr. Armstrong; and then they discussed the subject and manner of the discourse, as members of a congregation often do, without thinking of its application to themselves.

Charles Herbert accompanied the family of Dr. Halford to Englefield Grange, and while talking to

Henry about old days could not avoid a glance now and then at the tall, handsome, self-possessed girl who walked by her uncle's side.

Henry pressed him to remain to an early dinner, but he excused himself on account of being a visitor at Lime Grove: however, he promised to call the next day, and after a friendly leave-taking turned away with rapid steps to join his relations, whom he overtook at a short distance from the garden entrance.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

REPENTANCE.

August at the seaside, its sultry sunbeams softened by a breeze from the ocean, bringing health and vigour to worn-out frames, calmness and relief to overworked brains, and rest to the toilers in the battlefield of life. There is peace in the movement of the rippling waves, peace even in the sound as they dash lazily on the shore, and a feeling of rest in the aspect of the calm, smooth water, when its flowing tide is scarcely perceptible, and boats with their white sails are mirrored in its depths.

In the afternoon of a sultry day in August two gentlemen might be seen near the open window of a drawing-room in the Isle of Wight.

One of them is lying on a couch drawn close to the window, his pale face and delicate features plainly denoting a state of convalescence after a severe attack of illness. The eyes are large and bright, and the hair after a growth of six weeks just covers the head. The hands are thin and delicate, and the whole appearance and attitude betoken great weakness.

"Have you quite got over the fatigue of the journey, Arthur?" asks the other gentleman, in whom we recognise Henry Halford.

"Yes, quite," was the reply; "I am not so weak as I appear, Henry; I walked on the beach for a long distance this morning, and that accounts for my languid condition now. How are the little ones?"

"Quite well and happy, Arthur, and all send their love to papa and Clara. Where is she?"

"I sent her out with the nurse, she is assiduous in her attentions to me, and I am obliged to enforce the necessity of a walk sometimes. Dear child, I used to fear she would grow up forward and pert as well as precocious. These troubles seem to have sobered her, yet it very much interferes with the formation of a girl's character when she looks so womanly at sixteen as Clara does."

While Arthur Franklyn spoke, Henry could not avoid comparing the style of his present conversation to the light-hearted, jocular talk of olden times, proving that trouble had sobered the father as well as the daughter.

"Shall I leave you to have a little nap before dinner, Arthur?" he said.

"No, Henry, there are so many things on my mind that I wish to talk about, and you would answer no questions nor hear anything I had to say when we first arrived; but I have been here a week, and I feel so much stronger and better, there can be no possible objection now."

"I am half-afraid to allow you to excite yourself, Arthur; would it not be wiser to wait another week?"

"No, no, Henry, you cannot tell what a relief it will be to my mind to unburden my heart to you. We shall not be interrupted, for I desired nurse to keep Clara out till four o'clock; this anxiety retards my recovery."

"Well, my dear fellow, if it will really help you to get well I am ready to listen and answer questions, but remember you are not to excite yourself;" and Henry Halford drew a chair near his brother-in-law's couch and seated himself to listen.

"First then," said Arthur, "tell me one thing—did I rave about a carpet bag in my delirium?"

"Well, yes," said Henry, wonderingly; "I suppose it must have fallen with you into the river."

"Has it been found?"

"It was not brought to Englefield Grange for weeks after your accident; the bag and its contents are in a terrible condition from the action of the water."

"Were any papers amongst the *débris*?"

"One, completely reduced to a pulp, the writing upon it scarcely legible; it appeared quite useless, so I burnt it!"

"Thank God!" and Arthur as he spoke closed his eyes, and clasped his hands, showing that the words were not a mere commonplace expression, but came direct from the heart.

Henry Halford looked at him in surprised silence. Presently Arthur startled him by rising suddenly and laying his hand on his brother's arm.

"Henry," he said, "don't shrink from me with horror; on that paper which you have destroyed I had forged my dead wife's name after her death."

"Arthur, my dear fellow," said Henry, "pray lie down and compose yourself; I feared you would get excited. If you will lie quiet for awhile we can talk about this paper by-and-by."

"You think my brain is becoming disturbed again," said Arthur, lying back quietly at Henry's bidding, "but indeed I am telling you the truth. I have not yet dared to utter a word to anyone on the subject, and if you will not listen to me I must carry the burden with me to my grave."

Quite convinced by the calm tones and the earnest words, Henry Halford placed his hand on the arm of his brother, and said, "Have you taken your burden to God, Arthur?"

"Ah, that is what dear Fanny would have said; but how could I venture to take my trouble there, when it is caused by sin, and is therefore my just punishment?"

"Arthur," said Henry, "while you were a boy at my father's school, did you not study your Bible sufficiently to know how ready God is to pardon and forgive?"

"I have forgotten Him for years, Henry, and He left me to myself to fall. But let me tell you all the circumstances. That document in the carpet bag, if I had taken it to Australia and negotiated it there, as I quite intended to do, would have no doubt led to my conviction as a forger; I can see it now clearly, and I must have been mad at the time to suppose I could so act and escape. The truth is, I married my second wife under false pretences; she supposed I was well off, and yet I had no income, and my debts in Melbourne amounted to more than 1000*l.* I could not, therefore, make any inquiries about Louisa's power over her fortune, from a dread of questions from her friends about myself. After our marriage she gave into my hands a few hundred pounds which she had in the bank; but when I stated to her that I required more to obtain a partnership in a firm, I discovered that her property was invested in the power of trustees, one of whom resided in England. I gladly availed myself of the opportunity for bringing over my children to visit their mother's relations, and proposed that if Louisa would agree to advance me 2000*l.* we could obtain the signature of her trustee in Australia, and forward the document by mail to England, so as to be ready for completion when we arrived.

"On the morning of poor Louisa's death all necessary arrangements had been made. Her trustee in England had signed the document, and her signature only in the presence of a witness was needed to complete it. Mr. Norton engaged to meet us at Englefield Grange on that evening to witness the signature, and you will remember he called, but I was unable even to speak to him."

Henry silently assented, and Arthur went on. "I cannot describe to you the agonies of that night. The 2000*l.*, part of which was to pay my debts, had slipped from my grasp; ruin to myself and my children stared me in the face. I had a little flask of brandy in my pocket, which we had brought with us on the journey. I am not accustomed to spirits, and the brandy I drank that night first exhilarated and then almost maddened me. In a kind of frenzy I sat for an hour imitating on scraps of paper Louisa's writing, and that of another, whose name I need not mention. And then, oh, Henry! I signed the two names on the document, and one of them was, to all appearance, the handwriting of the dead! During that dreadful week I kept up my courage with that fatal spirit. You all attributed my stupefied and callous manner to the shock of Louisa's death, and pitied and sympathised with me. I left you and came to London, with the determination to sail as quickly as possible to Australia, that I might obtain money on the deed, and turn it to account in some speculation which would enable me to refund the money and recover the document before it was sent to England. It was a wild scheme, such a one as Satan often uses to lead on his victims to their destruction. I can see that now; I was saved from farther sin by the accident, and painful as my punishment has been, I trust I am thankful for it."

"But," said Henry, "why did you not carry the paper in your pocket book?"

"Henry, I dared not risk it; I seemed to have the presentiment of an accident, and dreaded the discovery of the paper upon my person. When I found myself falling on that day of sorrows, and felt the carpet bag slip from my hand, I cannot describe my feelings; no wonder I raved about it in my delirium."

"It is a most painful history," said Henry, after a pause, "and you may well be thankful for the accident which saved you from further sin, and perhaps disgrace. I need not ask whether you have repented, Arthur, for indeed your act was a breach of the laws both of God and man. It was ——"

"Don't hesitate, Henry, call it by its right name, 'forgery.' Truly, truly, have I repented in dust and ashes, and I can say like David, 'I abhor myself.'"

"Dear Arthur," said the young clergyman, as he saw the tears of real contrition stealing down the cheeks of his brother-in-law, "if such is your repentance, you can continue to use David's words in the Psalm, 'Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.'"

Henry Halford rose as he spoke, and gave the invalid a portion of the mixture which stood on the table, and after awhile Arthur revived, and could listen calmly to another subject.

"If you wish to relieve your mind still farther of all anxiety, Arthur," said his brother-in-law presently, "I have some letters in my pocket addressed to you. Would you like to open them? they may contain good news."

"Yes, oh yes; where are they?" he exclaimed eagerly.

Henry drew from his pocket three letters, and placing one in Arthur's hand, said—

"Suppose you begin with that, Arthur."

The invalid took the letter and opened it, Henry watching his countenance half in fear as he saw the flush and look of astonishment, and the rapid glance over its contents; but then laying it down he closed his eyes, as if unable to understand what he had read.

"Henry," he said presently, "read it to me; it is incomprehensible."

"No, Arthur, not quite," he replied, as he took up the letter; "and perhaps I can enlighten you. Mr. Norton called upon me a few days ago, and stated that the trustees had come to a decision respecting the payment of some money which you would have received had your wife lived, and have only been waiting for the consent of all parties. Mr. Norton wished me to inform you of their intention, but I advised him to write to you on the subject. He has done so, and this is the letter.

"Read it, Henry, read it; God has been too good to me in the midst of all my sinful conduct if the contents of that letter are true."

"He is wont to give us more than even we desire or deserve," said Henry, as he opened the letter.

> "Lincoln's Inn, Aug. 12th, 18—.
>
> "My Dear Sir,—I am desired by the trustees of the late Mrs. Louisa Franklyn's property to express their deep sympathy with you in the great loss you have sustained by her death, and also their hopes that you are recovering from the serious illness which has followed your accident.
>
> "With respect to a deed which was not completed by Mrs. Franklyn at the time of her lamented death, I am directed to state that, in consequence of a certain clause in the will of the late Mr. Howard, your late wife's first husband, you are not entitled to claim any of her property, the heir-at-law being Mr. William Lynn Howard, the testator's nephew.
>
> "In consideration of these circumstances the trustees of the late Mrs. Franklyn are willing, with the consent of Mr. William Lynn Howard, to make over to you the 2000*l.* which you could have legally claimed had Mrs. Franklyn lived a few hours longer to complete the legal document which only required her witnessed signature.
>
> "On receipt of your reply accepting this proposal, the necessary papers will be forwarded for your signature.
>
> "I remain, dear sir, faithfully yours,
>
> "E. Norton."

For a time there was silence between the two men, each being too much overcome to speak. At length Arthur Franklyn exclaimed—

"Oh, Henry, if I had only confided my circumstances to you, and waited and trusted, I might have been spared the recollection of this dreadful fall from rectitude and honour, which will leave a blot on my conscience to the end of my days."

"Then it will serve as a beacon and a warning to you in your future career, Arthur; when tempted and tried you will remember what this downfall has cost you, and with less confidence in yourself you will have to look to the 'Strong for strength.'"

"And yet, Henry, I would give worlds to recall the past two months. Oh, if I had only waited!"

"There is nothing more trying to the Christian in his path through life than being required to wait. 'Stand still' was the command of God to the Israelites when the Red Sea stretched before them, the mountains on either side, and Pharaoh's host was behind them. And in one place the prophet exclaims, 'Our strength is to sit still.' We often forget the truth of the poet's words, 'They also serve who only stand and wait.'"

"Henry," exclaimed Arthur presently, "mine has been a frivolous, useless life. I seem to have forgotten all the teachings of your dear mother in my boyhood, but they are coming back to me now. Is there not a verse in the Psalms about waiting? My dear lost Fanny would often remind me of it, when instead of waiting patiently for steady success in any undertaking, I put it aside and commenced something else. She would call it 'making haste to be rich.' O Henry, since my illness the memory of my carelessness about dear Fanny's health has caused me hours of bitter remorse."

"You must not indulge any longer in self-reproach, Arthur; it can do no good to recall the past excepting as a warning for the future, and mental anxiety will retard your recovery. The last two months have been very dark, but we must remember the Indian proverb, 'The darkest part of the

night is just before the dawn.'"

"What is the text in the Psalms about waiting, Henry?"

"It occurs in the thirty-seventh—'Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.' And now you must try and sleep for a while till dinner is ready, and in the evening I will write a letter for you to Mr. Norton, and you can sign it."

Arthur obeyed; the conversation and the letter had produced excitement, and great exhaustion was the result. Henry sat and watched him till he fell into a calm and peaceful sleep, to which he had for months been a stranger.

A quiet step, a gentle movement, and as the door slowly opened Clara Franklyn appeared. Her uncle placed his finger on his lips and pointed to the couch. The womanly girl understood, and withdrew as noiselessly as she had entered.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A PANIC IN THE CITY.

Autumn of the year which had proved so full of changes to Arthur Franklyn passed into winter, and frost and snow ushered in the time when the angels sang their holy song of "Peace and goodwill to all men."

The red breast of the robin and the holly berries gleamed brighten the glistening snow, and the joyous notes of the sociable bird sounded clear and melodious through the keen frosty air, heralding the birth of another year. Winter gave place to the gentle and balmy air of spring, and April found Mary Armstrong revelling in the country delights at Meadow Farm, when the "sound of the singing of birds has come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land."

With all the firm will and patient endurance of Mary's character she had not a constitution of iron. The alternation of hopes and fears, caused by the various opinions expressed by others in opposition to her father respecting Mr. Halford's family, were at last more than she could bear.

Had the young people been entirely separated, Mary had strength of character sufficient to school her heart to forget Henry Halford. But Sunday after Sunday to have to recognise each other as mere distant acquaintance, and to be required to sit and listen to him with indifference, while others were never tired of showing or expressing their admiration of the talented young clergyman, was indeed an act of positive cruelty on the part of her father to which he seemed quite oblivious.

Mary appeared as submissive now as to his wishes in the past. She was loving and attentive as usual to his requests and his comforts, at times even gay and cheerful, and always contented. She might be a little changed, as cousin Sarah said; but what of that? She was a woman now, and not a child. Why should he notice such whims and fancies? So reasoned Mr. Armstrong. But this strain on the nerves could not last. One evening during dessert she suddenly fell back in her chair and fainted away. Then Mr. Armstrong was aroused to a sense of danger. Dr. West's opinion carried the day.

"Send your daughter into the country for a month, she wants change of air and scene; there is nothing the matter with her yet to cause alarm. Has she anything on her mind, friend Armstrong?" added the doctor, significantly.

"Some silly love affair, I suppose you mean," was the reply; "my daughter, Dr. West, is above giving way to such nonsense."

"Possibly so," said Dr. West; "I know Miss Armstrong well enough to understand that she possesses a strong amount of self-control; but, my dear sir, a young girl's nerves are not iron, so the sooner you send her into the country the better."

The proposal that she should pay a visit to cousin Sarah was hailed with such delight by Mary, that her father could not help saying to himself—

"I hope Sarah will not encourage any nonsensical talk about this young parson who seems to be turning the heads of all the young people in the parish, and the old ones too."

But other circumstances were occurring at the time our chapter commences which drew Mr. Armstrong's thoughts from his daughter's health to matters, in his opinion, of equal importance.

He had an office in the city now, as well as in Dover Street, and went more frequently to the former. One morning, when Mary had been absent a week, he was met on his arrival at the office by his head clerk with a very rueful face.

"Have you heard, sir, what has happened?" he asked.

"No," was the hasty reply; "I've not seen the *Times* yet. Is there anything serious, Wilson?"

"I'm afraid it is, sir; Overton and Boyd have stopped payment."

Mr. Armstrong sank back into his chair as if a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet, while every vestige of colour forsook his cheeks.

"I am sorry I told you so suddenly, sir," said Mr. Wilson; "will it affect you very greatly?"

Mr. Armstrong, though for a moment surprised out of his usual self-possession, quickly recovered himself and said, "Not to cause me any serious injury; Wilson, but I have several thousands in the hands of these bankers, and that is too much to lose."

"Indeed it is, sir; but perhaps the reports have been exaggerated, and there may be an official letter amongst your correspondence explaining matters more correctly."

Mr. Armstrong turned to his letters.

"All right, Wilson, I daresay there is; don't wait, I'll call you if I find that any letters require attention."

Left to himself, Mr. Armstrong quickly opened letter after letter. Yes, there it was, from Overton and Boyd. Obliged from a sharp run on the bank to suspend payment; hoped to be able to recover themselves in a few days, and so on.

Edward Armstrong laid the notice on one side, looked over his other letters, wrote a few particulars on each, then sounded the gong for Mr. Wilson, who quickly made his appearance.

"Answer these letters, Wilson," he said; "two or three have evidently heard of this stoppage, and are alarmed for the safety of their money. I have written cheques to the amount of the debts of these parties, which you can enclose to them."

The clerk took the letters and left the room, and then Mr. Armstrong put on his hat and went out to ascertain the effect of this stoppage of Overton and Boyd on the corn exchange and elsewhere.

During the day many persons looked in at the office to ask the opinion of Mr. Armstrong, and to give him details of the present and probable consequences likely to result from this disastrous bank failure. Before the hour came for closing the office it was evident that a panic had arisen in the City, threatening destruction and ruin to more than one long-established house of business.

Mr. Armstrong, as he entered his splendidly furnished house at Kilburn, felt thankful for the absence of his daughter. At the same time he hastened to his dressing-room, anxious to remove, if possible, the pale and haggard look of his face before meeting his wife at dinner.

But the quick eye of affection was not to be deceived. Mrs. Armstrong waited till the dinner was removed, and the wine and dessert placed on the table.

The April evenings were cold enough for a fire, and the wife, whose mental powers her husband considered so inferior, soon proved herself a true comforter.

"Come and sit by the fire, Edward," she said, placing a tempting arm-chair near it; "you look anxious, dearest, has anything happened in the City to trouble you?"

"I do not wish to annoy you with business matters, darling," was the reply; "go and make yourself comfortable in the drawing-room, I will come to you presently;" and her husband as he spoke placed his elbows on the table and rested his forehead on his hands.

Mrs. Armstrong rose and advanced to where her husband sat; placing her arm across his shoulders she said—

"Edward, I am sure there is something wrong. I know I am not clever enough to advise you in business matters, but if you will only tell me what grieves you it will lose half its bitterness and relieve your mind."

"Maria my dearest wife," said Edward Armstrong, rising and throwing himself into the easy-chair she had placed for him, "my troubles are about money; do you care to hear about them?"

"I care to hear anything," she said, "if telling me will relieve your mind."

"Then I will tell you the worst at once. Overton and Boyd have stopped payment, and the 20,000*l.* which I placed with them was to have been Mary's marriage portion."

"And will she lose it all?"

"I fear so. The bank talk of recovering themselves, but I doubt if they will."

"Do you think this will trouble Mary?"

"I cannot say; at all events it will interfere with her future prospects. She will have nothing but the 1000*l.* left by her grandfather. What man worth anything would marry her with that paltry sum for a marriage portion?"

"You married me with less, Edward, and Mary is quite as attractive as I was, and I know one to whom Mary's little dowry of a thousand pounds would be a fortune."

Mr. Armstrong did not reply, and his wife, thinking she had said enough, rose and left him to himself.

No greater trial could have happened to this man than the loss of money. Year after year his

wealth had increased; loss, at least to any great amount, had been unknown to him. Arrogance, ambition, self-sufficiency, and pride had grown with his growing wealth. His ambitious schemes for his daughter had more of the ostentatious display of wealth than paternal love. And now—now when he had treated with scorn the offer of the young schoolmaster—now she had nothing for her dowry beyond a paltry 1000*l.*;—he had no hope that Overton and Boyd would recover themselves. He could not, without some injury to his business, draw out another 20,000*l.* for his daughter's marriage portion; and was it likely, even if he gave his consent, that the young parson would be anxious to marry his daughter with not more for her dowry than the young man's sister had taken to her husband? No, it was out of the question. So admired, so flattered and sought after, as the young curate of Kilburn undoubtedly was, Mary with her paltry thousand pounds would stand a poor chance.

So reasoned the money-getting man of the world, while the deepest mortification added poignancy to the loss he had sustained.

"I can never give my consent now," he said to himself; "indeed, it will never be asked when the loss I have met with is known. So hard as I have worked all my life to enable me to purchase a position for my only daughter, and this is the end!"

And yet this 20,000*l.* was to Edward Armstrong but as a mere bauble compared to the wealth which he really possessed. A love of money, a thirst for wealth, grows upon the man of riches, till like the horse-leech he cries "Give, give," and is never satisfied.

The days of that anxious week passed away, but still the panic in the City gained ground. One firm after another sunk under the crash. Only men of ample means such as Mr. Armstrong could battle with the waves and weather the storm, but even he had great difficulty in doing so.

Reports spread respecting his losses, which, however, in the City did not injure his credit. Westward their influence was felt with greater results.

He usually rode Firefly when proceeding to his office in Dover Street, and on more than one occasion he had encountered those who had either asked him for the hand of his daughter or courted his acquaintance. Now they passed him by with scarcely a recognition. And so the time passed on, till one morning about a fortnight after the reports that Overton and Boyd had stopped payment.

The affair had exceeded the time of the proverbial "nine days' wonder," and it was only in the City or to those deeply interested that the good news became really known. Overton and Boyd had recovered from the shock, and were ready to meet all demands.

Mary's fortune was safe, but the alarm and the changed manners of his sunshine friends had taught her father a deep lesson. When the notice arrived he was alone in the private room of his office in Dover Street. He had been schooling himself to endure the loss of money and friends patiently. More than once during that terrible fortnight the words he had heard read by his father sounded in his ears, "Riches make themselves wings; they fly away;" "The love of money is the root of all evil." And now the certainty that he had, after all, lost nothing, caused a revulsion of feeling scarcely endurable.

He sat for some time resting his head on his hands, and his elbows on the table, absorbed in thought.

"Those sunshine friends," he said to himself, "who turned their backs upon the corn merchant when they thought he was poor, shall never know that my position is unaltered. And these are the men to either of whom I would have given my cherished daughter! My losses are known at Kilburn, no doubt, and the schoolmaster and his son are of course congratulating themselves on the escape of the latter." And as Edward Armstrong thus thought there passed over his mind recollections of the holy truths, tho Christian principles, and the first sermon from 1st Cor. xiii. 13: "The greatest of these is charity," which he had heard from the lips of the schoolmaster's son.

Was he different from these sunshine friends? could he possibly love his daughter still, when, as was supposed, not only her fortune, but great part of her father's wealth had disappeared with the commercial crash?

It was impossible, he could not believe it. True, he had done so himself, but then it was under most peculiar circumstances. There was nothing of romance in the commencement of the acquaintance which had arisen between young Halford and his daughter. Should he try him? should he endeavour to find out whether it was money or Mary herself that he sought for? Yes, he would do it, and if he proved that the latter alone had actuated him to write that letter after Mary's visit to Oxford, then he should have the 20,000*l.* after all.

"Poor darling," he said to himself, as he thought of her patient endurance and filial obedience, "she had nearly lost all I could give her. It is not too late to make amends, at least if the young parson is really worthy of such a superior and accomplished girl as my daughter. Better secure the 20,000*l.* to her at once than risk its loss by-and-by."

Edward Armstrong had been roused from a false security in riches by a prospect of their loss. He felt that he had been like the man in the parable, who had said, "I will pull down my barns, and build greater;—soul take thine ease."

But from this he had been painfully aroused; he would endeavour to discover whether the young

people cared for each other still. The glamour which the acquisition of wealth had thrown around the man of business was removed. His ambition now appeared as mockery, his pride a disgrace, and his conduct to his daughter refined cruelty. Well may the awakening of the human heart from the influence of the god of this world, who blinds the eyes of his votaries, be called in the Bible, "arising from the dead."

Time passed on, and Mrs. Armstrong received a letter from Mary expressing a wish to return home the following week. "Something must be done quickly if done at all," said Mr. Armstrong to himself as Rowland drove him to the station in Mary's pony carriage on that morning. Not even to Mrs. Armstrong had he given a hint of his intentions.

During the day he received from the bank additional assurances that the money in their possession was safe. Owing to the delay in the settlement in some matter of business he left his office in the City rather later than usual, and arrived on the platform of the station at Euston Square just as the train was about to start. A porter rushed forward, opened a first-class carriage, and assisted him to enter, even as the guard's whistle sounded and the train moved.

Mr. Armstrong, without noticing whether any other passengers were in the carriage, seated himself next the door, feeling rather disturbed and out of breath from his hasty movements. After wiping his face with his pocket-handkerchief, for the April day was rather warm, he raised his head and faced the only passenger in the carriage beside himself, who sat directly opposite to him.

A sudden flush rose to his brow almost as vivid as that which had covered the face of his fellow-passenger at Mr. Armstrong's entrance.

A bow of recognition was followed by a start of surprise, as Mr. Armstrong held out his hand and said, "Allow me to shake hands with you, Mr. Halford, once more, for the sake of old acquaintance." Henry became pale with surprise; what could it mean? It was a moral impossibility for him to resent the pride and neglect of the past three years in the father of Mary Armstrong, yet he was too completely puzzled to feel at his ease.

Mr. Armstrong, however, asked so many questions respecting Arthur Franklyn and the young people his children, with such real interest and kindness, that he very soon found himself quite at home with a gentleman who could, if he liked, make himself so agreeable. This train started from Euston at the same hour as the one in which poor Mrs. Franklyn had travelled on that fatal afternoon, and did not stop till it reached Kilburn; Mr. Armstrong knew therefore that he and his companion would be alone the whole way. Still there was no time to lose, and yet Mr. Armstrong scarcely knew how to commence the subject for which there now seemed such an excellent opportunity. At last he said, "You have missed my daughter from church, Mr. Halford, I daresay?"

"I have done so," he replied: "I hope Miss Armstrong is well;" and his companion detected a want of steadiness in the voice when he spoke, for in very truth Mary's non-appearance had made him anxious.

"She was quite well when we heard from her last. She has been away for change of air, which Dr. West thought she required, at my old home in Hampshire with Mrs. John Armstrong, whom I think you met last summer."

"I had great pleasure in making the acquaintance of that lady," said Henry; "she spoke of persons and places connected with my father's early days which greatly interested me."

"Yes, so she told me;" and Mr. Armstrong glancing from the window saw that they were nearing the station.

"Mr. Halford," he exclaimed suddenly, "forgive me for being so abrupt, but you once asked me for the hand of my daughter; are you still of the same mind on the subject?"

Astonishment, perplexity, added to a thrill of hope, for a few moments deprived Henry Halford of the power of speech; at last he said in a tone of deep feeling—

"Mr. Armstrong, nothing could ever change the love I bear for your daughter."

"My dear young friend," said the father, who noticed the painful excitement under which he spoke, "believe me I do not ask from idle curiosity; if my daughter is willing to listen to your proposals now I will not say you nay, and you are at liberty to write and ask her. The address is Meadow Farm, near Basingstoke."

"I know not how to reply to you, Mr. Armstrong," said Henry, "but will you allow me to say that in my regard for Miss Armstrong I am not influenced by hopes of obtaining her fortune, which I hear is considerable?"

Mr. Armstrong placed his hand on the arm of the young clergyman, and said—

"Have you heard the rumour of my great losses, Mr. Halford?"

"I have heard something to that effect," he replied, "and I could almost wish to find it true, that I might prove my love for your daughter."

"Well, well, these reports are not *all* true; just write to Mary, and then we can talk about the other matter by-and-by. And here we are at the station; shall I offer you a seat in the pony carriage? it is no doubt waiting for me."

But after this exciting interview Henry wanted to be alone; he accompanied Mr. Armstrong to the station entrance, and then after a warm hand-clasp the two whom money had hitherto separated, parted as close friends.

That evening, when Mr. Armstrong joined his wife in the drawing-room, he seated himself in his easy-chair, took up the *Times*, and appeared for a few minutes deep in its columns.

Presently he looked over the top of the paper and said, "I met young Halford in the railway carriage this afternoon, Maria, and I told him he might write to Mary if he liked."

"Edward! is it possible?" was the astonished reply.

"Is what possible?" he asked; "I suppose you thought it was impossible for me to change my opinion, but for once, dear wife, you are wrong; I have learnt the lesson lately that riches can take to themselves wings and fly away. In fact, I wanted an excuse to change my mind about that young parson long ago, but pride kept me back from doing him justice till now. I suppose there is no likelihood that Mary will refuse him after all, Maria? I should be sorry to expose the young man to such a result."

"I do not think Mary is so likely to change her opinion as her father," said Mrs. Armstrong, with a smile; "besides, she has right on her side."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GIPSY DORA.

At some little distance from Englefield, in a contrary direction to Meadow Farm, and closely bordering on Berkshire, can be seen from the railway a picturesque town situated on a hill, overlooking a river.

This part of Hampshire, lying to the north-east, is more varied by hill and dale, wood and glen, than the low-lying ground near the Channel, and not far distant from the rich and picturesque country which surrounds Farnham, in Surrey. Odiham Castle stands on a hill in the neighbourhood, and at a little distance the ruins of an old keep, called King John's house. Odiham Castle was used as a prison in the time of Edward III.; and David of Scotland, who was taken prisoner by Queen Philippa at Neville's Cross, while Edward laid siege to Calais, was for eleven years imprisoned in this castle.

The town of Briarsleigh overlooks from its high situation woods and meadows, and the extensively cultivated estates and parks of more than one nobleman's seat. It is built on a kind of high table-land, along which the old coach road runs for miles in both directions with only an occasional dip. At one end of the town, however, a steep winding lane leads down to the river.

The town itself has nothing to boast of beyond the old-fashioned church, which once formed part of a priory, built in the time of Henry I. Its square tower surmounted by a small steeple and a vane, can be distinguished for miles. The town hall, the modern literary institution, one or two Dissenting chapels, and the High Street, with its principal shops, differ very little from those of other similar market towns.

Its principal wealth arises from its agriculture, and the farms in the vicinity are remarkable for their rich pastures and produce. A stranger arriving at the entrance to Briarsleigh on a spring evening, with the sunset bathing the landscape in a golden misty sheen, would pause to gaze on a scene so fair; but on the evening of which we write, the bright landscape and the glowing sunset were unnoticed by the inhabitants of Briarsleigh Rectory. The lowered blinds, the stillness, and the absence of any living object near the picturesque building, told too plainly that it was the abode of death. Presently might be seen ascending the hilly lane towards the spot on which the church stood two men, evidently respectable farmers, who had stayed later than usual in the town on this the market day at Briarsleigh.

As they approached the house, a glance at its quiet aspect and lowered blinds diverted the thoughts of one from money and the market, and he exclaimed—

"So the old rector is gone at last, Martin."

"Eh! is he? How do you know?"

"Why, look, the blinds are down; besides I heard of his death two hours ago in the town."

"Ah, well, it's what we must all come to one day, and rector has lived out his time; why he must have been fourscore at least."

"Eighty-six, so they say," replied Martin, "and I believe it, too; for I can remember him all my life nearly, and that's forty year."

"Has he been rector of Briarsleigh so long as that?" asked the other.

"Ay, that he have, and a kind good parson he's been too. Lord Rivers gave him this living a'most the first thing he did when he come to the estate at the old lord's death, and that was afore I was

born."

"I'm afeard we shan't get such another as Parson Wentworth, whoever it may be."

"Well, he wasn't much of a preacher in his best days," was the reply, "and the curate ain't much better, though he's a good young man, but his sermons send me to sleep. You know there's lots of us go to the Wesleyan chapel; you can hear sermons there that wake a man up, and no mistake, though I like the Church prayers best, I'll own that."

"I've been to them Wesleyans once or twice, and what their parson said was very fine, but he made too much noise about it; and I don't like their ways and their singing nohow."

"Well, I like Church ways best too, and I assure you, Martin, it's made me quite miserable lately when I've been at church to see such a lot of empty pews. Why, if it hadn't been for my lord's family, and the servants and labourers from Englefield, there wouldn't have been twenty-five people in the church."

"Yes, I know, and that's why I sticks to it. I'm only one, but if I go, my wife and the children goes too, and so we make up half a dozen amongst us. Poor old parson, the poor'll miss him, sure enough."

"Well, Martin," replied his companion, whose education as well as the number of his farm acres surpassed greatly those of his neighbour, "we must hope that if the new parson gets the people back to the church, he will be kind to his poor parishioners also."

And then as farmer Martin turned into his own gate, his companion left him with a friendly farewell, and stepped on quickly towards his own home, which, though the neighbouring farm, was at least a quarter of a mile farther by the road.

From the rectory of Briarsleigh with its shrouded windows, and the homely conversation of two of the parishioners, we must lead the reader to a far different scene.

On the evening of the second day after the death of the rector of Briarsleigh, a family party were seated at dinner in the dining-room at Englefield, to which we have introduced the reader in a former chapter.

Of the five persons then seated at breakfast, two only are present now, Lord Rivers and his youngest daughter, Lady Dora, now Lady Dora Lennard. Lady Mary Woodville, who has married a Scotch nobleman, inherits her mother's delicate constitution, and seldom visits Englefield. And that mother, Lady Rivers, whose gentle loving character had endeared her not only to her husband and children, but also to the lowliest worker on the estate, has passed away from earth. Even now, after ten years, the memory of the gentle lady lives in the hearts of those who could claim no nearer tie to her than that of friend or servant.

Lord Woodville, the heir, is in London with his brother-in-law, Sir William Lennard, and thither his father and sister purpose following him on the morrow. A few intimate friends and relatives by marriage are present on this occasion, making a pleasant gathering of eight.

Lady Dora is seated at the head of the table, opposite to the earl. She has the same bright dark eyes and brunette complexion which made her brother Robert once call her a gipsy. The face and form have a matronly dignity and appearance very different from the lively girl of seventeen who was so interested in the marriage of Fanny Franklyn; but the change is a decided improvement, and at thirty-three Lady Dora Lennard is a very handsome woman.

And the earl has changed since he paid a congratulatory visit to his old tutor on the marriage of his daughter; his hair is white as snow, but his eyes have lost none of their dark lustre, and the finely cut features still preserve their delicate outline, and even at the age of sixty his form has lost none of its stately bearing.

The dinner has been removed, and the dessert in its rich and delicate china of green and gold has been placed on the table. The wine-glasses, finger-glasses, and decanters; the silver knives and forks, the polished damask of the tablecloth, and the prisms of the chandelier drops above it, glitter and sparkle in the light of many wax tapers. In that sombre yet noble room, with its carved oak panellings, its many and richly draped windows, chairs of mahogany and ebony, and a thick handsome carpet, beyond the bordering of which appears the oaken floor; the dinner-table, the dresses of the ladies, and the men-servants in their gay livery, form a dazzling spot of brightness by contrast.

It would seem as if nothing could enhance that brightness, yet a few moments proved the contrary. The door opened, and three children entered the room—a girl of twelve, a boy of ten, and a little one of six, who escaping from the hand of her nurse, and disregarding her elder sister's remonstrance, bounded across the room to the side of grandpapa.

"Well, Gipsy," said the earl, as he lifted the little girl on his knee, "who sent for you?"

"Mamma did," she replied; and then added quickly, "Grandpapa, I'm not a gipsy; I saw real gipsies to-day, and they are ugly; they wear red cloaks and old frocks, and the little girl gipsies have no shoes or stockings. I don't be dressed like that."

A general laugh followed this speech; most certainly the little fairy in white lace, blue morocco shoes, and silk socks was very unlike the children she described, at least in dress. But well might

she claim the pet title of "Gipsy Dora." The dark flashing eye, softened by its long eyelashes; the clear brunette complexion, through which the damask rose colour showed itself on the glowing cheek, and the long dark brown curls that fell round her dimpled shoulders, made her far more deserving of the name than her mother had ever been.

The sisters were dressed alike, but May, the elder, differed greatly from Dora in appearance; tall and slight, with blue eyes and fair hair, her gentle manner and delicate face showed a striking resemblance to the late Lady Rivers. The boy, who stood by his mother, his blue velvet tunic contrasting with her light silk dress, appeared a manly, spirited little fellow, yet neither so gipsy-like as one sister nor so fair as the other. So far as the change of conversation is concerned, we need only have introduced Gipsy Dora, excepting to add brightness to the picture in the earl's noble dining-room, which children on such occasions so often do.

"Papa," said Lady Dora, presently, "talking about gipsies reminds me of that morning so many years ago, when I read the notice of Miss Halford's marriage in the paper at Englefield Grange, and you gave me an imaginary cause for the origin of the word Englefield."

Lord Rivers smiled, but he did not reply.

"What was it, Rivers?" exclaimed an old squire, who with his wife and daughter were guests at the table. "I have often wondered myself at the singular title."

"Most likely from Engle, or angle, a corner," said the earl, demurely, "the corner of a field being no doubt the earliest possession of my ancestors."

"Papa, that is worse than your other definition," cried his daughter; and then with her usual vivacity she related the conversation in which Lord Rivers had suggested that his family were descended from the gipsies.

"At all events, Mary and Willie are not gipsies," said the earl, quietly.

He was thinking of the other subject referred to by his daughter—the marriage of Fanny Halford; and while those round the table were discussing the gipsy question with Lady Dora, his memory recalled the sad events that had occurred since that time in his own family, as well as in that of his old tutor. Many years had passed after the visit of congratulation which he had paid to the residents at Englefield Grange on the occasion of Fanny's marriage, before the earl visited Dr. Halford a second time. The health of Lady Rivers had rendered it necessary for her to reside in the south of France for years before her death, and on the return of Lord Rivers to England after that sad event he could not for a long period visit the friends of his youth who so well remembered the fair, gentle lady who became the earl's bride. He answered Dr. Halford's sympathising letter, but it was not till he read in the *Times* the notice of Fanny Franklyn's death that he visited his old tutor again, and witnessed with sincere regret the effects of sorrow in the change and wreck of the friend of his boyhood, Clara Marston.

Henry Halford was on this occasion absent at Oxford, and the earl renewed his promise that the first living in his gift that fell vacant should be his. Of Mrs. Halford's death he had been informed in a letter from the bereaved husband; since then, in the very midst of the excitement occasioned by the tragic end of the second Mrs. Franklyn, an account of which appeared in the papers, he had also read Henry Halford's name in the list of ordinations by the Bishop of London. Rapidly all these memories passed through his mind, and he started almost perceptibly when Squire Hartley exclaimed—

"You've heard of Parson Wentworth's death, I suppose, Rivers?"

Opposite to the squire sat another guest, a bluff old colonel, also a neighbour of the earl's, who exclaimed—

"Heard of a living in his gift having become vacant, squire! What an unnecessary question! Why, man, the parson died on Sunday, and this is Wednesday! I for one shouldn't like to have to read all the letters on the subject, which Rivers has no doubt by this time received."

The earl glanced at his daughter. Lady Dora rose, and, accompanied by the ladies and her children, left the three gentlemen to themselves.

Then the squire made another attempt to introduce the subject so abruptly interrupted, by saying —

"I suppose the living of Briarsleigh is not already given away?"

"No indeed," was the reply, "although you are correct in your surmises, colonel, respecting the letters I have received; but I never decide hastily on such matters. Come, squire, help yourself, and pass the decanter," added the earl, in a tone far less serious; "and tell me how you have arranged about Henley's farm."

This reference stirred up the squire to descant on a personal matter with great gusto, and changed the subject.

The gentlemen did not delay to join the ladies in the drawing-room; indeed, very little time elapsed before the visitors had taken their departure. A drive of four or five miles is not very pleasant after ten o'clock on a cold spring night even in a close carriage. And yet how often is a visit of this kind followed by a drive home of even more than ten miles during a night in winter!

Lady Dora had taken leave of her guests, and finding herself alone in the drawing-room with her father, she approached him as he stood with his back to the fire in true English fashion, and said —

"Papa, I believe I understand why you dismissed me so suddenly from the table this evening."

The earl smiled as he replied—

"Well, my daughter, and what is it you understand?"

"Your intentions, papa. You mean to give the living of Briarsleigh to the son of your old tutor."

"I have some thoughts of doing so, Dora—at least of making him the offer, although I have had more than one letter on the subject."

"Has Dr. Halford written to you?"

"No, my dear, he is not a man likely to do so; yet I know the doctor's son is ordained. I saw his name in the list of ordinations. The old rector of Kilburn has given him a title."

"Is this son the clever little boy you became acquainted with when you visited Dr. Halford after his daughter's marriage?"

"Yes, his youngest and only surviving son, and I have no doubt clever and talented as a man."

"Is the living of Briarsleigh a valuable one, papa?"

Again the earl smiled.

"Why, Dora, you are taking as much interest in this young clergyman as you did in the marriage of his sister so many years ago."

Lady Dora did not blush as she had done when, at seventeen, her father had remarked her girlish interest in Fanny Halford's marriage, but she replied—

"Papa, this is a very different matter. I have heard enough of late years to make me feel the greatest sympathy for curates. It seems quite shocking to think of a gentleman with refined manners and a university education being obliged to support himself and perhaps a wife and children on a less income than a mechanic, who has no appearance to keep up."

"Too true, Dora; and if you were to read the letters I have received from friends on behalf of curates situated as you have described, you would understand the difficulties in which owners of Church livings are placed. These gentlemen are equally talented, and as truly well born and bred as Dr. Halford's son, but I cannot give the living to all of them, and my promise to my old tutor is binding. I must not go from my word. I hope to pay the family a visit next week, and make the young man an offer of the living personally. I do not suppose he will belie the promise of his boyhood. And perhaps I may contrive to hear him preach at Kilburn on Sunday."

"I am very glad to hear your decision, papa," replied Lady Dora; "and at all events one curate will be saved from poverty and starvation."

"Well," replied the earl, laughing, "that is scarcely true in Henry Halford's case: he could still follow the profession of a schoolmaster, and secure a good income; but I do not think a clergyman can conscientiously perform both duties well or with comfort to himself."

"And what income will he have as rector of Briarsleigh?" she asked again.

"Seven hundred a year, Dora. And now, my dear, as we have to travel to-morrow, perhaps we had better say 'Good night.'"

And so, while Mr. Armstrong was mourning the loss of his daughter's marriage portion, the young "parson" he despised was about to obtain an income of his own. But of this good fortune neither he nor his young companion knew anything when they met in the train on its way to Kilburn.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AT MEADOW FARM.

Clear and bright rose the sun on the morning of the earl's dinner-party, and Mary Armstrong, who stood at the window looking out over field and meadow, orchard and garden, belonging to Meadow Farm, was conscious of a sense of happiness to which for months she had been a stranger. There are few in this cold, dark world of ours who have not experienced at times such a feeling, although unable to account for it, and yet at no period is it more likely to occur than in the season of spring.

As Mary Armstrong now gazed upon the scene before her, the dewdrops on field and meadow sparkling like diamonds in the sunshine, the delicate green foliage trembling in the morning breeze, orchard and garden fragrant and lovely with flowers, buds, and blossoms, the fleecy

clouds streaking the pale blue of an April sky, and amid and around all, the song of joyous birds, the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, and other familiar sounds that betoken a farmyard; in the young girl's heart arose a calm feeling of happiness and trust, for she could say with the poet —

"My Father made them all."

Presently she saw cousin Sarah making her way as usual to the farmyard, and although this locality had ceased to be a novelty, she hastily descended the stairs to join her.

"Why, Mary dearest, you are looking quite blooming this morning. I shall be afraid to spare you next week for fear of a relapse."

"Oh no, cousin Sarah, you need not fear; besides, I mean to come again very soon if you will have me."

"That I will, dearest, whenever you like; but come, there is the bell for prayers, and you must want your breakfast."

The morning of this day—to be so long remembered—passed away in watching, and sometimes helping cousin Sarah or the dairymaids in making butter or bread, pies or cakes, or in the garden till dinner.

"You promised me one more walk to Englefield," said Mary, as they rose from the early dinner; "we could go this afternoon, the weather is so delightful, almost like summer—unless you are busy."

"No, dear Mary, not too busy for a walk," she replied; "we can start at three o'clock if you like, and that will give us plenty of time to return before tea."

The sun was still high in the heavens when cousin Sarah and her young companion left the farm, and took the pathway across the fields, with the intention of returning home by the road.

Under the shadow of lofty trees in delicate spring verdure, which now and then separated other fields from the pastures of Meadow Farm, through narrow lanes bordered with hedges of budding May blossom to the boundary of Englefield Park, which joined more than one of the farm meadows, Mary and her cousin walked, talking pleasantly of past days. Not a word, however, nor a reference to cousin Sarah's interference with Mr. Armstrong on Mr. Henry Halford's behalf passed that lady's lips.

Mary, also, was equally reticent; the subject was connected with too much pain to be spoken of lightly. In fact, she was endeavouring, with the calm determination of a strong will, to overcome the faintest signs of hope, and to banish for ever the memory which that hope kept alive in her heart.

Just before crossing the stile which led to the old coach road, they came upon a break between the trees, through which could be seen the rising ground of the park, and on the hill at a distance the imposing façade of Englefield House. Mary Armstrong had seen it on many former occasions, but she did not the less feel inclined to stand still and gaze on its noble aspect and picturesque surroundings.

"It is a lovely spot, cousin Sarah," she said, after a few moments' silence. "And is Lord Rivers still living? I remember meeting him on horseback once when I was walking with dear grandfather. He stopped to speak with him, and they talked so pleasantly for several minutes; and when he heard who I was he asked so kindly after mamma and papa! Oh, look, cousin Sarah! there are some ladies and children on the terrace."

This terrace to which Mary directed her cousin's attention formed one of the modern additions to the right wing of the house. It was approached from the side windows of the drawing-room, and sheltered by a verandah, from the roof and supports of which hung a magnificent westeria, with its drooping flowers like bunches of grapes.

It was too far distant to distinguish the faces of the children, but as the little ones flitted about on the terrace it could be seen that they were following the movements of a white shaggy dog, whose sharp, shrill bark of pleasure sounded faintly across the park.

"They are the children of Lady Dora Lennard," said cousin Sarah, as they turned to continue their walk; "I heard that she was staying with the earl for a few days till they go to London for the season."

"Then Lord Rivers, whom I met two years ago, is still living, and these are his grandchildren, I suppose?"

"Yes, the children of his youngest daughter, who married Sir William Lennard, and retains her own title of Lady Dora. Lord Rivers is still a fine old man at the age of sixty."

"Is he so old as that, cousin Sarah? Why, he did not appear older than papa when I met him two years ago."

"And yet, Mary, he has aged considerably since the death of Lady Rivers about ten years ago. I have heard uncle say that in his young days he was one of the finest men in the county."

"He has a son to inherit the title and estates, I suppose?" said Mary.

"Yes, Lord Woodville; and another daughter, who has been married several years to a Scotch nobleman. She inherits her mother's delicate health, and seldom visits Englefield."

Thus talking the ladies walked on till they reached the stile, over which Mary stepped with the lightness and activity of youth, and then turned to assist her cousin; neither of them, however, was prepared for the surprise that awaited them.

To explain this surprise we must carry our readers to the station at Basingstoke. The coach road, which has been continued on to that station for the convenience of passengers, passes round a hill rising just above the line. On this hill stands the ruins of an old abbey, forming a picturesque and attractive object to travellers by rail.

One of these, a gentleman who had just left the station, paused for some moments to examine the singular appearance of the old ruins, and while thus engaged a voice at his elbow startled him.

"Curious old place, sir."

"Yes," was the reply; "what does it belong to?"

"It be the remains of an old abbey, sir, as was built in the time of Henry VIII. It were partly destroyed by Cromwell's armies," continued the old man, who had a cottage near, and often picked up a gratuity for his information from passengers. "There's nought but the ruins of the chapel left, and they seem strong enough to stand again wind and weather for hundreds of years to come. Why, sir, I remembers that there arch with all the moss and ivy a-covering it when I was a boy, and I'm nearly fourscore now."

"What was the name of the old abbey?" asked the gentleman.

"I don't know, sir; but them ruins are part of the chapel called the Chapel of the Holy Ghost. It's a wonderful name."

For nearly ten minutes the gentleman listened with great interest to the old countryman's account, then suddenly remembering the object of his visit in this part of the world, he looked at his watch, and exclaimed—

"I fear I must be satisfied with what I have heard for the present, for I have still some distance to walk. Pray excuse my leaving you so suddenly," he added, as he placed a silver coin in the old man's hand, "and thank you very much for your information."

The gentleman raised his hat to the homely countryman with such true politeness, that the old man stood with uncovered head for some moments while the wind scattered his white locks, watching the stranger's departure.

"He be a true genelman, he be; us doan't get much o' they foine manners hereabouts, 'cepting wi' the reel gentry."

At a turn of the ascent leading from the station to the coach road appeared a board fastened to a tree, and upon it the representation of a hand with the finger pointing, and the words "To Meadow Farm." This information was at the time of which we write very little needed to tell the residents in the locality the whereabouts of the old homestead, yet it still remained in its half-decayed state, fastened to the trunk of a tree.

Decayed as it might be, it was very useful to the railway traveller, who, following its friendly finger, turned into the high road a few minutes after Mary and her cousin Sarah had entered it from the fields by climbing the stile.

At a bend in the road the gentleman came suddenly in sight of the two ladies as they advanced towards him—not near enough, however, for him to discover whether they were strangers or acquaintances.

Perhaps the change from winter to spring attire in Mary Armstrong's dress, and her unexpected appearance at such a distance from Meadow Farm, caused an impression that the younger lady was a stranger, and of the elder he had no recollection.

Yet a something familiar in their appearance made him look at them earnestly, and as they drew nearer neither the plain cotton gown nor the coarse straw hat could disguise the graceful movements and dignified carriage of Mary Armstrong. It seemed as if the recognition was simultaneous, for at the moment the stranger made the discovery, Mary exclaimed, with a deep flush, "Cousin Sarah, there is a young clergyman coming towards us exactly like Mr. Henry Halford!" And the nas the flush faded to paleness, she added, in a suppressed voice, "Cousin Sarah, it *is* Mr. Halford."

Even as she spoke Henry advanced hastily to meet them—not, however, with his usual self-possession.

"Mrs. John Armstrong," he exclaimed, as he held out his hand to that lady, and bowed nervously to Mary, "I am glad to have met you. I am on my way to pay a visit to Meadow Farm."

"I am very happy to hear such good news, Mr. Halford; we will turn and walk back with you."

"Oh, pray do not let me deprive you of your walk," he replied, glancing at Mary, who was too

greatly surprised and mystified to speak.

"We have had our walk," said cousin Sarah, "and were thinking of returning home by another road, which is longer than the way we came. It will be pleasanter for you than the dusty road, Mr. Halford, to return through the fields, and Mary is looking tired already."

"Miss Armstrong appears to me much improved in health," he said, placing himself by cousin Sarah as they turned with him to retrace their steps, and looking inquiringly at Mary, as if asking her to confirm the truth of his remark.

With an effort at self-control to steady her voice, she said with a smile, "Appearances are not fallacious in my case, Mr. Halford; my health is much better than when I left home."

Yet the efforts of the young people to regain their accustomed ease signally failed. Mary was confused and agitated by Henry Halford's presence in that locality, and he from his eager anxiety to account for it.

He turned to cousin Sarah, and plunged at once into the object of his visit.

"When I had the pleasure of meeting you, Mrs. Armstrong, last summer," he said, "you kindly expressed a hope that I would visit you at Meadow Farm. I travelled yesterday in the train with Mr. Armstrong, and as he entrusted me with a message for his daughter, I thought that instead of writing I would take advantage of your kind invitation, and bring the message myself."

"We are most happy to see you, Mr. Halford," replied cousin Sarah, "and I hope you will be able to spend a few days or a week with us now you have found your way here."

"I fear not," he replied, "but if the result of my message is favourable, I shall gladly remain with you till to-morrow."

"Are they all well at home, Mr. Halford?" said Mary, in a constrained voice, and addressing him to conceal the emotion which his mysterious words excited.

"I believe so, Miss Armstrong; from your papa's replies to my inquiries for his family, my impression is that Mrs. Armstrong and your brothers are quite well."

Just at this moment the gable roofs of Meadow Farm appeared in sight in the distance, and cousin Sarah endeavoured to break through the restraint under which the young people were evidently trying to disguise their feelings, by calling their attention to surrounding objects.

The attempt was successful, Mary's unnatural reserve vanished when in sight of the old farm. She could point out the varied features of the landscape, direct Henry Halford's attention to the fields and meadows surrounding the farm, now in their delicate spring verdure, and excite his interest by explaining that Meadow Farm obtained its name from these rich cornfields and pasture-lands through which they passed.

Before they reached the pleasant homestead Mary had to a certain degree recovered her self-possession; while Henry, when shown to his room to refresh himself after his journey, felt his hopes of a favourable reception of his message raised to almost a certainty. Mary at once escaped to her room. Much as she loved her cousin Sarah, she could not open her heart to her as she did to her mother, and she longed to be alone.

What could this visit mean? What message could her father possibly have to send to her by such a messenger?

He and Mr. Halford must have been on very friendly terms in the railway carriage to talk about *her*, or even to talk on any subject. Could it be possible that her father had changed his mind respecting Mr. Halford? And at the thought, the blush that covered the young girl's face would have relieved that gentleman from any further anxiety, had he seen it, and known the emotions from which it arose.

Cousin Sarah, although at first surprised at the appearance of the young clergyman on his way to the farm, had no such perplexing doubts. She recalled her conversation with Mr. Armstrong, and therefore readily accounted for this visit. "Mr. Halford can only have been sent for one purpose," she said to herself, "and I must contrive an opportunity for him to deliver his message to Mary before we meet at the tea-table; until that is done the young people will not be at ease in each other's society." Full of this determination, she hastily removed her walking dress and descended the stairs; yet with all her quickness Henry Halford had found his way down before her, and now stood looking out over garden and orchard to the distant prospect from the garden entrance.

He turned quickly at the sound of footsteps, and as Mrs. John Armstrong advanced he said—

"This is truly a country landscape, Mrs. Armstrong, and your gardens and orchards promise great things from their present appearance."

"Are you too tired to walk through the garden?" she asked. "Our spring flowers are in great profusion this year."

"No, indeed," he replied, "it will be a pleasure to do so."

But as they passed down the steps cousin Sarah saw him cast a hasty glance behind him, as if hoping for and expecting another companion.

She opened the gate for him to pass through, and then said—

"Will you excuse me one moment, Mr. Halford? I can soon overtake you if you walk on slowly." The next moment he was alone. Hastily returning to the house, she ascended the stairs to Mary's bedroom. Her knock brought Mary to the door.

"My dear," she said, "Mr. Halford is in the garden alone, pray do not allow him to feel himself neglected; will you join him while I tell cousin John and the boys that he is here, and get the tea ready."

"Certainly I will, cousin Sarah," she replied, with a slight blush as she followed her cousin downstairs, feeling ill-concealed agitation at the prospect of being informed of her father's message. On entering the garden she saw the tall, manly figure, slowly pacing the centre path in front of her, as if in deep thought; yet the usually self-possessed Mary Armstrong had not the courage to hasten her steps.

Presently, however, her dress was caught by a currant bush, and the rustling sound caused the gentleman to turn, expecting to see cousin Sarah. A few steps brought him to her side, and then Mary's natural ease came to her aid.

"My cousin is detained by household duties, Mr. Halford; she has sent me to supply her place, and to show you the wonders of Meadow Farm."

He greeted her with one of those smiles which so greatly improved his features as he replied—

"I am glad of any circumstances which have obliged Mrs. Armstrong to send me such a substitute."

For a few moments they moved on side by side in silence, each too agitated to speak. At length Henry Halford determined to plunge at once into the matter. Why should he hesitate? Was there a possibility that after all he might be mistaken? The thought gave him courage. If such a possibility existed, it must be discovered quickly, for to remain at Meadow Farm under the ban of a refusal was out of the question.

"Miss Armstrong," he said, "do you remember the subjects we discussed when we met three years ago at Mr. Drummond's dinner-party?"

He! Henry Halford remembered that day. How the heart of the patient, enduring, and obedient daughter bounded with joy at the thought! but she did not reply, for her companion gave her no opportunity, as he continued—

"We have a very different and far more pleasant subject to discuss now, and we need not refer to the past. I am well aware that your father with his great wealth could reasonably expect a splendid settlement for his only daughter, and therefore I was not surprised when he refused the offer of a man in my position, and without even——"

"Oh, pray do not go on, Mr. Halford," said Mary, interrupting him. "I cannot endure to think that ——" She paused suddenly, and added, "Forgive me, I must not presume to pass judgment on the conduct of my own father."

"I entreat you to excuse me for referring to it," he said; "not for worlds would I utter a word to pain you; and, indeed, Mr. Armstrong has made ample amends for any pain his refusal may have cost me; he yesterday gave me not only permission unasked to write to his daughter, but also promised to agree to whatever her decision might be. I could not wait for an answer to a letter, so I have come myself to plead my own cause."

There was a pause, and the two walked on in silence for some moments. Although in a measure prepared for the object of Mr. Halford's visit, Mary Armstrong was taken by surprise at hearing of this wonderful change in her father. Henry Halford, in referring to his letter, and the refusal which followed, had touched upon a tender string. Shame, regret, and a loss of confidence in her father, had resulted from her discovery of the circumstances, and to hear it spoken of by Henry Halford caused her double pain. She was about to say, when she so abruptly paused, "I cannot bear to think that he has acted so cruelly to you," but the reflection that by so saying she should not only too openly show her interest in himself, but blame her father, made her conclude her reply as we have described.

The contrast presented to her by Henry Halford's description of her father's behaviour to him now, also added to the confusion of her ideas, and she literally had not power to speak.

"You are silent, Miss Armstrong," he said at last. "Do you remember what I once said to you in Christchurch Meadows at Oxford? Nearly three years have passed since then, and I am quite as ready now to devote my life to your future happiness as then. Only answer me one question: shall I go back to Kilburn at once, and tell Mr. Armstrong that I have asked his daughter to be my wife, and that her decision is 'No'?"

"I am not prepared to decide yet, Mr. Halford," said Mary, with an effort controlling herself, "for after all my father's objections, this sudden change has taken me by surprise." Yet as she spoke, with the consciousness of those earnest eyes looking into her face, her voice faltered, and the changing colour and tightened breath too plainly evinced deep emotion. It gave the young man courage as he gazed, he raised her hand and placed it on his arm, saying with a smile and a gentle pressure of the captive hand—

"And now Mr. Armstrong's objections are all removed, do any remain on the part of his daughter?"

Another pause, and then the straightforward candid character of the young girl asserted itself. She glanced modestly in the face of her companion, and said with a smile—

"I did not suppose you would think such a question necessary, Mr. Halford."

A summons to tea interrupted the conversation, and as they turned to retrace their steps, he could only say as he pressed the hand that rested on his arm—"My darling, you have made me so happy."

Cousin Sarah met them at the garden gate, and said—

"We have made no stranger of you, Mr. Halford. Mary is always so happy in the portioned-off corner of our farm kitchen, that I think you also will prefer it to the best parlour."

"Indeed I shall," was the reply.

"Perhaps you will be as well pleased with this apartment as with the beauties of the gardens and orchards," she added, with a smile.

"I fear I have monopolised Miss Armstrong's attention too much on another subject," he replied, smiling also, "but as I am about to accept your kind invitation to remain till to-morrow, I shall hope to become better acquainted with this pleasant spot before I leave."

When Mary seated herself at the tea-table, cousin Sarah required no words to tell her what her father's message had been. It was not so much the brilliant colour in the young girl's cheeks, or the brightness of her eyes which attracted notice, as the expression of calm happiness which had replaced a sad, and at times a constrained look in her face, showing to those interested in her how firm a control she had exerted over herself.

All this had disappeared, and yet the memory of the past increased Mary's happiness. She had submitted to her father's wishes, and subdued her own will to his. Neither by word or thought had she disobeyed him, except in refusing to marry those whom she could neither respect nor love. And now unasked he had given his consent from, as she fully believed, his own unbiassed opinion of Henry Halford's real character and real worth.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE NEW RECTOR OF BRIARSLEIGH.

The summer of the year which had brought such happiness to Mary Armstrong was fading into autumn. At the door of the parish church at Kilburn appeared a goodly array of carriages, the coachmen wearing white favours indicating a wedding, and attracting a crowd of lookers-on.

A stranger passed, and observing the police endeavouring to force a passage though the crowd for the bride and bridegroom, whose carriage stood at the gates, also remained as a spectator, and inquired of those around him the name of the bridegroom.

"It's our curate, sir," said a respectable woman who stood near; "leastways he was our curate, but he's got a church of his own now down in Hampshire; it's been given him by a great lord. And the lady, sir, she's the daughter of a rich gentleman as lives here at Kilburn, and he's given her I can't tell how many thousand pounds for her fortune, and here they come, sir," she added, as the bells rang out a merry peal, and the congregation, hastening from the church, increased the crowd outside.

In a few minutes the bride appeared leaning on her husband's arm, the folds of her white satin dress swaying gracefully as she moved, and the bright hair glinting beneath the lace veil and orange blossoms, while the brilliant colour on her cheeks made more than one exclaim, "Doesn't she look beautiful!"

Henry Halford's tall, manly figure, dignified carriage, dark hair, and full whiskers formed a pleasing contrast to his fair bride, heightened not a little by his pale face. In fact the young clergyman could not yet realise his happiness and good fortune, but felt as if in a dream from which he must shortly awaken to the realities of life.

And yet the scene at the church was too real and too attractive in its surroundings to be mistaken for a vision by commonplace individuals who are not afflicted with vivid imaginations. Edward Armstrong could not conceal a feeling of exultation as he contemplated the brilliant company who had assembled to do honour to his daughter on her marriage.

As carriage after carriage drives up to receive them we will point out those whose names appear in our story.

Colonel Herbert and his son, their uniform contrasting with the bridesmaids' dresses of white and blue, while assisting them into the carriages form one great point of attraction to the crowd. Among the bridesmaids we can distinguish the womanly figure and handsome features of Clara

Franklyn, to whom Charles Herbert is very attentive. She is accompanied by her sister Mabel, whose gentle and delicate features bear the same childlike expression, although she has reached her fifteenth year. Kate Marston and Arthur Franklyn are assisting the venerable Dr. Halford into another carriage. His health has, to a certain extent, improved since the happy results described in the last chapters have completed the happiness of his son, and placed him in a position even beyond his father's brightest hopes. He is now on his way to Lime Grove, to be present at the wedding breakfast, and with dear grandpapa and Kate Marston in the carriage are James and little Albert Franklyn, the latter, in his blue velvet dress and golden curls falling over the lace-collar, has attracted general admiration. James, a steady, quiet youth of thirteen, is looking forward to the time when he shall leave school, and become a clerk in his father's office. Quite as worthy of notice as any present are the two brothers of the bride, Edward and Arthur Armstrong —the former a manly youth of nineteen, whose dark eyes and hair and strongly marked features made his resemblance to his father very striking. In the latter, whose fair delicate face and tall slight figure prove that he is growing beyond his strength, can be too surely seen that a powerful intellect is chafing the slight frame which encloses it. The boy's studious habits had been encouraged by his father till he one day expressed a wish to enter the Church. Mr. Armstrong, at that time irritated with the discovery of his only daughter's predilection for a "parson," harshly forbade the boy to speak to him again on the subject.

That objection had been during the last few months removed, but with the father's consent came the doctor's cautious prohibition—

"Mr. Armstrong, your son's mind must lie fallow for a few years, till he has ceased growing and regained his strength. He is scarcely seventeen yet, time enough when he reaches twenty-one to send him to the university." And with a promise from his father that his wishes should then be gratified, Arthur was learning to wait patiently.

These two were making themselves popular among the ladies by their active and polite attentions, yet not more so than the gentleman who now lifts his little Albert into the carriage and kisses him fondly.

Arthur Franklyn, while escorting the various lady visitors through the crowd, has lost none of the pleasing, attractive manner which made him so courted and flattered in Melbourne. And yet those who knew him in his gay and thoughtless days, can detect a calm steadiness of purpose in the still handsome face indicating a change, not, however, to his disadvantage. Arthur Franklyn had risen from his bed of sickness humbled and subdued. By the advice of his first wife's friends he devoted a portion of the 2000*l.*, which so unexpectedly became his legally after his wife's death, to the liquidation of his debts in Melbourne.

Released from debt, and, above all, from the tortures of conscience and the consequences of his sin, he quickly recovered his health and spirits.

The remainder of the 2000*l.* he invested in a partnership with a rising firm in the city, and so steadily and cleverly have his business habits and tact been carried out, that the prospects of the firm are brighter than ever.

With relief from debt, that foe to peace of mind, a quiet conscience, and hopes of prosperity in business, his constitution, though greatly shaken, has recovered its elasticity, and the glow of health adds no little to the changed appearance of Arthur Franklyn.

He and his children still reside at Kilburn, indeed, now that they are about to lose Henry, neither Kate Marston nor her uncle can endure the thought of parting with them, and the children cling to her as to a second mother. Kate is still supreme manager of the domestic arrangements, in which she is willingly assisted by Clara, when not occupied with her sisters at their usual studies. A graduate of the university has been engaged to supply the place of Henry Halford, and the old Grange will subside into its usual routine when the bustle caused by this wedding shall be over.

Three carriages are still waiting for their occupants—Mr. Armstrong's and two others.

One of them bears on its panels the coronet of an earl, and on another may be seen the mitre of a bishop.

Mr. Armstrong's carriage is the first to draw up, and he himself appears in a vainly suppressed state of elation and excitement. His morning costume is faultless, and although a large sprinkling of white is observable in his dark hair, yet he bears his fifty-four years well. He had failed in his attempts to form an alliance with the aristocracy through his increasing wealth by the marriage of his daughter. Yet had he carried his point, such a marriage could scarcely have been attended with greater *eclât* than on the present occasion. This Mr. Armstrong now understood and acknowledged to himself without reservation. The bishop who had just married his daughter to Henry Halford, had been vice-principal of the young man's college at Oxford; the nobleman who had presented the living to his son-in-law—were both to be his guests at the wedding breakfast.

Lord Rivers had known the name of Armstrong from his boyhood. And the purse-proud merchant, who had been almost ashamed to acknowledge cousin Sarah before his clerks in Dover Street, stood back in surprise while the earl assisted that lady into his own carriage, where he had already placed Mrs. Armstrong. He then entered himself, and the carriage drove off on its way to Lime Grove.

Mr. Armstrong's own carriage was quickly filled with a party of young people; two juvenile

bridesmaids, with their aunt Edith Longford, soon to be Mrs. Maurice, and Arthur and Freddy Armstrong, now a merry laughter-loving boy of eleven. There remained now only three gentlemen to accompany the bishop in his drive to Lime Grove, the rector of Kilburn, Horace Wilton, Henry's best man, and Mr. Armstrong. Perhaps the latter's foolish prejudices about clergymen were never more completely shaken than when he found himself seated in the bishop's carriage with that high church dignitary and the two gentlemen we have named. In fact, he wondered at himself that he could feel proud of the position. And now what can be said of the wedding breakfast, laid out in Mr. Armstrong's splendidly furnished dining-room? For this occasion Mrs. Herbert had obtained *carte blanche* from her sister to make any alterations she pleased, and the introduction of flowers and other ornaments, according to that lady's taste, had greatly improved the elegant appearance of the table and satisfied the hired waiters, who succumbed to that lady's superior knowledge at once and without a demur.

And what shall we say of the numerous yet select party who assembled around that elegant table? It was like all other wedding breakfasts, a medley of smiles and tears, of joyful hopes and sad regrets, painful memories and bright prospects. And yet there was something in the gathering round Mr. Armstrong's table which made it differ from similar associations. The preponderance of the clerical element did not cast a damper on the young and buoyant spirits then present. The bishop's genial, yet dignified manner, resembled that of the lamented Dr. Wilberforce. The rector, an old man approaching his eightieth year, belonged to the class of polished and refined gentlemen of olden times, who would take off their hats to the meanest of their female parishioners, or enter bareheaded the humblest cottage in the parish.

Horace Wilton, as we know, had not learned to regard with a cynical eye the happiness which he had himself so nearly grasped, and Frank Maurice found himself taking lessons in the present ordering of an event which was so soon to be realised in his own experience. As to the bridegroom, who, strange to say, is very often looked upon as the least important person present on such an occasion, an overflow of happiness kept him silent. It was not till called upon to return thanks in the name of his bride and himself, that the natural powers of eloquence and oratory possessed by Henry Halford astonished and delighted the wedding guests.

The speech scarcely occupied five minutes. His words were well chosen, and to the point; his allusions pleasant and in good taste; his quotations, in one or two instances classical, were suitable and attractive; while through all could be detected the oratorical powers of the speaker, although subdued and restrained to suit the room and the occasion. When the clear young voice ceased there was a burst of applause, hushed, however, in a moment, as Lord Rivers rose and exclaimed—

"Thank you, Mr. Henry Halford, for showing me that I have not made any mistake in my choice of a rector for Briarsleigh."

But the wedding chapter is extending itself beyond the prescribed limits. We must pass over the speeches and the toasts which followed. We, who know the love of mother and daughter in that hour, now so joyous with the voices and symbols of happiness, can understand how both are dreading the hour of parting.

It came at last; and when Mary, accompanied by her bridesmaids, hastened to the room to prepare for her journey, Mrs. Armstrong followed her upstairs, and seating herself in her own room waited nervously till her daughter was ready.

She heard the door open, and the young voices in gay conversation as they approached. Then she rose and stood near the door, to be quickly observed by her daughter.

"Mamma! oh, I'm so glad. Wait a few minutes, Kate and Clara." Then she turned, and throwing herself on her mother's bosom, she exclaimed, "Mother, dearest mother, how can I leave you? Who will take care of you when I am gone?"

The mother's arms closed around her child, and for some moments neither spoke, but the tears were silently flowing from Mrs. Armstrong's eyes, as she listened to the scarcely restrained sobs of her daughter.

A tear dropped on Mary's forehead; she raised her face quickly—

"Mamma, I am causing you unnecessary pain; pray forgive me. I cannot help it; I shall miss you so much."

"No, darling," said the mother, with a smile, as she wiped the tears which she tried to restrain; "you belong to your husband now; he will more than supply my place to you; besides, we shall not be so very far away from each other after all, and Martha will take care of me."

"That I will Miss—Ma'am, I beg your pardon," and the faithful old servant entered hastily as she spoke; "They are calling out for you, Mrs. Halford; the carriage is waiting."

"Once more, darling mother, good-by," said the young bride, who had started with a smile at the matronly title; and after one more kiss and fond embrace, the mother and daughter descended the stairs together. Mrs. Armstrong had nerved herself to witness her child's departure.

One more ordeal awaited Mary.

After kisses and farewells from the bridesmaids, and more formal adieus to the visitors, Mary

turned to her father. Mr. Armstrong clasped his daughter to his heart, and as he fondly kissed her, whispered, "Forgive me, darling, for all the sorrow I have caused you." Controlling her emotion, she playfully placed her gloved hand on his lips, and exclaimed, "Hush, papa, it has made my happiness all the greater."

In a few moments the lawn beneath the lime trees was glittering with tarlatan, lace, and ribbons, as the juvenile portion of the company followed Mary and her husband to the gate. At length, after one last kiss had been given to the bride, to be succeeded by another, the rector of Briarsleigh's carriage drove off amid a shower of old slippers, only one of which reached its destination.

That evening, when alone, and reflecting on the events of the day, Edward Armstrong discovered that with all his self-confidence in his own superior judgment, he had during his life made more than one mistake.

In all his successes he had forgotten God, and worshipped riches and position. He had despised those possessing high, noble, and intellectual qualities, because they lacked those advantages which he so highly valued.

His prejudices and his pride had made him unkind to his only daughter, and only when at last alarmed by discovering that "riches can take to themselves wings," did he allow these foolish prejudices to be set aside. To his surprise he was now obliged to admit that the honours this day conferred upon him arose from his daughter's alliance with the family he had once despised for their profession and supposed poverty. To them he owed the presence of the bishop and the earl as his guests. While the family he had despised had been honouring God, he had been honouring gold; and as these facts became clear to his mind, the words of a text he had read when a child at his mother's knee came back on his memory with full force—"Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."

THE END

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