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DILEMMAS OF PRIDE.

BY MARGRACIA LOUDON

THE AUTHOR OF FIRST LOVE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I.](#)
[CHAPTER II.](#)
[CHAPTER III.](#)
[CHAPTER IV.](#)
[CHAPTER V.](#)
[CHAPTER VI.](#)
[CHAPTER VII.](#)
[CHAPTER VIII.](#)
[CHAPTER IX.](#)
[CHAPTER X.](#)
[CHAPTER XI.](#)
[CHAPTER XII.](#)
[CHAPTER XIII.](#)
[CHAPTER XIV.](#)
[CHAPTER XV.](#)
[CHAPTER XVI.](#)
[CHAPTER XVII.](#)
[CHAPTER XVIII.](#)
[CHAPTER XIX.](#)
[CHAPTER XX.](#)
[CHAPTER XXI.](#)
[CHAPTER XXII.](#)
[CHAPTER XXIII.](#)
[CHAPTER XXIV.](#)
[CHAPTER XXV.](#)

DILEMMAS OF PRIDE.

CHAPTER I.

Alfred felt a strong and restless desire to absent himself from Cheltenham for a time. What might ultimately occur he saw as a frightful spectre in the distance, and he even strove to keep his mental vision fixed with stern steadiness on the unwelcome image, while he laboured to discipline his mind to generous emotions, and teach it to desire absolutely the happiness of his truly generous brother, without any remaining reference to self, even though Willoughby should become a serious and a successful admirer of Caroline's. But to witness the early steps, the daily progress towards such a consummation, was what seemed to his imagination impossible to be endured. Caroline's gentle smiles—the privilege of walking beside her on the Montpelier promenade—of sitting near her little work-table in Lady Palliser's drawing-room—of joining his voice to hers in certain duets which he called to mind individually: these had been his own. The dread of seeing them appropriated by another, appeared, in the present disordered state of his mind, to terrify his fancy even more than all the vague and distant views of that irremediable step; the very despair attending the contemplation of which awed every gentler emotion into stillness; and produced comparatively, a seeming, if not a salutary calm. Accordingly he made up his mind to go to town, on the plea of aiding to complete some arrangements then in progress for his promotion. We forgot to mention that our hero held one of those fashionable licences to be shot at, an ornamental commission in the Dragoon Guards. By using the word ornamental, we do not wish to infer that a regiment of Dragoons is not useful in a field of battle; we only mean to say, that in peaceful times like the present, young men go into the Guards more with a view to becoming *ornamental* members of society than useful engines of warfare, and very naturally feel more ambitious to attract the attention of ladies than to repel the enemy.

Alfred set out for town. For several days however, Willoughby continued in a very unsettled state of mind, avoiding rather than seeking the society of Lady Caroline Montague.

He had always entertained towards Alfred an affection much stronger than, from the strangeness of his temper, was known to any one but himself, or perhaps even to himself. His thoughts were now absorbed and saddened by the remembrance that Alfred was not happy. He felt a fastidious repugnance to draw happiness himself from the same source which had caused, and was still causing his brother pain; and rather than run the risk of aggravating that pain, he doubted whether it would not be better to relinquish at once an acquaintance of only a few days. He almost wished he had gone to town with Alfred; yet town had unpleasant associations for him just then.

For a time, guided by feelings such as we have described, he almost avoided Caroline; yet a fatality seemed to hang upon him. Though he told himself again and again that she was but the acquaintance of an hour, it seemed as if the matured attachment of Alfred had, by some mysterious tie, by some identity of sympathies existing in nature between the twin brothers, flung its spell, from the first interview, over the heart of Willoughby, as though those more than brothers scarcely enjoyed a divided being, but that the wishes and affections of both were still united by hidden links, which irresistibly propelled them to one object.

The very efforts which Willoughby made not to attach himself to our heroine seemed to invest his feelings with a seriousness, a pathetic tenderness, so strangely mingled with his pity for Alfred, that while he sometimes sat apart, yet unable to withdraw his gaze from the mild and lovely features of Caroline, his sensations approximated to torture.

Her beauty appeared to him, the more he gazed upon it, Nature's only perfect work. That any one could admire any other style, any other lovely being, seemed to him a thing impossible. His former fancied attachment he now saw to have been indeed but a dream of vanity, and that it had touched any other feeling.

He could not, however, maintain the struggle long; he soon began to seek for arguments favourable to his wishes. Alfred's love, he told himself, could not bear comparison with his in fervour, or he would have persevered longer—he would have renewed his offer again and again. The attachment was not mutual, Caroline having herself rejected him. Such an attachment then would, in all probability, soon be forgotten; then why, if he could, make himself acceptable, might he not be happy? In a little time he arrived at the certainty that Alfred would himself be generous enough to rejoice in his happiness.

Lady Palliser's encouragement was decided. Caroline's indeed was but passive. Geoffery, however, himself believing his cousin's attachment to be a hopeless one, pretended to point out many marks of a hidden preference, which he said could not be mistaken, averring that a cool looker-on was better able to judge than a party interested.

Willoughby, more even than the rest of the world, was liable to being flattered into the belief of what he wished; he very soon, therefore, gave himself over to a passion which left him no longer master of any one thought or feeling.

Geoffery's motives were such as we have already pointed out. Unsuccessful courtships were at least time lost, while his being the administering medium of flattery and flattering hopes kept up his own influence.

Willoughby, when he wrote to his brother, which he did frequently and kindly, thought there was a delicacy in refraining entirely from any mention of Caroline, or of his own growing admiration; accordingly he did not even allude to the subject.

Three or four letters had been severally received by Alfred, and opened with excessive trepidation, dreading what they might contain; yet when they were concluded and found not to contain even the name of Caroline, the feeling of momentary relief was followed by one allied to disappointment; one which was at least an access of the miserable suspense, the restless craving to know something, even the worst, rather than look any longer upon the desolate blank, which, without the slightest variation, each weary day now presented. From the hour he had quitted Cheltenham, and it was now some weeks, he had seemed to himself a being cut off from the past, apart from the present, shut out from the future. It was a state of mind no longer to be endured. Within about half an hour after the receipt of Willoughby's last letter, though it was then about ten o'clock at night, he set out for Cheltenham.

CHAPTER II.

Alfred arrived at Cheltenham at an early hour in the morning. On repairing to Lady Arden's villa, however, he found that the family had already gone to the walks.

That Caroline was probably there also was his first thought; his next, that Willoughby perhaps at that very moment walked beside her as her received lover. He certainly dreaded to behold realized the picture his imagination had formed. Yet a strange restless feeling, a sort of desperation, blended with a faint hope that he might be quite wrong, impelled him to turn his footsteps towards Montpelier.

It chanced that the band which had paused for one of the usual intervals, recommenced just at the moment. It would be utterly impossible to describe the universal thrill which, on hearing the well-known sounds, took possession of Alfred's whole frame, the rush of associations, numerous, various, vivid, yet so cruelly contrasted with his present feelings.

He wandered on, and entering what may be termed *the* walk, beheld close to him, but in the act of turning, Caroline and Lady Palliser, with Willoughby in attendance. He had seen Caroline's countenance for one moment, but none of the party had seen him. Their backs being now towards him he followed within a few paces, endeavouring to summon resolution for the necessary task of joining and speaking to them.

Willoughby it was evident had no eyes for any object but his fair companion, towards whom he turned and addressed with an eagerness which precluded the possibility of his ever once looking before him, much less over his shoulder. Caroline of course turned her head from time to time towards Willoughby to reply. She wore the memorable close bonnet of white sarsenet which Alfred had thought so becoming. The morning he had first seen her wear it became present to memory, while imagination vividly portrayed within its own beautifying sanctuary that vision of loveliness which it now seemed to be the peculiar privilege of another to behold, as once it had been his, sheltered from the common gaze, and beautiful for him alone.

Lady Arden's party also was close before him, but his agitation, instead of being at all composed by the time he reached the front of the pump-room, was so much increased, that while the ranks of fashion were wheeling to the right or left, to turn down the prescribed limit, he found a convenient screen behind the crimson velvet pelisse of Lady Whaleworthy who chanced to be near, and a moment after, turning off by a cross walk, he made his way home. On the plea to the servant who admitted him, of fatigue after his journey, he sought the shelter of his own apartment; where, while he was supposed to have retired to bed and slept, he sat strengthening and preparing his mind by meditation for a meeting with his brother, and endeavouring to resolve what should be the tenor of his own conduct.

He had been but a very short time shut into his room, his mind still in much too perturbed a state for society, when he heard the family party coming in below. He could distinguish Willoughby's step cross the hall and hastily ascend the stairs, but he had not yet resolution to admit him; he therefore bolted his door without noise, and remained quite still. He heard Willoughby turn the handle of the lock gently, and after pausing a moment retire. "They have told him of my arrival, and with his wonted kindness, poor fellow, he is impatient to see me," thought Alfred. "And if he is destined," he added, after a pause, "to a better, a brighter lot than mine, shall I wantonly embitter his happiness by allowing him to perceive that the confirmation of hope to him will be the sealing of despair to me? No, no, I will be more generous, he shall see me firm, collected—if possible cheerful. Nay, that he is happy, surely ought to be, and as surely is, a source of rejoicing to me. Would this admit of a question were his happiness derived from any other source?—Certainly not! What perverted feeling, then, can it be to which I yield?—Selfishness! yes, selfishness the most aimless, the most degraded! For shame! for shame! I must cast it from me and be a man."

As he formed this resolve he rose from his seat and stood erect. After a few seconds he hastily decided on descending to the breakfast-room, lest Willoughby should again seek him; for he felt that he should have more self-command in the full family circle, than were his heart just at this moment subjected to the probing of his affectionate brother's anxiety in a private interview.

Alfred, too amiable not to be a general favourite, was received by every individual of the party with the most entire cordiality, except, indeed, Geoffery, who had no good will for any one.

Willoughby, by the manner of shaking hands, and a look which accompanied the action, implied a kind and even anxious enquiry into the state of his brother's feelings, which it cost Alfred an effort to parry. He did so, however, though with an air of rather overdone carelessness.

Willoughby, deeply interested in believing him sincere, and himself not a very keen observer, was more than satisfied—he was delighted. And by the time breakfast was concluded, so well had Alfred, aided by a feverish excitement, acted the part of cheerfulness and even gaiety, that Willoughby now looked forward to the coming evening with unmixed pleasure. It was the one fixed for a splendid ball at Lady Arden's, and Lady Caroline Montague was already engaged to open it with him.

The ball was so far a fortunate circumstance for our hero, for his sisters could think of little else, which prevented their bantering him in the unmerciful manner they might else have done about forsaking his post. Mrs. Dorothea Arden, who after being at the walks with the young people, always breakfasted with the family party, was so anxious on this particular morning to see that meal concluded—having many arrangements to recommend to her nieces, that she too made but one remark on the painful topic, merely saying, as she rose from table; "Well, I am glad, Alfred, you have returned in time not to allow your beautiful heiress to be run away with. Willoughby has been paying fierce love in that quarter I assure you. However, I should hope that with his ninety thousand a-year of his own, he has no serious intention of interfering with your making so desirable a match."

Mrs. Dorothea had effected her exit by the time she finished her speech, so that fortunately no answer was required. An awkward silence however followed; for though all the ladies had by this time departed in various directions, Geoffery's presence precluded any thing like confidential conversation between the brothers.

By our constant mention of Geoffery, it may be supposed he lived with the Arden family, and it must be confessed that he found it both convenient and agreeable to do so in a great measure; he had, however, a nominal home at a hotel. For the last few moments Alfred had yielded to a reverie of no very agreeable nature, the result of which was, a conclusion arrived at with inward dismay: namely, that if he would avoid calling down a universal clamour of remark both upon himself and Lady Caroline, he must continue on friendly, and apparently intimate terms both with Lady Palliser and her daughter, and for this purpose pay to both every polite attention which intimacy claims; and still more that the exertion, however painful, must be made at once.

Accordingly, with as much ease of manner as he could assume, he proposed to Willoughby and Geoffery that they should accompany him in a morning visit to Jessamine Bower.

"I suppose you forgot to ask Mrs. Dorothea's permission before you fall in love," murmured Geoffery aside to Willoughby, as they passed out; "how absurd it is of aunts and mothers to suppose that they are to dictate to young men in these matters; but women love to hear themselves talk."

CHAPTER III.

Lady Palliser not being at home, Alfred was spared the trial of this first visit, and felt that the respite, even till evening, was a sensible relief.

Geoffery, after a vain effort to draw Willoughby to the billiard rooms, repaired thither himself; and the brothers, thus left to each other's society, wandered on into a quiet walk, and naturally fell into confidential conversation.

So well had Alfred hitherto acted his part, and so successfully did he during this interview conceal his emotions, that Willoughby was gradually led to open his whole heart, to dwell with enthusiasm on his attachment, and even to speak of his hopes. He would not have approached this latter part of the subject had he not at length mistaken Alfred's fortitude for indifference, and persuaded himself that prudential considerations must have been chiefly influential in tempting his brother to seek the hand of Caroline.

"I cannot tell you how happy you have made me, Alfred," he said, "by returning among us, and in such good spirits. And remember," he added, "that whenever and wherever you may fix your ultimate choice, it will be my joy to forward your views to the utmost of my power. Whatever settlement the lady's family shall require, you may command at my hands; I speak without limit."

Alfred made an evasive, but affectionate and grateful reply.

"That we may be sometimes mistaken in the strength, or rather the reality and consequent

durability of our feelings," continued Willoughby, "I am now fully aware from my own experience. I thought myself very sincerely attached to Lady Anne Armadale, and for a short time after her worthless breach of faith, I believed myself quite miserable; yet how deeply am I, in point of fact, indebted to her ladyship for giving me an opportunity of being undeceived before it was too late! You see, my dear Alfred," he added, smiling, and looking round in his brother's face, "that a disappointment is not always an irremediable misfortune." Alfred had not time to assume cheerfulness of countenance; and Willoughby sighed as he continued, "Not always, I say; for how widely different are my present feelings. I sometimes shudder when I think how little they are within my own control! Alfred," he added, suddenly standing still, and laying his hand on his brother's arm, "if the hopes to which I have now given up my whole soul prove less than true, I shall—become a madman!" he subjoined, after a moment's pause. "You can have no idea," he pursued, "of the wildness of my thoughts, when I give way to a doubt—" A long silence followed, which Willoughby at length broke by saying, "I am well aware that suicide is one of the greatest of crimes; yet without even visible or absolute insanity, I can imagine the balance of the mind being so entirely upset on one all-engrossing object, as to render us for the time no longer accountable beings."

"There are cases," replied Alfred, with mournful solemnity, "which certainly require a more than common exertion of fortitude to carry us through the hour of trial. Impulses, however, of a sinful tendency must not only be resisted, but from the first they must be dismissed from our very thoughts; they must not be dwelt upon even to be condemned, lest our minds become, as it were, familiar with crime, and one barrier be thus broken down."

"Fortitude!—reason!" repeated Willoughby. "Alfred," he added, laying both his hands on his brother's shoulders, "I fear I am already in a delirium! I have intoxicating hopes, yet I know not if they are rational; for there are times when I conjure up fears and calculate chances, till breathless and with beating pulses I could almost rush on self-destruction as a refuge from the mere possibility of ultimate failure!" While uttering the words self-destruction, he looked wildly round for a moment, as if in search of the means.

Alfred was indescribably shocked: the painful surmise which, on less important occasions, had frequently crossed his imagination, now struck him with redoubled force. His sympathy with his brother, mingled as it was with the strange circumstances of his own case, became a sort of agony. "Why should you, my dear Willoughby," he said, "who can command every means of enjoyment this earth has to offer—why should you give way to dreams, so wild, so incoherent? Banish all such thoughts, and let me have at least the happiness of seeing you happy." An anxious inquiring look was Willoughby's only reply to this. He shrank unconsciously from seeking any unwelcome confession—a selfish feeling, of which he was not aware, secretly urging him to believe without probing too deeply, that Alfred was comparatively indifferent. In silence, therefore, the brothers now bent their steps homewards, Alfred reflecting the while on the peculiar cruelty of his fate; for if a miracle could now be wrought in his favour, and Caroline be restored to him all he had once believed her, his compassion for Willoughby, he felt, would render the remainder of his own life wretched. Yet how did his heart sicken at the thought of the scenes he must witness, the confidences he must hear, the thoughtless railleries he must parry, if he would act successfully the part which he felt it his duty to maintain: for why should he wantonly embitter for another the cup of joy which he was himself forbidden to taste; that other a brother whom he fondly loved—a brother who he knew loved him with the most enthusiastic affection? in short, in a futurity now become evidently unavoidable, he beheld, as it were, all the appalling apparatus of torture displayed before him, yet felt necessitated to submit his spirit to agony, with almost the stern fortitude of an Indian chief, yielding his limbs to the cruelty of his foes.

No sooner did he enter the drawing-room than his sisters began to tease him, first about the length of his visit; and when they found he had not been admitted, one observed that a runaway lover did not deserve the favour of an audience; another asked archly, if he had commissioned Willoughby to take the sole charge of Caroline in his absence. Lord Darlingford, who was holding a skein of silk on the extended fingers of both hands for Jane to wind, being unconscious how painful the subject was to Alfred, said that he would not suspect Mr. Arden of conduct so imprudent, for that love-making by proxy was universally acknowledged to be extremely perilous.

Louisa declared that with her the lover who was present was always the favourite. Sir James, who was standing beside her, giggled, and drew a step nearer. An expression of disgust passed over her countenance, which, however, she concealed, by stooping closer to her scrap-book, into which she was writing some passionate lines given her by Henry, of the ardour of whose manner when he last repeated the said lines she was reflecting at the moment.

Jane thought, but did not say, that absence would rather add tenderness to feeling where it did exist; without, however, daring to associate the thought with the idea of one now absent—and who had once been remembered with tenderness—for his marriage with another had some time since appeared in the *Morning Post*.

Madeline, whose heart was free, expressed openly the sentiment Jane had secretly thought, though not without one of those prophetic blushes which will suffuse the cheeks of even disengaged young ladies at the very anticipation of being one time or other in love in their turn.

CHAPTER IV.

Geoffery was still at the billiard table, where, with the assistance of Sir William Orm, he was engaged in plucking a new pigeon, no less a personage than the future head of the Salter family.

Mr. John Salter was a vain, vulgar, selfish fool; in natural clumsiness a caricature of John Bull personified, yet so determined to be French and Frenchified, and so proud of his travels to and through Boulogne, that the young men about the rooms, to whom he afforded infinite amusement, called him the Marquis. Sir William Orm, though he had long since cut the other members of the Salter family, sometimes did the young man the honour to win his money; while Geoffery Arden, and several other fashionables, granted him the privilege of a limited portion of their acquaintance on the same liberal terms. When the Misses Salter, however, saw their brother bow to one gentleman, speak to another, and walk with a third, their drooping hopes naturally revived.

"Who is that, John?—Has he much fortune—Is he married?—Couldn't you ask him to dinner some day?—And who is that? I never saw you speak to him before." Such were the questions and comments addressed by the young ladies to their hopeful brother, who never, however, took the trouble of giving them any satisfaction; his usual polite reply being, "If I choose to ask him to dinner, I won't wait for your leave you may depend upon it."

"Well," said Miss Salter to her sister, "if we get plenty of men acquaintance through John, we needn't much care about the ladies after all. It's the men we want you know."

"I know that," said Grace, "but I don't know that we shall get them: however we might have had both the ladies and the gentlemen, only for your improper conduct to Mrs. Dorothea. Isn't this Mr. Arden that John knows, her nephew; and Sir Willoughby Arden, and the other Mr. Arden both her nephews? besides, her knowing all the fine people; why she would have been the very best acquaintance in Cheltenham, if we had only kept her while we had her."

"Well, I wish you'd keep your temper I know, and not be always harping on that old story."

"Temper, indeed! The less you say on that subject the better; but for that matter I mean to take your advice and *keep* my temper, as it happens to be one of the best going; but I recommend you to part with yours as soon as possible, for you can't exchange it for a worse let me tell you."

Miss Salter, who had just finished washing her hands, snatched up the basin, flung its contents in her sister's face, and effecting her retreat during the first consternation of the enemy, said, as she flounced out of the room, "except I changed it for yours."

Descending in haste, she encountered her brother, Sir William Orm, and Mr. Geoffrey Arden in the entrance hall. Astonished, delighted, and covered with smiles, she accompanied them into the drawing room; ere however they had time to be seated, in rushed Miss Grace, dripping from the shower bath so lately administered by her affectionate sister, and her eyes so blinded by the visitation of soap suds, that, alas, she saw not the strangers; but having heard her brother's voice as he crossed the hall, she poured forth her bitter complaints, sobbing violently, and relating the particulars of the assault perpetrated by Miss Salter. John laughed rudely—Sir William and Geoffery looked foolish—and Grace, having received a private hint from her sister, wiped her eyes, beheld the gentlemen, and after standing for a moment perfectly aghast, took her departure; while Miss Salter, in utter confusion, and with a countenance of the deepest mortification, yet trying to force a laugh, said it was very childish of Grace to take her silly jest amiss.

"You're such a pair of little innocent children, to be sure," said her brother with a sneer.

"Some people have a particular dislike to practical jokes," observed Sir William Orm.

"This is not the entertainment however that I brought my friends home to receive," continued the amiable Mr. John. "So I beg you'll keep your quarrels to yourselves, and order some dinner."

Mr. Salter entering at the moment Miss Salter made her escape, she flew first to the room to which her sister had returned to repair the injured adornments of her person, opened the door, thrust in her head, grinned a silent defiance, and slamming the door to again, ran down to Mrs. Johnson, to consult in providing a proper entertainment for guests so valuable, or rather so invaluable, as were two fashionable beaux. Hotels and pastry cooks were ordered to be laid under contribution, and no expense spared, let papa scold as he might. In cases of such vital importance, thought Miss Salter, people mustn't stick at trifles. She then ran up stairs again and in breathless haste, with the assistance of a housemaid changed her dress, and throwing on all the gold chains and bracelets she could muster, made her appearance in the drawing-room, looking however, as might have been expected, after so much exertion both mental and corporeal, not quite so cool as she could have wished. Whether, therefore, it was most to her relief or to her disappointment, when she found the gentlemen too much occupied to perceive her entrance, she was not able to define her feelings with sufficient accuracy to decide, although she had plenty of time for self-examination, having nothing to do during the full hour that dinner was delayed by the necessary additions, but to sit in perfect silence beside her sister on a sofa. The fact was, that the four lords of the creation had got to a rubber at whist and looked as if the slightest interruption would annoy them.

And young ladies, who have neither beauty nor fortune to recommend them, are obliged to be so

amiable, that they learn to acquire an anticipative perception of what will be pleasing and soothing to the whims and tempers of those falsely important personages—bachelors. Alas! alas! for the dignity of the poor ladies! But this is only another of the many evil consequences of the monopoly of property; for that monopoly being generally vested in the male line, women are early taught that it is only by worshipping some golden calf, in other words some man of fortune, that they can hope to be restored to any participation, either in the comforts of domestic, or in the distinctions of public life. Were there but a little more justice laid in at the foundation of society, surely there would be less occasion for this heartless scramble, so revolting to almost all, while too many of those who were made for better things, find themselves necessitated by circumstances to join the throng, whose every movement and motives they despise; but as they cannot change the world, they are compelled to let the world change them; for tastes and feelings may be outraged, but dinners cannot be dispensed with.

How different an aspect would the world in a very short time present if that offspring of pride and prejudice, the unjust law of primogeniture, were abolished. The slaves of circumstances, whether men or women, would thus, without spoliation or revolution, be gradually emancipated, and the worship of wealth, that most universal and degrading of all idolatries, be put down. The standard of ostentation would be lowered, tis true; but the sum of human felicity would be increased, not only in a natural proportion, but still more through the medium of that ideal estimate which now poisons the very sources of peace. For then, not only would the number possessed of comfortable independence be much greater, but all those so blessed would learn (their understandings being no longer warped by invidious comparisons) to know themselves rich and feel themselves happy. Imagine then pride, prejudice, and famine thus banished from the world. Fancy this amended state of things to have existed for some centuries, and the happy generation then in being looking back on the records of our times. Would they believe what they read to be a grave statement of facts? Certainly not! On the contrary, they would be inclined to suppose the whole not only a work of fiction, but the conception of a madman's mind; so extravagant, so far removed from nature and probability would every action appear, so insufficient every motive, the sacrifices of realities to phantoms so egregiously inordinate, so hyperbolically absurd, that the feelings and adventures of personages so unlike themselves would find no fellowship with their sympathies. As well might we be expected to feel pious awe when we read of the gross idolatries of the ancient sage or modern savage. When, however, we look back on obsolete absurdities, or abroad on foreign follies, and find that when objects are removed from the artificial atmosphere of interests and habits we can discern them with distinctness, it seems not unreasonable to hope, that our mental vision is in itself perfect, and that therefore when the great luminary truth, which is gradually climbing the intellectual horizon, shall have arrived at its meridian, and dissipated the mists of prejudice, we shall behold with equal distinctness those objects, which lying in and around our homes and our times more intimately concern our happiness. Were all the world governed by rational, sufficient, and consistent motives, how few, comparatively speaking, would be the ills of life!

The objectors to the just division of paternal inheritance urge that the wellbeing of a state is best secured by the members of the community having as great a stake in the country as possible, and assert that such a division would lessen that now possessed by the heads of families. But is not the heartfelt happiness, the peaceful and joyous prosperity of the many, not only a greater stake than the ostentatious pride of the few, but one much more calculated to rouse when necessary the lion-spirit of national defence?

To those who would bring forward, as so many insurmountable objections, the thousand remote evils they think they can foresee, as the probable results of the system we thus advocate, we can only reply, that we do not pretend to understand the difficult science of political economy, we only know that what we recommend is just. Do justice then in all things we would say, not in the pride of opinion but on principle, and let the Allwise Disposer of the fates dispose of the consequences.

CHAPTER V.

At dinner young Salter was vastly liberal of his father's wine, and called loud and often for Champagne, sparkling bumpers of which had shortly the effect of so raising the spirits of his guests, that they began their usual merciless quizzing of the Marquis, as they styled their younger host; for, holding as they did, all the family in sovereign contempt, the presence of father and sisters was no sort of check. Indeed they rather seemed to expect that their easy familiarity would be received as a compliment by the whole domestic circle; nor were they far wrong in their calculations. Mr. Salter, honest man, thought that, as he had been at a great expense about his son's education and travels to foreign parts, it was no wonder that his said son should on his return home create a very great sensation. As for the young ladies, they were particularly well pleased; for John's getting so intimate with men of fashion must, they thought, lead to their receiving more or less attention.

"You import the silk for your own waistcoats, I suppose, Salter?" observed Sir William Orm, "there is nothing like it to be had in this country."

"I heard a lady—a lady of title too—say, no later than last night," chimed in Geoffery, "that she

would give anything for a pair of slippers made out of one of the Marquis's waistcoats, they were all so perfectly beautiful."

"She don't mean to go barefooted till she gets them, I hope," replied the polite object of this delicate compliment.

"I suspect," said Sir William, "that it is the Marquis's own beauty which the lady has so associated with the patterns of the silks he wears that she knows not how to separate the ideas."

"Salter is certainly a fortunate fellow," rejoined Geoffery, "the ladies all admire him."

"Confess the truth now, Marquis," cried Sir William; "in round numbers at home and abroad, how many hearts do you think you have broken in your time?"

"I know better than to kiss and tell," answered young Salter conceitedly.

"That chain," said Geoffery, "which you wear in such graceful festoons, Marquis, must be either Venetian or Maltese, the workmanship is so exquisite. By-the-by, there was a lady last night admiring that too, and wishing so much you would make her a present of it."

"What," cried Sir William, "the ladies volunteering to wear his chains? you may well be vain, Marquis."

"They may volunteer to wear this that get it," said young Salter, looking down at the chain.

"You are a great fool, John," observed his father, "hanging money round your neck that way, that's paying no interest."

"Pardon me!" interrupted Sir William, "it is interesting to the ladies."

"He will be able to afford it to be sure," continued old Salter, "for which he may thank an industrious father. Why, gentlemen, when I began the world—confound it!" he cried, shoving back his chair violently, "what are you treading on my gouty foot for?"

Miss Salter, who knew too well what was coming, had tried to avert the impending evil by, not it would seem a gentle hint under the table. It had for many years of Mr. Salter's life been his boast that he had earned every shilling of his own fortune. "Any fool might belong to an old family," he would say, "but a man deserved credit, he thought, who could make a new one;" which as we have already hinted he was determined to do, by heaping all his wealth on the noble Marquis. On Mr. Salter's first coming to Cheltenham, however, his daughters had prevailed on him, much against his will, to be silent on this favourite topic; while they had flourished away from morning till night about family—respectable family—highly respectable family—old family—ancient family; till at length, by dint of retrograde movements, they had arrived, for aught we know, at coming in with the conqueror. But, alas, about this time Lady Flamborough jilted, and Ladies Whaleworthy and Shawbridge cut poor Mr. Salter, and so put him out of humour with all sorts of quality, as he called them, that he derived a species of consolation from suffering the full tide of his old notions to overflow once more both his soul and his conversation. In vain, therefore, was Miss Salter's hint, as well as many subsequent interruptions. "When I began the world," he recommenced, "the young man in the song who had but one sixpence was better off than I was. My father came by his death in a colliery you see in Cumberland, and left my poor mother with six of us upon the parish. I was big enough at the time, I remember, to lead a cart, so was apprenticed to a farmer, who moving some years after to a farm in Ayrshire, took me with him. There I picked up the knowledge of Scotch farming that afterwards made my fortune, and brought me a wife into the bargain, who, were she living, good woman, wouldn't believe her own eyes, that that there fine gentleman, and these here fine ladies were her own born children! Look here to be sure," he continued, pointing to Miss Salter's ornaments, "such chains, and rings, and bracelets, and nonsense; and if you'll believe me, gentlemen, the first pair of shoes ever her mother had on her feet I bought for her at Maybole fair, in Ayrshire. As for ornaments, we were married with a rush ring, and all the household furniture we possessed was a chaff-bed."

"Well, Mr. Salter," said Sir William, "I can only say that times are greatly changed for the better, and you have yourself to thank for it."

"That's what I say, sir," cried Salter, striking his clenched hand on the table till he made the glasses ring. "Let me see the man that has done so much out of so small a beginning. My son will have as fine an estate as any gentleman in the country, and as fine a house upon it as any nobleman. And if the family is *new*, why so is the *property*, and likely, therefore, like a *new* coat, to give some wear, which is more than some of the old ones will do," he added, winking, and looking exceedingly wise as he laughed at his own wit. The mortified young ladies here rose, and tossing their heads and biting their lips, took their departure.

"Nothing would serve my daughters, when first we come to this vanity-fair," continued Mr. Salter, "but they must pass themselves off for ladies of high family, forsooth, and behave with impertinence to their betters, till they got themselves blown and cut too, as all that sail under false colours deserve to be. But let a man, I say, come forward with nothing but the truth in his mouth, and who shall despise him for having made his way in the world by honest industry?"

Mr. Salter's guests assented, in words at least, to his proposition, and thus encouraged, he proceeded, "A man who has had his own and his children's bred to get, may not have had much time, to be sure, *ither* for book-*larning* or bow-making, and may not, therefore, be over good

company neither for your scholar nor your fine gentleman; but what e that; there are plenty neither wiser nor genteeler than himself, why shouldn't he be happy with them! As for his children, why, if he can afford to make them independent, let him give them, as I have done, plenty of schooling with it, and so make them company for any man."

Geoffery here interrupted the discussion by rising to take his departure, pleading the ball at his aunt's, which he must attend, while Sir William Orm, finding there would be no chance of renewing the whist party, inveigled away the Marquis to the hazard-table. Mr. Salter, thus left to himself, was soon fast asleep in his chair; and his usual nap being prolonged by his unusual potations, it was a couple of hours before he found his way into the drawing-room. The disappointment of his daughters, on his making his appearance alone, may be imagined, when it is duly considered that they had waited tea, though we cannot say patiently, till near one o'clock in the morning for the gentlemen, of whose early retreat they were not aware.

So much for feeding illbred men of fashion, in the hope of securing in return what they have not to give—their politeness. After, therefore, expressing warmly their disapprobation of such rudeness, the Misses Salter had nothing for it but to retire to rest, venting on each other, 'till sleep closed their lips, the aggregate of spleen collected throughout the day from so many fruitful sources. Yet here were people whose more than common prosperity might have brought with it more than common happiness in their own line, had not silly ambition and idle vanity poisoned every fountain of attainable enjoyment, and created an inconvenient thirst for the springs of a land of which they were never likely to become naturalized citizens.

The Misses Salter had always heard their poor father say, that he had spared no expense in their education; they knew that they possessed accomplishments, and prided themselves on remembering what they had been made to read at school. But they knew not, for it came not within their sphere to know, that there is an education of early habits effecting the minutiae of outward bearing, and acquired it would seem, by the unconscious mimicry of infancy, the stamp of which no after-school discipline can yet either erase or bestow; and still less were they capable of comprehending, that there is a further education of refining sympathies and ennobling sentiments which, while as children of Adam we all share one first nature, bestows, in combination with that already named of early habits, a sort of second nature, on the privileged few, who from generation to generation have been reared, like exotics, amid the beautiful and beautifying blossoms of delicacy and feeling, sheltered from the rough winds of coarseness, the blighting atmosphere of necessity, and the cold ungenial climate of that almost justifiable selfishness unavoidably learned by those who have not only their own, but their family's imperious wants to supply by their individual anxious exertions.

Thus it is that shades of thinking, of feeling, and of judging, scarcely sufficiently palpable to form subjects of instruction, pass, unintentionally imparted, unconsciously imbibed, from father to son, from mother to daughter, till education in this enlarged sense, in other words refinement, becomes a kind of hereditary distinction, which must be possessed for several succeeding generations before it can well exist in its highest perfection.

That these are very sufficient reasons why the various classes of society, for the comfort of all parties, should keep in their respective spheres, till gradually assimilated by time and circumstances, no one who knows the world can deny; the error lies in making pride instead of expediency the ground of separation,—the sin, in suffering the manifestations of that pride to be offensive.

CHAPTER VI.

Lady Arden stood with Alfred receiving the still arriving guests, while Willoughby was just leading away Lady Caroline to commence dancing. He trembled as she took his arm, some of the uncomfortable doubts expressed in his last interview with his brother recurring at the moment. "Why did she always receive his attentions without hesitation, he thought, or rather with a gentle, a winning acquiescence, yet never look happy." This was a problem on which he pondered night and day, yet one which he could never solve to his entire satisfaction. His intentions were declared in their manner and in their object, and when this is the case, he told himself again and again, not to avoid is surely to encourage.

This ball was Caroline's first meeting with Alfred since his return; for it may be remembered that in the morning he had only seen, not spoken to, nor been seen by her. Willoughby's impatience had led him to overstep the bounds of etiquette. He had been watching near the door, and hearing Lady Palliser and her daughter announced in the first hall, had hastened forward to meet them, given an arm to each, and led them into the ball-room. To address both with tolerable composure was no easy task for Alfred, but imperious necessity seemed to furnish him for the time with the necessary strength. Lady Palliser, all smiles, expressed great pleasure at seeing him, but Caroline's eyes instantly sought the ground, and a glow which no effort could suppress, suffused her cheeks. Alfred became as suddenly pale—a kind of terror seized him when he recognized the well-known symptom of emotion, and beheld that accession of loveliness which the fleeting brilliancy never failed to bestow on one, the perfect beauty of whose features and form was always to him an object sufficiently dangerous. Willoughby's leading her away, as already noticed, to commence the dancing, was almost a welcome relief.

"I cannot understand, my dear Alfred," said his mother anxiously, as during a pause in the arrivals they stood for a moment quite apart; "your present position with Lady Caroline? Willoughby seems as if by the general consent of all the parties to have taken your place; the lady receives him just as but the other day she did you, and you stand by as if perfectly satisfied that your services were no longer required."

"They are no longer required," said Alfred, "and this is, in fact, the only explanation that can be given."

"No, no; there is some foolish misunderstanding," said Lady Arden, "and I fear," she added, "you are resigning not only your interest, but your happiness too easily."

"You would not deny a lady freedom of choice," whispered Alfred, as the approach of fresh guests put an end to the conversation. Lady Arden however, who loved all her children tenderly, but Alfred above all, was far from satisfied. She sighed, and was compelled to await in silence a more favourable opportunity for discussing the subject.

The quadrille, and the waltz which succeeded it, being concluded, Willoughby led his partner to a kind of arbour, formed by enclosing the veranda, which was well supplied with exotics and flowering shrubs, with an awning of canvass, so that the whole range of French windows could, without imprudence, be permitted to stand open. It would seem that they must have found this retreat a pleasing one, for it was some time before they re-appeared, and when they did so, the countenances of both wore a suspicious aspect, Willoughby's looked delighted, Caroline's conscious and confused.

Alfred had been considering that, to keep up appearances, he must, particularly being at home, ask Lady Caroline to dance. He felt sick at heart when he contemplated the exertion of false spirits it would require to carry him through such an undertaking; yet the more he dreaded the task, the more imperiously did he feel himself called upon to go through its performance. As soon, therefore, as our heroine with her late partner returned to the dancing-room in the manner described, he approached. He was much struck by the expression of Willoughby's countenance: he, however, proffered his request by a sort of indistinct murmur. It was acceded to in sounds quite as inarticulate, and he felt Caroline's trembling fingers laid as lightly as possible on his proffered arm. The room now swam round, and how he found his way into a quadrille which was forming, he never knew. The quadrille ended: a waltz tune instantly commenced, and all the couples fell into the ring, as if it were a matter of course; and with the rest, Alfred and Caroline, —neither perhaps, now that the latter had forfeited her plea of never waltzing, being prepared to give a reason for not doing as others did. If even the quadrille had been an agitating task to poor Alfred, the waltz certainly did not tend to compose his nerves; while the idea of Willoughby, which was never for a moment absent, made every thought and feeling agony. Yet was it useful; it gave firmness, if not sternness to his deportment, and so enabled him to get creditably through the concluding ceremonies of leading Caroline to a sofa beside Lady Palliser, and procuring for her an ice, &c.

On crossing the apartment he encountered Willoughby near a window, took his arm, and drew him into the veranda. He had, as we have already mentioned, been struck with the expression of Willoughby's countenance, and could not help suspecting that some conversation of a peculiarly interesting nature must have just passed between him and Caroline; while he fancied that, could he once know the worst to a certainty, he should afterwards be able to meet his fate with composure.

"I think, Willoughby," he said, with tolerably well acted playfulness, but looking down, for he could not venture to meet his brother's eye, "that you have something to communicate that has given you pleasure; and if so, do not fear it can give me pain. I trust I am not so wretchedly selfish! That I have not been fortunate myself, I already know; that you, my dear brother, should be more so, should not surely add to my disappointment; nay, believe me, if I had a lingering regret remaining, it would vanish before the certainty of your happiness."

Thus encouraged, Willoughby, after some little hesitation, confessed that Alfred's suspicions were just; that there had been a conversation of the nature he supposed, and that he had met with so favourable a hearing that he intended on the following day to speak to Lady Palliser on the subject. Alfred, who had overrated his own strength, had not a word to offer in reply. Fortunately, however, at the moment both brothers hearing themselves inquired for by some of their sisters, returned accordingly into the dancing-room.

CHAPTER VII.

When Alfred quitted Lady Arden, her ladyship was joined, at her post near the door, by Mrs. Dorothea, who having much anxious business to arrange, was looking very important, with a large pack of her own printed visiting cards in her hand. On the said cards was added in writing, the words "At Home," together with a certain date, and in a corner nine o'clock; from which latter memorandum hopes of dancing were to be inferred. The date had been chosen with great nicety; for this was to be Mrs. Dorothea's grand party for the season, and must be given while she had her nice house, and before she should be obliged to go back into miserable little confined

lodgings, and discharge her footman, &c. Still she wished it to be after Lady Arden's ball; for on that opportunity was placed her grand dependence for picking up beaux. It was for this laudable purpose that the pack of cards already mentioned had been brought in her reticule, and the convenient position near the door taken up. Every lord of the creation who made his appearance was immediately introduced by Lady Arden to Mrs. Dorothea; for, if her ladyship was in any danger of forgetting to do so, she invariably received a reminding twitch of the sleeve, which obliged her in self-defence, or rather in defence of the sit of her blond, to perform the ceremony forthwith: notwithstanding which preventive measures, a nice observer might have remarked, for the remainder of the evening, a slight droop about the elbow of the gauze balloon, which had the misfortune to be nearest the assailant. The introduction made, a card was instantly presented by Mrs. Dorothea to each gentleman, and with a slight bow pocketed by him. At length, however, one beau arrived, whom it was Mrs. Dorothea's turn to introduce to Lady Arden. She did so with great pomp and circumstance, as well as with evident triumph. The gentleman, whose name was Cameron, was rather on the wrong side of fifty-five, with a bald head, and blinking eyes, an Indian complexion, and small features; but a certain smirking expression withal, and an air of youthful activity, which denoted that he was still a bachelor.

We did our friend Cameron injustice when we said that he was bald; for he was still in possession of certainly not less than three hairs on either side his head. While, as to the high estimation in which those said hairs were held by their owner, no one could entertain a doubt, who had ever seen the establishment kept expressly for their due culture and arrangement. In the first place, Mr. Archibald Cameron's dressing table was adorned with a display of no less than four large-sized, patent, penetrating hair brushes, of the latest and most improved kind; next, were ranges of bottles of self-curling fluid, *huile antique à la rose*, &c. and pots of *pommade aux mille fleurs*, with combs of every description; to say nothing of a sly little one in a case for the waistcoat pocket, which, on all such occasions as morning visits, state dinners, &c., was taken out in the hall, and used with the assistance of a pocket glass, drawn from the fellow pocket, to coax the two said side locks upwards, and by pointing them towards each other, induce them, as nearly as possible, to meet over the centre of the naked polished forehead. But as this was an undertaking too difficult to be always achieved with perfect success, the restive curls not unfrequently stood on end with the most obstinate pertinacity, like the pricked-up ears of a listening cur. There was no help for this; for when the curls refused to be coaxed, they were too great favourites to be quarrelled with, so they were; just obliged to be allowed to have their own way.

While Mr. Cameron stood speaking to Lady Arden and Mrs. Dorothea, the latter lady looked frequently about her, with evident anxiety. At length she made what she intended for a private signal with her fan to Madeline, whom she espied walking up and down, leaning on the arm of her last partner, one of those unhappy young men, *no match for any one*, of whom the most prudent mothers are, notwithstanding, obliged to admit a certain number when they give a ball, merely as dancing machines. This is one very serious objection to giving absolute balls at all: it being rather awkward to cut people whom one has exhibited at one's own house. We question, therefore, whether it would not be more prudent in ladies with unmarried daughters to resign, altogether, the eclat of ball-giving, and limit themselves to a select quadrille, got up *purposely* by accident; in which every partner for the dance should be a desirable partner for life: in case it should so happen.

Madeline, in obedience to her aunt's summons, approached: Mrs. Dorothea, with the greatest stateliness, held out her elbow, of which her niece accepted the proffered support, making at the same time a slight courtesy to her late partner, as at once a dismissal, and a recompence for past services. He accordingly perceiving he was *de trop* took himself off. Aunt Dorothea, now glancing at Madeline with the side of her eye, drew herself up, pursed her mouth, and looked amazingly consequential; at length, after a delay sufficient in her opinion to take off all particularity, she availed herself of a pause in the conversation, and after remarking to Mr. Cameron, that she supposed he was a dancing man, presented him to Madeline. Had Cameron been but three-and-twenty he might have affected indifference about, or even a dislike to, the particular modification of locomotion alluded to; but as any demur at his particular stage of existence might have given occasion for ill-natured people to surmise that his dancing days were over, he declared himself a most devoted votary of the mirth-promoting rites of the light fantastic toe, and asking Madeline to dance, led her towards the ball-room.

"Well," said Mrs. Dorothea, to Lady Arden, "I have managed that so nicely."

"And who, my dear madam, is that comical quizz?" demanded her ladyship.

"Quizz, indeed! I should not have introduced Mr. Cameron to my niece," said Mrs. Dorothea, haughtily, "had he not been a man of high connexions, unexceptionable character, and very large fortune."

"I have not the slightest doubt of your prudence, my dear ma'am, I merely alluded to his appearance."

"I see nothing the matter with his appearance, ma'am."

"The matter, oh, no; merely he is a droll looking being: but what did you say was his fortune?"

"While Governor of Madras he is said to have realised about fifty thousand pounds, and a short time before he returned from India, he succeeded unexpectedly to the family property, about seven thousand a-year, beside which, now that his elder brother is dead, he is heir to his uncle,

Lord Dunsmoor, whose title and estates, of full thirty thousand per annum, he must inherit. That is a sort of quizz which I think your ladyship will allow is not to be met with every day."

"No, certainly, as you say. If he should take a fancy to Madeline, I hope she won't think him too old."

"If Madeline should, like many other young people, be very silly, I should hope she would have your ladyship to think for her."

All this was of course said aside, and *sotto voce*. Had the situation been better adapted to confidential conversation, much more would have been said, particularly by Aunt Dorothea, who considered Mr. Cameron the very first prize in life's lottery.

At two or three-and-twenty, when a poor younger brother and "*no match for any one*," he had been a passionate lover of Aunt Dorothea, then a beautiful girl of nineteen. But a marriage at that time would have been too imprudent a thing to be thought of, and so they parted. This was five-and-thirty years ago. For about the first ten years both parties had been very faithful; but the affair had since, like most early engagements, died a natural death.

Aunt Dorothea, to do her justice, had too much good sense to dream of any one continuing to be a lover of hers at her present age. And as for Cameron, although a halo of romance had lingered around the remembered image of his "First Love," even 'till their meeting on the very morning of the evening we are now describing; it was the blooming girl of nineteen whom his fancy still painted, such as she had looked five-and-thirty years before; when vowing eternal truth, he had bade her a long farewell. One sight of our respectable friend Mrs. Dorothea Arden, now fifty-four years of age, banished in an instant every romantic idea as associated with the personal attractions of that lady.

The former lovers became, however, at once excellent friends; and in the course of that day Aunt Dorothea laid her plan for making up a match between one, whom she considered a sort of valuable heir-loom that ought not to be allowed to go out of the family, and her favourite niece, Madeline, who had always been reckoned like Mrs. Dorothea, and her aunt knew her to be still disengaged.

Woman—the delicate day lily, blooms her hour—fades, and disappears for ever from beauty's garden! Man—the hardy evergreen braves the cold storm of disappointment—stands through the long winter of delay—and when his genial season of prosperity at last arrives, finds fair companions still in the smiling buds of each succeeding spring.

CHAPTER VIII.

Madeline was considered by every one very like her aunt. To Cameron she was the vision of his early days, restored unchanged.

The years of past toil faded to a dream—the polished barrenness of the forehead—the scanty growth and restive sit of the side locks—nay, certain twitches of rheumatism in the knee and ankle joints were all forgotten; he felt himself five-and-twenty, and not a day more! He was in an ecstasy—a delirium;—in short, he was desperately in love. He danced like a Vestris, and between the regular evolutions of the quadrille, frisked about his partner, a perfect grasshopper: for such was his excessive eagerness to oblige, that he waited not between each service rendered to make the obsequious angle of knee or elbow straight again, but fetched and carried with the docility of a spaniel, in attitudes which, could he but have seen himself in a mirror, must have made even himself laugh. The performance ended, Madeline took his arm and walked towards aunt Dorothea, with a strange, conscious, half-pouting expression of countenance, evidently not knowing whether she ought to be flattered or annoyed by the conspicuous assiduities of her old beau.

Cameron was sent in pursuit of a passing tray to procure an ice. With an air of infinite triumph Mrs. Dorothea patted the dimpled cheek of her niece, and whispered, "I wish you joy, my dear, of your brilliant conquest, for I do think Mr. Cameron seems to be quite smitten already."

"Oh, but aunt, such an old man!"

"Nonsense, my dear, we were all young once, and you won't be young always recollect, so mind what you're about."

The return of Cameron put an end to the lecture, which was only however postponed to a more convenient opportunity. This occurred on the dispersion of the company, when the family party collected at one end of a long deserted supper table to talk over the events of the evening.

"I only hope, Madeline," commenced Mrs. Dorothea, "that this affair may go on as prosperously as it has commenced, and you will be quite an Eastern queen."

"If he were a nice young man," said Madeline.

"He is quite young enough," retorted Mrs. Dorothea, "a girl should always marry a man somewhat older than herself."

"Somewhat; yes, but not twice or three times."

"It is impossible, my dear child, to combine every advantage," observed Lady Arden, with a sigh, "and the establishment, as your aunt says, would undoubtedly be a very brilliant one." Willoughby, Jane, and Louisa, all enquired eagerly about the fortune and connexions of the gentleman, and on being informed of every particular, confessed that it would certainly be a most desirable match.

"When we consider too," said Lady Arden, "the great difficulty, the next to impossibility, of meeting with suitable establishments for girls of good family and small fortunes. They cannot marry wealthy men of low connexions—that would be disgracing their families; they cannot marry the younger sons of good families, as they too are of course poor; and the elder sons cannot marry them, for they want money to pay off their incumbrances; so that when a girl so situated chances to make a conquest of a man who can afford to marry her, she may be said to be unusually fortunate." To have escaped, she might have added, the saddest of all the *Dilemmas of Pride*.

"Whatever sort of fellow the man may be," interrupted Willoughby, laughing.

"That is not at all a fair inference," replied her ladyship. "We are of course taking it for granted that the gentleman is of unexceptionable character, agreeable, and, in short, all that a gentleman ought to be."

"Which is, you will allow," persisted Willoughby, "taking a good deal for granted. The only thing you ladies seem determined not to take for granted is the fortune."

"Luckily," observed Mrs. Dorothea, "there is nothing to take for granted in this case. Indeed," she added, drawing up, "I should not, as I said before, have introduced Mr. Cameron to my niece if he had not been in every way a desirable connexion."

The immediate prospect of the title was now discussed, the uncle being eighty-six; the magnificence of the fine old place; the splendour of the town residence; the entertainments to be given; the equipages, the diamonds, and so forth: while at every pause Madeline was pronounced by her aunt a most fortunate girl, till vanity at length stirring within her, she began to think that she really was fortunate; and that she must, she supposed, be civil to her old beau the next time she saw him.

After this, when Lady Arden had retired to her own room, accompanied by Madeline, who was her sleeping companion, she renewed the conversation in a serious and tender strain, representing strongly to her daughter the great danger of appearing for a season or two unappropriated, with the ultimate and utter wretchedness of the single state, than which she did not know if even an unhappy marriage were not preferable. "Mrs. Dorothea says, you know," she added, trying to treat the subject jestingly, though herself ill at ease, "that a bad husband, from which heaven preserve you, my child!" she fervently ejaculated, "is quite a *natural* misfortune, and therefore easy to endure, in comparison with the unnatural misery of having no tie to life; no affections, no feelings, no hopes, no fears, no joys, no sorrows; yet to be surrounded with the most undignified annoyances, and to feel that for want of more important objects of interest, one's mind is degraded into being their very slave, with just enough left of its former self to make it sensible of its debasement. The cares of the wife and mother, however numerous, however anxious, are comparatively ennobling! For though it is our second self, and our children, who may be said to be parts of ourselves, that are their objects, still they are not felt for self alone; they do not spring from that most unredeemed of instincts, individual selfishness. Then, in the case of Mr. Cameron," proceeded her ladyship, "he is, your aunt says, so peculiarly amiable, and bears in every particular so high a character, that there is every reason to hope that where he fixed his affections he would make a kind and good husband." And here again Lady Arden enlarged on the splendour of the match, yet with tears in her eyes, and even more than her usual indulgent tenderness of manner; for while she could not bear to resign prospects so dazzling, she looked anxiously at her blooming child, and feared the sacrifice might be too great.

Madeline, very much affected by her mother's fond and winning gentleness, said, and thought at the time, she was sure that she should be quite happy in doing anything that would give her pleasure, promising to be always and in every thing guided by her advice.

"Still, my love, 'tis you yourself who must ultimately decide; only don't be rash in casting away, should it ever be in your offer, what has so many advantages."

This doubt as to the fact of her having made the so much talked of conquest at all, sounded somewhat disagreeable in Madeline's ear; and perhaps went further in creating a desire to secure the said brilliant establishment than all which had been said in its favour. She began already to think herself threatened with the fate of Aunt Dorothea; and contrasting that in imagination with what she was told her lot would be as the wife of Mr. Cameron, she came to the conclusion, that whenever he made her an offer of his hand she supposed she must accept it!

What were the while the thoughts of the lover, as "sleepless he lay on his pillow?" Smiles, dimples, and ringlets, floated in lovely confusion before his mind's eye; the latter, however, brought with them a painful remembrance of the scantiness of his own locks; then immediately followed visions of gold and silver, and precious stones; and gratitude and adoration; all to be offered at the feet of his fair idol, if she would but kindly overlook the *slight* disparity in their ages, and become his wife. What equipages, too, she should have; what a palace she should dwell

in; and as to her own fair person, it should blaze the very queen of diamonds!

What a happy man, despite an extra twitch of rheumatism, brought on by his dancing, would our old beau have been, had "some good angel," not exactly "ope'd to him the book of fate" perhaps, but whispered to him the propitious resolve just formed by the lovely object of his affections.

The angel, of course, would have had too much politeness to mention that the lady intended to marry him solely for the glitter of his title and his gold.

Thus do we see the identical class of persons whom pride, were they starving, would not suffer to seek a livelihood by selling any thing else in the world, for very pride's sake willing to sell themselves!!! Such are the strange monsters of inconsistency to which the prejudices of society give birth.

Such, in short, are the *Dilemmas of Pride!!!*

CHAPTER IX.

Willoughby was fidgeting in and out of the drawing-room, looking at his watch every five minutes, drawing off and on his gloves, and whistling out of tune, although his ear was excellent. Alfred was seated in a corner reading a book, which he said he was anxious to finish, having on that plea, though in general so obliging, refused to walk out with his sisters. The fact was, that he was miserably desirous to watch the movements of Willoughby, and be on the spot to hear from himself the earliest account of the result of his intended visit at Lady Palliser's. Willoughby suspected as much, but neither had the courage to speak to his brother on the subject, though they had the room quite to themselves, and knew that they enjoyed each other's confidence. At length Willoughby, after looking at his watch rather longer than usual, put it abruptly back into his pocket, once more drew on his gloves, but now so hastily that he deprived one of a thumb; he then took his hat and smoothed it round and round three several times with the wrist of his coat, paused irresolutely between each deliberate performance of the operation, as if intending to say something, and yet at length, without speaking at all, rushed through one of the French windows which opened on the lawn, and disappeared. Alfred, as soon as he was alone, raised his head from his book, and with parted lips held his breath, to listen for the tread of his brother's foot on the gravel, first in their own garden, then in the adjoining one. He next heard his knock, and a few moments after could distinguish, though not the precise words, Willoughby's voice inquiring, of course, if Lady Palliser were at home. Lastly he heard the entering step and closing door.

Now it was Alfred's turn to pace up and down the apartment. He did so with hurried and unequal steps for about ten minutes, then flung himself on a sofa, and lay perfectly motionless, his eyes vacant of expression, for their sight was turned inward, where fancy was busily portraying the scene probably passing at the moment in Lady Palliser's drawing-room—that very room in which he had lately spent so many blissful hours; in which he had so often yielded to the fatally fascinating conviction that he was beloved by a heart too innocent to hide its feelings; that very room in which he had finally been accepted with seeming confidence, with seeming tenderness; and yet in which but a few hours after, he had been as capriciously, as unfeelingly rejected; nay, rejected with the most unequivocal symptoms of personal aversion, and that without any possible cause being assigned, except the lady's having, in the mean time, met with and determined to captivate his elder brother, who was a much richer, and as head of the family, a greater man. And she had accomplished her end. Willoughby was probably at this very moment declaring his love! How did Caroline listen? He pictured her such as she had looked while he had himself spoken; and the most pitiable agitation overwhelmed him. After the lapse of half an hour he again heard footsteps on the gravel. He started up—he stood at the window; he saw Willoughby approaching, his countenance beaming with satisfaction. How strange were his own sensations; the exquisite pang instantly checked by the bitterest self-reproach. Was it possible?—Could he when he beheld the face of his kind, affectionate, dear brother, expressive of happiness, grieve at the sight?—Oh, for shame! it was not so—it should not be so—as to his own disappointment, that had been an ascertained thing long before;—why recur to it now! By this time Willoughby had entered and grasped his hand. Alfred mastered his emotion, and cordially returning the pressure of the hand, said with a forced smile, "I see you have been accepted?"

"I have—it is not however to take place for several months; so Lady Palliser has invited me in the mean while to stay some time with them in ---shire; and after I have been to Arden, and made all my arrangements there, I am to join them in Paris, whence we are to proceed through some parts of Italy and Germany; all previous to—to—the ratification of our engagement. They will leave Cheltenham, I believe, to-morrow or next day; but I am to spend this evening with them *en famille*, when I shall know all their plans."

Fortunately for Alfred, the walking party returned at this moment, which spared him the painful necessity of either hearing more or speaking at all, beyond the one warmly expressed ejaculation, "May you be truly happy!"

Each of the girls was attended by her respective lover; Louisa indeed by both of hers, and Mrs. Dorothea was chaperon, as she was on all occasions when Lady Arden felt fatigued; for the young people knew very well they had only to get about their good-natured aunt and declare they could

not do without her, to make sure of her services.

"What has become of Mr. Cameron?" asked Mrs. Dorothea. Madeline had been thinking the same question. "Surely he has not slipped away without bidding us good morning!" continued the old lady, "he came to the door with us."

The object of their enquiries now made his appearance; he had merely in passing through the hall slunk behind the party a little to comb up the side curls; and they had either been more unmanageable than usual, or their owner had become more than ever anxious about his personal appearance.

A long luncheon-table was laid in the dining-room, furnished with many good things which had adorned the supper of the night before; with this resource, a little flirtation, and a good deal of music—for all the girls sang and played on various instruments, nothing could be more gay and agreeable than the party. Even Henry Lindsey was in high good humour; for Louisa had that morning bestowed on him two smiles for each one she had vouchsafed Sir James.

Lady Arden, who was never early after a night of raking, joined them in the midst of their merriment, looking, however, rather serious herself; for Willoughby had been up to her dressing-room, and had confided to her his pleasing prospects, and though she could not absolutely grieve at the happiness of any of her children, she certainly could not help regretting in this particular instance that Alfred had not been the successful suitor. Setting aside a peculiar overflow of tenderness for him as the secret favourite of her heart, she considered that, in a pecuniary point of view it would have been a most desirable match for him, while his brother did not require fortune. And then she had watched Alfred, and had traced, or at least thought she could trace, effort in his manner, and even in the very tones of his voice a cadence that was not quite natural. There was something, in short, in the sound, that made her look at him while he spoke, and pained her, she could not tell why. He sat opposite to her at the said luncheon-table, and had just offered to help her to something. She met his eyes and saw that they rose and fell unsteadily before the enquiring expression of hers. The first time they were alone, or at least thought themselves so, her enquiries were so tender that he could no longer act a part. His eyes filled with tears; ashamed of these he hid his face for a few moments, then, as if to apologise for his weakness, with a vehement burst of feeling confessed the ardour of his attachment; the hopes he had been authorised to entertain—nay, how he had been on the morning of the very evening on which Willoughby arrived, actually accepted; and then on the very morning after as absolutely rejected, and from interested motives he could not doubt; there was no time for preference. And here, he added some bitter reflections on the misery of being a younger brother, till his more generous feelings prevailing again he spoke with his usual affection of Willoughby, and of his chief consolation being in the thought of his happiness, for the sake of which it was that he had struggled, and still would struggle to conceal, and ultimately subdue every feeling of his own.

Geoffery had been all this while laying *perdu* on a sofa in the adjoining drawing-room, the folding doors to which were open; he had therefore heard enough of the foregoing conversation to be tolerably *au fait* of the family secrets of which it treated, sufficiently so at least for a future purpose, of which, however, he was not, indeed could not be at the time aware. On the philosophical principle, however, that "knowledge is power," perhaps he thought it as well to have all the knowledge he could obtain. A knowledge of peoples' affairs does sometimes, there is no question, place them in our power.

Without therefore announcing his presence he retained his unseen position till Lady Arden and Alfred had severally quitted the room.

CHAPTER X.

In the evening, when Willoughby was preparing to go to Lady Palliser's, he received a miniature note from her ladyship, saying, that Caroline's cold was so much worse that she was not able to leave her room, which untoward circumstance compelled them to resign the pleasure of seeing him that evening.

He was of course much disappointed. The next morning, and for several succeeding ones, he called regularly; sometimes saw Lady Palliser, sometimes not; but Caroline was still invisible, being confined to her apartment by severe indisposition. Alfred, who felt that his fate was now sealed, longed for the quiet of Arden; and on the pretext of shooting, had proposed going thither. But Mrs. Dorothea would not hear of his leaving Cheltenham till after her party; and Lady Arden wished him, if possible, to be present at his sister Jane's marriage. Our kind-hearted hero therefore, the least selfish of beings, though fatigued by the perpetual effort to force his spirits imposed by society, consented to remain for the present.

Madeline, in pursuance of the prudent resolve she had formed, received Mr. Cameron's attentions in so amiable a manner, that he became very shortly a declared and received lover, and the happiest of men. She too, was for the present, or at least thought herself quite happy. Being the least striking of the family she had hitherto had rather an humble opinion of her personal attractions; she was therefore highly flattered and gratified by Mr. Cameron's absolute adoration. Her imagination too, dazzled by anticipations somewhat resembling the Arabian

Nights' Entertainments, learnt to revel in the prospect of splendours heaped on splendours, as offerings at the shrine of her own charms; while, never having entertained a preference for any one else, her better feelings also found a pleasing resting place, in the thoughts of the promised fond devotion of her future husband. She could now sit like one really in love, and muse with delight on the prospect of the accomplishment of her every wish—the indulgence of her every whim—the worship of her very faults, which she flattered herself she was securing for life by marrying Mr. Cameron. In short, she was in high spirits; and in such good humour with fate, that she even began to think she should not have been half so happy had she been about to marry a younger man, who would have met her on more equal terms; or, had he been a man of fortune, would have thought perhaps that he was doing her the favour.

Louisa's mind, on the contrary, was in a very unsettled state. Sir James had proposed to her more than once. He had certainly not been accepted, but he had as certainly not been rejected with any thing like rational decision. But people did not seem to think it necessary to be rational with poor Sir James. She had told him, it is true, again and again, in a pert and childish manner, that she never would marry him; but she had laughed the while, and he had taken it all in good part, saying, that the girls liked to be tantalising. He had asked her at length for the measure of her finger: she had given him that of her wrist. With this he had repaired to a jewellers.

The shopman had assured him there must be some mistake; but at the same time recommended his taking the lady a very splendid bracelet, which was, he added, a present that should always precede the presentation of the ring.

Though Sir James was by no means careless of his money in general, he was now too much in love to give prudential considerations a thought; he therefore allowed the man to put up the highest priced bracelet in his whole collection. Its beauty pleased Louisa, and she was silly enough to accept and wear it: nay, Sir James himself was allowed to clasp it on her arm. This produced a scene with Henry: for our little baronet, vain of his unusual munificence, had kept the circumstance no secret. Louisa, beginning to fear she was getting entangled with a man whom she could not seriously decide on accepting, was vexed and out of spirits, and consequently staid at home that evening from the walks, on pretext of a headache.

Henry, always violent and imprudent, the moment he saw that she was not of the walking party, quitted the promenade, and repaired to Laden Arden's villa.

It was late and almost quite dark when, unannounced, he entered the drawing-room from the lawn by an open French window.

Louisa, who was alone and had flung herself on a sofa, thus taken by surprise, had but time to rise partially from her reclining position.

He approached. It so happened that though the apartment was without lights, a stray beam from a lamp at the distance of the little lawn gate, was caught and reflected, as Louisa moved her arm, by the bright jewels of the luckless bracelet.

Henry seized the arm with the fierceness of a highwayman, wrenched the snap, and flung the bracelet to the further end of the room; then suddenly calmed by a sense of shame and contrition at his own brutal violence, stood petrified without attempting to utter a syllable. Louisa rose proudly. "By what authority, Mr. Lyndsey," she exclaimed, "have you dared to offer me this insult?" While speaking she was crossing the room to ring the bell and order the intruder to be shown out. Guessing her intention, he started from his state of stupor, flew to intercept her, flung himself at her feet, seized both her hands, and leaning his face against them, sobbed violently.

"Hear me!" he exclaimed in broken accents. "My ruffianly, my wholly unjustifiable conduct, was at least unpremeditated; I had no thought of even uttering a reproach. I entered here but to bid you an eternal farewell! Louisa, I am a miserable, a desperate man—I am about to quit England for ever."

Louisa, who was speaking at the same time, was commanding him to quit her presence instantly, or suffer her to reach the bell; but when he mentioned quitting England for ever, her voice became less firm. Yet she persisted in telling him that he must be gone—that she must not incur the unjust suspicion of having remained at home to receive his highly improper visit. How soon such commands were obeyed is not precisely known; when the party however returned from the walks Louisa was alone, though in manner strange and abstracted, and in a state of agitation so great, that when requested, as the only one who had not a bonnet to remove, to make tea, the small bunch of keys fell twice from her trembling fingers ere she could contrive to open the caddy; while every other part of the simple ceremony was performed in an equally bungling and insufficient manner: from all which it seems scarcely more than fair to infer, that whether the scene concluded in a reconciliation or a last farewell, the lady had had but little time to compose her nerves between the departure of her lover and the entrance of her friends.

CHAPTER XI.

Aunt Dorothea had fixed her ball for the evening of the day of Jane's marriage, that it might be a kind of wedding party; and such had been the mighty preparations for a day, thus doubly

momentous, that what with selecting and displaying wedding finery—finding out where to hire cheapest coloured lamps, waiters, and forms—hurrying milliners, and seeing packing-cases carefully opened—hunting up newly-arrived beaux, begging evergreens, admiring jewels and new carriages, ordering ices and rout cake, bargaining with confectioners about a standing supper, and ordering in some wine; for, as a single lady, she had of course no cellar; then planning where the said wine had best stand, that it might not be drank by the waiters instead of the company; and, lastly, considering where to put the music, that it might be heard by the dancers, without taking up room; that, as Sarah said, when dressing her mistress for the great occasion, "It was surprising that she had a foot to stand on at last." The feet were a little swollen, it must be confessed, which obliged her, so Sarah, in support of her assertion to that effect told Mrs. Johnson, to snip the binding of her new white satin shoes.

She had got on wonderfully however; had gone to church with the wedding party—been of great assistance to Lady Arden in getting through the public breakfast; seen the happy couple off; helped to send away packages of cake and gloves; refused to dine at her sister-in-law's, on the plea of all she had to do at home; eat a mutton chop in her bed-room, the dining-room being already occupied by the standing supper, the drawing-room by a great step-ladder, and two workmen hanging a hired lamp from the centre of the ceiling; the spare bed-room with card tables, the bed being taken down; and lastly, the dressing-room being fitted up with the already mentioned evergreens, as a grotto for the refreshments. The mode in which they were here arranged was Mrs. Dorothea's happiest invention, and one on which she greatly prided herself.

At the upper end of the grotto was erected a pile of real ornamental rock-work, which had been brought in on purpose from the garden. Between the crevices of the rocks were stuck all manner of flowers and flowering shrubs; at the top of the heap, on a large space purposely made level, were placed a well-known common kind of dessert dishes, of green china, in the shape of large leaves, and on those dishes moulds turned out of different coloured ices, resembling so many painted specimens of variegated spars and marbles; while among and around all were scattered rout cakes in abundance, which formed a very tolerable imitation of pebbles, shells, and mosses. The grotto was furnished with rustic seats and a rustic table, also borrowed from the garden; and on the table lay a supply of the small leaves, or small plates, of the said green china dessert set, with spoons, of course; so that, as Aunt Dorothea said, the gentlemen must be very stupid if they could not take the hint, and help their partners to a spoonful of marble or spar, and a few pebbles or shells, as taste should direct. There was very little fear, however, of mistake or oversight; for the grotto was Mrs. Dorothea's hobby, so that she not only showed almost every couple the way to it herself, but favoured each with geological lectures on the virtues and properties of all its *natural* productions. That all might be in perfect keeping, the only light admitted to this favoured spot, proceeded from a single ground-glass lamp, of the size and shape of the moon, and so ingeniously placed among the evergreens, as to bear a respectable resemblance to the queen of night, rising to view from behind a forest.

Mrs. Dorothea, by another excellent contrivance, added much to the effect of her drawing-rooms, which, like those of most watering-place villas, were on the ground floor, and had French windows. The end one of these looked directly up one of the public walks, which the proprietors were in the habit of illuminating on occasion, and which was therefore provided with lamps. These Mrs. Dorothea had obtained permission to have lighted, so that the long vista from her open French window, looked very beautiful; particularly as some of the least prudent of the company thought fit, between the dancing, to step out and walk up and down.

It happened to be one of the few very hot summers we are occasionally blessed with in this country. So that though it was now the middle of September, the weather was still very sultry, and it was only late at night that there was any thing like a refreshing coolness in the air.

Lady Caroline Montague was still so unwell as to keep her room, so that neither her ladyship nor Lady Palliser were able to come out. This was a great disappointment to others besides Mrs. Dorothea; it was one, however, for which Willoughby was fully prepared; for though he had of course called every day to inquire for Lady Caroline, she had not been well enough to see even him. The ball was, nevertheless, going off with great spirit. Being a wedding party, in the first place, gave it *éclat*; and then Aunt Dorothea had insisted on its being opened by her favourite Madeline and that far-famed hereditary beau of her own, Mr. Cameron, whom she was so proud and so pleased to have handed down to her niece in such high preservation.

Fate, however, had ordained that Mrs. Dorothea Arden's ball should be marked by more than one memorable event.

Louisa, after dancing with Sir James, had also, as she generally did, danced with Henry Lindsey; who, instead of quitting England, had made his appearance at Mrs. Dorothea's with a flushed cheek, an angry eye, and a hurried, absent manner. When the quadrille had concluded, they were among the *imprudent* couples who ventured to promenade the illuminated walk. Henry seemed to think the affair of last night forgiven or forgotten, for he began in his usual passionate strain to talk of the fervour of his own attachment, and reproach Louisa with comparative coldness.

For the gratification of a culpable vanity, as well as from really feeling a secret preference for Henry, Louisa had so long listened to such language as this, and thus authorised him to believe himself beloved, that she now literally knew not how to pacify him; although she was far from having made up her mind to sacrifice, either to his feelings or her own, the title and brilliant establishment which still awaited her acceptance, if she could but bring herself to take the advice of her friends, and marry his brother.

Henry could not be blind to what were the wishes of Louisa's family; and he had of late had many reasons, besides the acceptance of the bracelet, to suspect that she herself hesitated. The idea drove him almost mad. The interview of last night, though it had convinced him of his power over Louisa when present, had by no means silenced his fears as to what she might be persuaded to do or to promise in his absence; he had determined, therefore, to bring matters to a crisis. He besought her, with all the eloquence of which he was master, to end his suspense, and pronounce his doom. She hesitated—she knew she should never be permitted to marry Henry; and thinking that she had already indulged too long in an idle flirtation, a foolish preference that must end in nothing, she confessed at last how much it was her mother's wish that she should marry Sir James. Henry lost all self-command; overwhelmed her with reproaches; raved at her perfidy, her cruelty; and after working himself up to a perfect phrenzy, threatened to put a period to his existence that very night—that very hour, and before her eyes.

As his agitation increased, his step quickened, till it was almost impossible for Louisa to keep pace with him; while, as the interest of the conversation deepened, he led her first as much apart from the other couples as possible, and finally, turning short round a corner, quitted the general promenade altogether. He then, with his really alarmed companion, entered a cross walk, which was shrouded in almost total obscurity, except that at the furthest point of its long and unfrequented vista, one solitary lamp glimmered, as if but to make the surrounding gloom more apparent.

Louisa's terror was now extreme: she felt certain that he had dragged her to this gloomy spot to witness, as he had declared she should, the horrible act of suicide he was about to commit.

CHAPTER XII.

Arrived about midway in the long dark walk, Henry at length paused. What with agitation and the quickness of his pace, he seemed himself exhausted, while Louisa, faint with alarm and fatigue, was no longer able to stand unassisted, much less to walk. There was no seat near, he was obliged to support her by an arm round her waist. She leaned her head on his shoulder and sobbed hysterically. His resentment now gave way to tenderness. Her alarm could only be for his safety—the thought soothed his chafed spirit—he whispered the fondest expressions of endearment mingled with incoherent apologies for his violence. He ascribed all his faults, as he had done on the evening before, to love and jealousy. When the bare possibility, he said, of losing her but crossed his imagination, he was no longer an accountable being—he should be ranked with the veriest madman in bedlam! She only sighed in reply, but it was a sigh from which no lover could fail to derive encouragement, nor did it falsely report what was passing in the bosom whence it came. The ardour of Henry's manner, assisted by her late fears for his safety, had driven all prudential considerations from her thoughts, reduced the vanities of wealth to a mere puppet-show, and for the moment at least made all the bliss of earth seem concentrated in the enthusiastic devotion and actual presence of such a lover. Encouraged by the tremulous tenderness of her sigh, and the gentle quiescence of her manner, Henry ventured to whisper that his leading her from the frequented walk was not altogether accidental, but that driven to distraction by alternate hopes and fears, he had that evening determined at all hazards to make one desperate effort to secure a happiness that it was intoxication even to think of, and would be phrenzy to lose—that he had consequently taken the daring step of having a carriage in waiting, which was now not many yards distant. He then entreated her with all the eloquence of wildly excited passion, instead of resenting his audacity to end the cruel doubts which had thus stung him to madness, and fly with him at once.

"I must not, Henry!" she exclaimed, "indeed I must not—I must not," she repeated. But in fluttering broken accents of tenderness and joy, so encouraging, that the arm which was still round her waist, continued the while with a gentle violence propelling her forward; and so light, so willing, though tremulous were her steps, that the tiny white satin slippers, twinkling like little stars, scarcely touched the earth.

"Oh! Henry, dear Henry, my mother will be so grieved—my brothers will be so angry! Let us go back—and I will promise you to—to—" But she faltered.

"Never, Louisa, will I trust you out of my sight again, till by the sacred name of wife you are mine for ever!"

The passionate tone of voice in which this was uttered sank into whispers of tenderness. Louisa attempted no reply, but all her remaining scruples vanished, and recklessness of consequences came over her: the whole of life seemed comprised in the present moment—the whole world seemed to contain but herself and her lover. A chariot and four was now visible outside a gateway which they were approaching. They glided through the portals, and Louisa suffered Henry to assist her into the carriage. He sprang in after her—the door was closed—"All right," said Henry's man, though begging his pardon it was all very wrong, and off set the horses at their full speed.

It was some weeks before Louisa remembered the gifts of fortune she had resigned, or Henry thought with painful misgivings of the meditated abandonment of him and his love, which he had

so strongly suspected before he had been driven to take the violent step we have just described.

What will Tommy Moor say to this, after having declared that *sweetbriar* is the safest fence for the "Garden of Beauty;" nay, that there is more security in it than in the guardianship of that unamiable duenna, the "Dragon of Prudery, placed within call."

Now, every one knows that the Cheltenham walks are hedged with sweetbriar. Perhaps Louisa Arden, not being a daughter of the Emerald Isle, may account for "that wild sweetbriary fence" which the poet has pronounced their characteristic barrier, not proving effectual in her case. But to return to our ball.

"I wonder which room Miss Louisa is in," said Sir James to Lady Arden; "I have been looking in all the rooms for her, and I can't find her."

"I hope she is not gone into that foolish lit-up walk," replied her ladyship, looking rather anxiously towards the window. "I am afraid it will give all the young people cold."

"I never thought of that," said Sir James, bustling off.

"I wonder what is become of Louisa," said Mrs. Dorothea, coming up to Lady Arden. "Sir James," she added, calling after the retreating baronet, "do bring Louisa here; I want another couple for this quadrille in the next room."

"Oh, yes, I'll bring her if I can find her," said the little man, "but I don't know where she is."

"Where can Louisa be?" said Madeline.

"In the ball-room, I suppose," replied Mr. Cameron. "They were in the refreshment-room."

"Where can Louisa be?" asked Alfred, who was in the ball-room, "my aunt is looking for her."

"In the refreshment-room, I suppose," replied the person questioned.

"What can have become of Louisa?" asked Willoughby, looking round the supper-room. "My aunt wants her."

"Is she not in the ball-room?" said Geoffery.

"No, I have just come from thence."

"Nor in the refreshment-room."

"I have not looked there," and away went Willoughby.

In came poor Sir James, looking very silly.

"She is not there," he said, addressing Geoffery.

"Who?"

"Why, Miss Louisa, she promised to dance the next set with me, and I can't find her any where."

"But where have you been looking for her, Sir James?" asked Geoffery, who never missed an opportunity of quizzing the little baronet.

"I looked in all the rooms first, and now I have been to the far end of the lighted walk, up one side and down the other, and I can't find her anywhere."

"But did you not try any of the dark walks?"

"I never thought of that, but I don't think she'd go there."

"She must be somewhere, Sir James; you say she is not in any of the rooms, nor in the lighted walk, therefore, she must be in one of the dark ones!"

Sir James, looking innocently convinced by the force of this logic, replied, "Well, I'll go and see," and turned to depart.

"But you can't see in the dark; had you not better take a lantern?"

"I never thought of that," he replied, and making the best of his way into the hall, he asked every servant and waiter who crossed his path for a lantern to look for Miss Louisa. They all stared at him in turn, and seemed more likely to stumble over him in their bustle, than either to comprehend or grant his request. At length he perceived Sarah in the back ground, filling her office, as warden of cloaks and boas, and tossed off for the occasion in a net fly cap, quite on the back of her head, to display her innumerable curls; and decorated with bows of pink ribbon full a quarter of a yard long, made stiff with wire in the inside, to give them an enviable resemblance to horns. By her assistance he obtained the illuminator used by Mrs. Dorothea when she was returning home on foot from evening parties; and thus provided, set forth on his voyage of discovery. He was secretly followed at a certain distance by Geoffery and a knot of wags, who concealed themselves behind trees and shrubs, and when Sir James, holding up the light at the entrance to each dark avenue would cry, "Are you there, Louisa?" they would answer simultaneously in all directions, and in feigned voices of course, "Yes, I am here——" till our puzzled little baronet would stand, looking now before him—now behind him—now on the one side—now on the other, literally not knowing which way to turn, to the infinite amusement of his

hidden tormentors, to whom he was, with his lantern, a conspicuous object, whilst they, in their various dark retreats, were invisible to him.

CHAPTER XIII.

It is scarcely necessary to observe, that Sir James's researches proved fruitless.

By the time he returned to the house the alarm was becoming serious. Indeed it was beginning to be an ascertained thing, not only that Louisa was missing, but that Henry Lindsey had also disappeared, which latter circumstance afforded a solution of the young lady's absence by no means agreeable to her family. The news spread quickly, and every one was looking amazingly amused, except they happened to meet the eye of Lady Arden or Mrs. Dorothea, when they thought it necessary to quench their smiles; and if they were particular friends, add a few inches to the length of their faces.

It was now very late, and the rooms were thinning fast, though many were induced to delay their departure by the spur and zest which so fair an opportunity of making ill-natured comments had given to conversation. Yet who can say that we do not live in a good-natured considerate world, when we can assert, as an incontestable fact, that poor little Sir James, as soon as it was whispered about that his intended bride had gone off with his brother, received the sweetest possible smiles from several young ladies, who had scarcely taken any notice of him ever since his engagement had been generally known. What but the most generous compassion for the forsaken baronet could have dictated so sudden a change of manner.

Had it not been for this untoward accident, Mrs. Dorothea would have insisted on setting up another and another quadrille, *ad infinitum*; for the pride of a dance is in how late you can keep it up, however tired of it host and hostess, chaperons, musicians, and dancing gentlemen may be; as to young ladies, they are never tired of dancing, except they *don't dance*.

Mrs. Dorothea, however, now courteseyed to her retreating guests with an anxious countenance, and an absent manner, without making any attempt to dissuade them from *running away*, as she would have designated their departure, but for the real *run away*, which caused her very serious uneasiness: first on her niece's account, and secondly on her own; for she was mortified beyond expression to think that her grand party, which had cost her so much trouble, and would cost her so much money, should have been so sadly broken up.

She need not however, good lady, so far as her party was concerned, have afflicted herself; for it was pronounced the next day to have been so enlivened by the elopement that it was quite delightful.

Willoughby and Alfred, having ascertained that a chariot and four, the horses' heads to the east, had been seen driving off from the Montpelier gates the night before at a furious rate, set out in pursuit on the road thus indicated. They soon, however, lost all traces of the fugitives, and after an absence of two or three days, returned to Cheltenham. Lady Arden had by this time received a letter announcing the marriage, and begging pardon, and so forth. There was therefore nothing more to be done, and Willoughby accordingly repaired to Lady Palliser's, to inquire after the health of Caroline. As he crossed the little lawn, he observed great ladders set up against the front of the house, and persons within and without apparently employed in cleaning the windows. The hall door was open, and a slatternly looking woman, not the least like a servant, on the steps, washing them down and rubbing them white with a stone. He knocked, and another woman, who was crossing the hall at the moment, armed with a broom and a duster, threw them aside, came forward, and asked him if he was wanting the lodgings. "They will not be quite ready for coming into before twelve o'clock to-morrow," she continued, without waiting for a reply; then fancying that Willoughby looked disappointed, she added, "If you're particular about coming in to-night, sir, I'll set more hands to work, and see what can be done; but the family only left this morning, and they kept so many servants, that there is no saying all there's to do after them; for as for servants, as I *sais*, they always makes more work than three masters, or their mistresses either, which was the cause why I was endeavouring to assist a little myself just with dusting the bookshelves."

"Has Lady Palliser then left Cheltenham, or only changed her house?" asked Willoughby.

"Oh, left Cheltenham, sir. Her ladyship was not likely to change from my house while she staid, if it had been seven years. Indeed, situation and all, where could she be so well, except it were next door, which also belongs to me. Sixteen guineas a week, sir, is the lowest farthing I can take! Indeed they should have been twenty, but you seem such a nice civil spoken gentleman that——"

"Thank you," interrupted Willoughby, "I don't want the house; it was Lady Palliser I was inquiring for."

"And where were your eyes that you didn't see the bill on the window; as if I'd nothing to do but stand talking to you!" and away she flounced.

During Caroline's protracted illness, Willoughby had had some uncomfortable misgivings; not that he had confessed his feelings even to himself, yet he had thought that during convalescence, he might have been permitted to see a lady to whom he now considered himself betrothed. True,

he had frequently been admitted, and been received very graciously by Lady Palliser; and on such occasions he had tried to feel satisfied with the excuse that Caroline had not yet been able to quit her room. He had addressed to Caroline very many and very tender *billet doux*; to all of which he had received very gracious and encouraging replies, though written by Lady Palliser, to spare, as he supposed, the invalid the fatigue of being her own amanuensis. This was all perfectly proper, yet though he told himself so again and again, he could not help feeling that some more direct communication would be much more satisfactory.

So sudden a recovery as was implied by this journey, undertaken too during the few days of his absence, seemed so strange, that every painful feeling was instantly increased tenfold. Yet he knew not what to apprehend; suspense, however, becoming wholly intolerable, he resolved to set out immediately for —shire.

He did so within an hour, but without communicating any of his doubts or fears even to Alfred. As soon as Willoughby had set off, Alfred also hastened to quit Cheltenham, where every object, and every circumstance, which used formerly to yield him delight, was fraught with the most miserable associations.

He went to Arden; nor could he have chosen a better retreat: for the instantaneous effect of a sight of its well-known scenes was for a time to give to the feelings and affections of childhood and boyhood a most salutary preponderance over the newer and more vivid, but far less uniformly happy sensations of the last few months.

CHAPTER XIV.

Lady Arden, about the same time, set out for her house in town, accompanied by Madeline, her only remaining daughter. Mrs. Dorothea, thus left alone, began to ponder on the prudential step of breaking up an establishment, which she found much too expensive for her means—more so, infinitely, than she had anticipated. For it so happened, that her maid-of-all-work cook, whom she took with the house, was one of a set, who not being sufficiently reputable to get places in private families, are frequently employed by speculators in furnished houses, to take charge of the same when vacant, living on their wits the while, and on their lodgers when they can get them. Moreover she belonged to a club for supplying servants out of place with broken meat. Poor Mrs. Dorothea, therefore, was sadly puzzled about the consumption in her kitchen. At last she ventured to consult her confidential abigail, Sarah.

Servants, however, though they had been pulling caps five minutes before, always stand by each other in the grand common cause—defence of extravagance! Sarah, therefore, assuming an expression of countenance, in which sauciness and sulkiness were combined, replied,

"You can't expect to be much of a judge, ma'am, not being used to housekeeping; I'm sure I never see no waste; but people must have enough to eat of something."

"I am far from wishing any person under *my* roof not to have sufficient to eat," replied Mrs. Dorothea, with offended dignity, "but I certainly expected of you, Sarah, that you would not see me imposed upon by lodging-house servants."

"I never seen you imposed upon, ma'am; but you seem to forget that you've got a man now to feed. Where there is a man, there's no end to the consumption; in particular butcher's meat, and they will have it. It's no place of mine, however, to see the larder, and I am not a going to get myself mobbed, meddling with other servants."

Sarah was ordered to leave the room, and send the cook. There had been a shoulder of mutton at the table the day before, in which Mrs. Dorothea had made the usual first gash with the carving-knife, intending to help herself, but changed her mind; the meat had, of course, separated a little, as in a shoulder it always does.

"You have the cold mutton for your own dinners," commenced Mrs. Dorothea: the servants dined some hours before she did.

"The mutton, ma'am!" repeated Jones, such was the cook's name, "I believe John picked the bone for his breakfast: but, really, the joint was so severely cut in the parlour that I didn't think it worth looking after."

Mrs. Dorothea explained; but jerks of the chin were all the satisfaction she could obtain.

Jones's blotted account of the last sovereign she had had for small expenses was given in.

Mrs. Jones would have made a good M. P., for her hand was as illegible as it was large. The first item in the account certainly seemed to be a bag of ground salt for the bird. The canary having been added to the establishment only the beginning of the last week, Mrs. Dorothea was obliged to enquire what this meant.

"Groundsel, ma'am, for the bird; I paid a boy for gathering some, you can't get people to do things for nothing." This was not the only expense the bird had occasioned—he was the alleged cause of a great additional consumption in many things: eggs for boiling hard, bread for crumbling into his tea, white sugar for sticking between the wires of his cage, &c. &c. &c.; while

there was a charge for bird-seed every second day, half a pound each time. So much for the bird. The charge for soap had always been enormous, but this week it was twice as much as usual. Mrs. Dorothea remonstrated: "You told me," she said, "that the reason you had used so much soap hitherto, was, that there were so few glass towels, that you were obliged to wash them continually; I got a dozen new ones accordingly, and here is more soap than ever charged."

"It stands to reason, ma'am, where there is more linen, it must take more soap to wash it," answered Jones, with the coolest effrontery possible; and having, of course, no change to return out of the sovereign, she retired to the kitchen, to pronounce her mistress the *most meanest* lady she had ever met with—indeed no lady at all; to grudge people the mouthfuls of meat they had earned, and the poor bird its two or three seeds; but what was worse than all, she wouldn't have them to wash their hands, for fear of using a bit of soap.

"Considering the difference a canary bird has made," thought Mrs. Dorothea, "it is a fortunate circumstance that I was not persuaded to add an errand-boy to my establishment, as Jones so much wished." Jones, by some sort of accident, happened to have a son of eight or nine years old, whom, of course, she wished to see provided for.

If one could but afford it, proceeded Mrs. Dorothea, I don't know a greater luxury than the peace of allowing oneself to be plundered without seeming to see it. Mrs. Dorothea had had so much experience of the discomforts of lodgings, that she had entertained some thoughts of trying a boarding-house; indeed she had dined at one, one day of the last week, by way of seeing how she should like the kind of thing; but the company had been so different from the refined society she had been living among lately at Lady Arden's, that she had felt quite uncomfortable. Her neighbour on one side had entertained the party in a loud, almost angry voice, the whole time of dinner, with accounts of accidents on rail-roads; she heard afterwards that he was a great holder of canal shares. Her neighbour on her other hand had quite disgusted her, by eating of every dish at table; at the same time that he had made her laugh, by mentioning to her, in confidence, as a sort of apology for his gluttony, that never having been much out of his own part of the country before, he wished while in such a fine new fangled place to get all the insight into the world he could. And after all, if eating a certain number of dinners give a knowledge of the law, why should not eating a certain number of dishes give a knowledge of the world.

After this essay Mrs. Dorothea had given up the idea of a boarding-house. She had even began to turn her thoughts again towards her old lodging with the good carpet. Winter was now coming on and the heat of the oven would no longer be an objection. And she could stand out for the sofa, and the key to the chiffonier, and the drops to the chimney-lights, before she went into the lodging at all. To be sure the new carpet, that had made the room look so respectable, might be getting faded by this time; she would step in, however the next day and see how it looked, and inquire what the set could be had for during the winter months. As she formed this resolve a vague remembrance of past annoyances came over her mind, producing a sense of the utmost dreariness.

It was getting dusk, for she did not dine till six, and while she sat looking at the fire the days of her youth returned. She dwelt on the thoughts of Arden Park, then her home, and of her father's princely establishment. Now all belonged to her nephew; while she was an outcast, almost hated, because she could not afford to be cheated; and paying more than the half of her small income for a single sitting room, not so good as that in which at Arden her own maid used to sit at needle-work. At this moment the train of her reflections was interrupted by a voice of complaint under her window. She looked out. It was raining, but there was still twilight sufficient to discern a poor creature sitting on the ground, and looking through the iron railing in at the kitchen-window, where the light for cooking made the preparations for dinner visible. The poor woman, was miserably clad! and, from her accent, Irish. She was eloquently appealing to the compassion of the cook, while she carried in her hand, as a sort of shield against the vigilance of English policemen, a bundle of matches to sell, worth perhaps one half-penny.

"Ye that's warm and well fed yonder, pity the poor crathur could and wet and hasn't broke her fast this blessed day!"

The cook's shrill voice was heard in a key of reproof.

"Oh, mistress," proceeded the mendicant, "but it ill becomes the face that the fire's shining upon and the mate roasting before, to look round in anger on the desolate. Sure I wouldn't be troubling you here in the could this night if I had a hearth or a home of my own to go to!"

Mrs. Dorothea was struck with compassion for the poor wanderer. She opened the window, handed her money from it, and ringing the bell ordered her to have some dinner. "What a cheerful thing fire-light is!" she thought, as she resumed her seat, unconsciously made happy by the performance of a good action. She now remembered her late murmuring thoughts with shame, as she contrasted her own situation with that of the really destitute and became conscious that the source of her discontent was not any actual deprivation, but *pride*, a pride too, fostered into supernatural growth by the constant contemplation of the wealth and splendour belonging to the head of her own family, "If I could but afford to retain such a home as this," she thought, "how truly happy I might think myself. However, the poorest lodging I am at all likely to get into is a better shelter than many of my fellow creatures possess; let me not, therefore, murmur!"

A dapper double rap here startled her from her reverie. "Who could be calling at so late an

hour?"

A gentleman entered whom Mrs. Dorothea had never seen before. He apologized for being so late. He had been detained by a client from the country, and had a journey to perform at an early hour in the morning. The writings had not been completed till that day, and he feared that before his return Mrs. Arden might have had the unnecessary trouble of moving from a house which was now her own freehold property. He then explained, that by order of Sir Willoughby Arden he had effected the purchase of the premises, with the fixtures, furniture, &c. &c., every thing as it stood; and was instructed to present her with the deeds, which accordingly he did.

This was, as may be well believed, welcome news to Mrs. Dorothea. She was thus not only comfortably settled in the home she liked so much, but rendered for her quite a rich woman; as her income, hitherto so insufficient, would, now that she was relieved from her heaviest expense—rent, be ample for all her other wants.

Willoughby, the most liberal and generous of mortals in money matters, had frequently heard his sisters talk over Aunt Dorothea's adventures in lodgings, and lament that she could not afford to keep her nice pretty house which suited her so well. He had, in consequence given the orders we have just seen executed, and from a feeling of delicacy had said nothing of his kind intentions, which had thus invested the transaction with the character of an agreeable surprise.

CHAPTER XV.

While Willoughby is travelling towards Lady Palliser's, or rather Lady Caroline Montague's magnificent country seat, we shall endeavour to account for some of those contradictory circumstances and inconsistencies of manner which to him seemed so unaccountable; or rather for which he was so unwilling to account by that solution which yet pressed itself upon his judgment as most probable.

Caroline, though from her extreme timidity the worst of actresses, had yet ventured to form a vaguely conceived plan, for the execution of which she hoped one time or other to summon courage. In the mean while, perhaps unconsciously, the thoughts which were passing in her mind affected her manners, and sometimes even the expression of her countenance, and thus led to the most fatal misconstruction of her sentiments. Her total ignorance of the world, too, occasioned by that want of communication with any one older than herself already mentioned, as one of the evil results of her mother's harsh and heartless system of education, rendered tenfold the dangers of her difficult situation.

Lady Palliser had informed her daughter that she meant to marry her to Sir Willoughby Arden. Caroline's attempt to remonstrate had been silenced, as usual, with the most tyrannical violence. What was to be done?—poor Caroline felt quite unequal to open opposition: she had recourse accordingly to the dangerous expedient alluded to. She resolved to make a friend of Sir Willoughby; and the first time that by a declaration of his sentiments he gave her an opportunity of speaking on such a subject, to cast herself on his compassion, and entreat him to withdraw his addresses, without making it known to her mother that she had rejected him. This it was which gave to her manner that gentle acquiescence in his attentions, and especially that willingness to listen, which it is impossible to define, but which is, above all things, encouraging to a lover. And this it was which at Lady Arden's ball had produced the scene of misunderstanding, from which Willoughby re-appeared in the dancing room with a countenance so delighted. The interview in the veranda had commenced by some lover-like speeches, which, while they could not be misunderstood, did not absolutely call for reply: and Caroline, unwilling to seem too ready to comprehend, became uneasy and anxious, but yet did not speak. The ardour of Willoughby's manner increased; more than once Caroline moved her lips to commence her difficult task, but no sound proceeded from them; while every moment she grew more miserably conscious that her silence would be—must be misconstrued. At length, by way of exordium, she murmured a few scarcely audible words, thanking him for his flattering preference; but what she wished to add required so much courage—so much explanation, that she knew not how to proceed. She faltered, and became silent; and while striving to find words in which to recommence, she suffered so intensely from the tumult of her agitation, that she lost much of the purport of the enthusiastic declarations of attachment which Willoughby was now pouring forth. When he began, however, to talk of his gratitude for the favourable hearing she had granted him, she felt the necessity of speaking, and in fearful trepidation commenced: "The—the confidence I—I am about to place in—in you, Sir Willoughby—"

"Will never be abused by me," he exclaimed, with fervour.

"I—I fear—" she recommenced, colouring, stammering, and withdrawing her hand gently, but in the utmost confusion. At this moment several other couples, who seemed to have just discovered the veranda, entered from different windows almost simultaneously.

"May I then call to-morrow morning?" said Willoughby, in a hasty whisper, "and be permitted to ___"

"Yes; but speak to me alone!" she replied, resolving that to-morrow she would make the painful explanation, now more than ever necessary. It was on their returning to the dancing-room at this

junction, that Alfred had remarked the delighted expression of Willoughby's countenance.

The last injunction of Caroline, to speak to her alone, sounded odd; but surely it was kind and encouraging. The whole interview, in short, amounted to as favourable a reception of his now fully declared passion as he could desire. In the course of the evening he found an opportunity in an aside conversation with Lady Palliser, of expressing his rapturous hopes, and alluding to the visit he was to pay by permission on the next morning.

The ball concluded—the morning arrived—and Lady Palliser at breakfast told her daughter that she was happy to find from Sir Willoughby, that she had shown a proper sense of obedience, in accepting the offer of his hand, which he had made her the evening before.

Poor Caroline's attempt at manœuvring was thus entirely defeated. She had, as we have stated, resolved to entreat Sir Willoughby, by withdrawing his addresses apparently of his own accord, to shelter her from the rage of her mother; but she was quite unprepared for taking herself an active part in the deception, and maintaining that part by bold and decided falsehood: completely thrown off her guard, she exclaimed with fervour, "Oh no, no! he has entirely misunderstood me; I feared he had, but I have not accepted him—I never can—I never will accept him!"

"Do you dare assert that you will not obey my commands?" said Lady Palliser, rising, and assuming that fierceness of aspect before which our heroine habitually trembled.

Caroline sunk on her knees, and promising never to listen to any one of whom her mother did not approve, only intreated permission to remain single.

Lady Palliser was well aware that her daughter might at her leisure command many much more splendid matches than the one now in agitation; but in the first place she was determined, from the spirit of tyranny, to be obeyed; added to which there was a second motive, which though too contemptible to be confessed even to herself, had no doubt a certain influence on her present conduct.

The time had been when the loveliness of the infant, held on the knee purposely for effect, had added interest to the matured and lustrous charms of the beautiful mother: but now that mother and daughter had become two distinct objects, and that the eye of the beholder not unfrequently passed with hasty indifference over the still striking countenance of the former, to pause in evident delight on the fresher charms of the latter, an irksome sense of secret mortification incessantly assailed Lady Palliser. In childhood she had treated Caroline with harshness, from the united effect of a worthless nature, and a mistaken plan of education; but now the constant proximity of one who was the innocent cause of the diminution of those triumphs which had hitherto formed the sole charm of her existence, was becoming irksome to her; and awaking feelings closely allied to angry aversion! And therefore it was though, as we have said, she would have blushed to have confessed it to her own heart, that her ladyship was impatient to rid herself of annoyances such as these; of, in short, the meek unconscious rival who was, notwithstanding, the only being that had ever disputed with her the reign of vanity she had so long enjoyed, and even still felt that she recovered whenever she appeared in public without her daughter. For it must be allowed that her ladyship's beauty was at the very time of which we speak, still of so striking and splendid a character, that it lost little by comparison with any loveliness but that of Caroline, whose similarity of feature seemed to render the advantageous dissimilarities of extreme youth and infinite superiority of expression peculiarly conspicuous.

CHAPTER XVI.

Lady Palliser was inexorable, and Willoughby's knock being heard, while our heroine was still at her feet, she commanded her to retire to her own apartment and remain there till prepared to render implicit obedience to her commands.

The lover on his entrance was told with the sweetest smiles imaginable, that Caroline had taken cold the evening before, and was unable to leave her room. He was, however, encouraged to make known his sentiments and his wishes to Lady Palliser, who both accepted his proposals on the part of her daughter, and in the most gracious manner possible pronounced her own approval of his suit. Then followed the arrangement respecting the visit to —shire, and the tour on the continent, &c. mere manœuvres of her ladyship's to gain time, in case Caroline should prove untractable.

All this, it may be remembered, Willoughby mentioned to his brother on his return from his morning visit already described. His not having seen Caroline herself, however, he suppressed; he felt he knew not why, an insuperable objection to mention the circumstance; not that he deduced from it at the time a doubt of his happiness, of which he felt he thought perfectly secure. He longed, it is true, for evening, and could not help thinking that his felicity would be still more complete when his fate had been pronounced by Caroline's own lips; yet surely the night before in the veranda she had accepted him quite as explicitly as young ladies generally do. His disappointment again that evening annoyed him very much; and during our heroine's protracted illness, the anxiety it was natural he should feel respecting her state of health, was mingled at times with gloomy apprehensions, which had yet another and a more agitating source.

At length he left Cheltenham as we have seen for Montague House. His last interview with our heroine herself was that already described as having taken place in the veranda on the night of Lady Arden's ball.

The secret of Caroline having never since been visible, was, that she still continued to resist Lady Palliser's tyrannical commands, while her ladyship, astonished at conduct so unparalleled, on the part of her hitherto submissive child, and unaccustomed to be baffled, was more than ever determined that she should finally yield.

Accordingly she had put off the lover from day to day with promises and excuses which yet she scarcely expected him to believe, and with which in fact she cared very little after all, whether he was or was not satisfied, being with her usual whimsical inconsistency fully prepared, whenever he refused to play *blind-man's-bluff*, as she called it, any longer, to laugh excessively and turn the whole affair into an excellent jest. In the mean time she derived quite as much gratification from the amusement of quizzing Willoughby, as from the prospect of tyrannizing over her daughter.

For it was a part of Lady Palliser's character, which was as absurd as it was worthless, to think it exceedingly witty to succeed in deceiving any body, though by the gravest, and therefore of course the dullest lie imaginable: we mean in the April-fool style, not vulgar business lying—that would have been out of her line.

On Willoughby's arrival at Montague House, Lady Palliser, though scarcely able to keep her countenance, attempted to carry on the farce by saying, that she had removed her daughter in the hope that change of air might prove beneficial, but that she was still unable to leave her room. This went on for a day or two, during which her ladyship, more than ever anxious to carry her point, because now getting tired of the business, treated the still inflexible Caroline with great harshness. The third morning, a female servant, who had evidently watched her opportunity, entered with great caution the breakfast-room where Willoughby was alone, and handing him a letter vanished again. He read the epistle, turned deadly pale, gasped for breath, read it again, rose, paced the apartment, stopped, looked wildly round him, threw open a window, the room being on the ground floor, and rushed into the lawn. It is difficult to say what he might have done, or whither directed his steps, had he not perchance encountered his groom, who had been exercising his horses and was bringing them home.

With a vague idea that it was necessary to affect perfect composure, Willoughby waved to the man to stop, and his signal being obeyed, walked quietly to the side of the led horse, and laying his hand on its neck, raised a foot as if with the intention of mounting; the absence of the stirrup however rendering the movement abortive, he stood for a moment looking confused.

"Shall I saddle him, sir?" enquired the groom.

"Do," replied Willoughby, with the air of one relieved from a great embarrassment, and walking on as he spoke.

"Where will you please to mount, sir?" asked the servant, following a step or two, with his hand to his hat.

After a few moments employed in recalling ideas, which had evidently already gone forth on some far distant execution, Willoughby answered, "Any where."

John, as the best mode in his judgment, of obeying commands so far from explicit, returned to the stable, exchanged the body cloths of the animals for the saddles, and following in the direction he had seen his master take, soon overtook him, walking slowly on the side of the road, with his arms folded, and his head uncovered. John had before observed that Willoughby was without his hat, and had been thoughtful enough to bring it with him. He now presented it, then held the horse; Willoughby put on the hat, mounted the animal and rode on, followed by John, without a word being spoken on either side: nor was it till they had performed one stage of their journey towards Arden, and were lodged at an inn, that John ventured so far to obtrude himself upon the evident abstraction of his master, as to enquire if they were going home. He received an answer in the affirmative; on which he made bold to ask further, whether Sir Willoughby had left orders with the other servants to follow with the carriage, &c. To this enquiry he received a reply, first in the negative, then in the affirmative, and again finally in the negative.

On which he begged permission to dispatch a line to the coachman himself. He stood ten minutes without obtaining any answer, and then taking silence for consent, proceeded to do as he had suggested.

The exertion of mind necessary to comprehend and reply to John's queries, or even a part of them, seemed to recall Willoughby to some recollection of the duties he had himself to perform. He must write to Lady Palliser—he must account for his abrupt departure. That he might do so in strict compliance with the request contained in the letter of this morning, he applied himself to the reperusal of the epistle which had already caused him so much affliction. It was, as our readers have probably anticipated, from Caroline. Driven to desperation by her mother's perseverance in her determination of marrying her to Sir Willoughby, and terrified by her violence, which at every interview increased, she was at length compelled to conquer all the timid reluctance she felt to take what to her seemed the boldest of steps, and address to Sir Willoughby the letter we have seen him receive in so frantic a manner.

After a hesitating, and almost unmeaning commencement, consisting of broken sentences, and

awkward apologies, she went on to say: "Yet if I would avoid calling down upon myself your just resentment, by appearing in your eyes to be guilty of the most unjustifiable caprice; I must I fear relate a circumstance which—I have been so unwilling to mention, that—I have—I know—in consequence—delayed this explanation much too long. But before your arrival in Cheltenham, before ever our acquaintance had even commenced, I had promised to—to—accept—the hand of—of—Mr. Arden, your brother; and though by my mother's positive command, I was compelled the next day to withdraw that promise, I cannot—I never can—I am sure too—you will think.—But I know I express myself very badly—very confusedly, yet I hope you will see—at least that my being quite—quite unable ever to enter into the engagements my mother has wished to form for me, does not proceed from any caprice or change of mind on my part, or any want of gratitude for the flattering regard with which you have so kindly honoured me.

"What I now entreat of your compassion is, that you who have nothing to fear from my mother's anger, would generously interpose yourself between me and a storm, before the very thought of which I tremble till my hand can scarcely hold the pen with which I attempt to write.

"I know I ought to have made this explanation long since, but a foolish, a culpable fearfulness, made me ever ready to believe no opportunity a fitting one. At Lady Arden's ball I did attempt it, but we were interrupted; so that I only made things much worse. I was so confused too, I was glad of the respite. I thought I could say what I have now written, when you should call the next morning;—but on that occasion my mother interfered, and has never since allowed me to see you."

On finishing Caroline's letter for the second time, Willoughby, in a sort of desperation, wrote a hurried scrawl to Lady Palliser, towards whom he felt strong resentment for the deception she had practised. His epistle was written in strange incoherent language, but its general purport was that he considered himself trifled with in having been so long debarred from seeing Lady Caroline Montague; and in consequence, begged leave to withdraw his addresses finally. Nor was the truth in this much disguised, for he felt that had he been permitted to see Caroline from the first he should much sooner have been undeceived.

CHAPTER XVII.

With a trembling hand, and apparently in the utmost haste, Willoughby folded and sealed the letter he had just finished; and without allowing himself one moment for reflection, rang and ordered the person who appeared to take it to the post-office immediately.

As the door closed, however, after the servant to whom he had given this command, a sense of terror at having thus himself rendered his fate irremediable, overwhelmed him; and, with an instinctive impulse, he grasped at the bell, but immediately flinging it from him, he assumed a mock composure, and as though there had been some one present before whom to act a part, with a ghastly sort of smile, seated himself. He had for some time been almost expecting, though he would not confess it to his own thoughts, some such blow as this: he had seen, despite every effort to avert his mental vision from the view, that all could not be right; and, weary of secret dread—the true definition of that hope deferred, which maketh the heart sick—he now fancied, for the moment, that there was a sort of stern satisfaction in knowing that fate had done its worst. His brain, however, was already beginning to wander; he was already contemplating, though vaguely, the fatal step which finally ended his career. He thought of Alfred, and his soul secretly yearned for the consolation of pouring out all its sorrows into his affectionate bosom; but *Pride*, under the form of wounded vanity, with a jealous soreness, shrank from the salutary exposure; while so irritable was the state of his mind, that the very pleadings of his own heart, for the balm it longed for, seemed importunate, and were resisted with something of his characteristic obstinacy. Nay, the pettiest and most contemptible considerations from time to time blended themselves indistinctly with his despair, and became, to a certain degree, governing motives of conduct.

The story of his former disappointment, and of such recent occurrence too, he reflected, with a very disproportionate share of uneasiness, would now be renewed, coupled with the present affair: he should become a proverb—a byword—an object for the finger of scorn to point at. Then the wild excitement of the hope with which, despite his fears, he had with strange inconsistency fed his passion; this was gone, and he could not endure the void within; while it was upon the brain, the fever seemed to feed. Whether there was a physical cause for this, such as Alfred had sometimes feared; or whether the attachment, though violent, being recently formed, still dwelt more in the imagination than in the heart, it might be difficult to decide; but the effect on Willoughby was that some active principle of misery and evil seemed urging him on to a frantic resistance of his fate; compelling his very pulses to beat at a maddening pace; causing an alternation of quickened and suspended breathing, which fatigued him sensibly; and the while presenting to his imagination, snatches of thoughts, and visions of projects so terrific, that while they were in fact the effects of incipient insanity, they became, in their turn, by the fearful excitement they produced, powerful causes of its future development. There was still an inward struggle, but it ended fatally. He could not—no, he never would pronounce her name again! He—in whom else he would have confided every thought—he it was who was preferred; and, though he could not feel a rival's hatred towards his kind, his generous, his unoffending brother—no, he

did not, he would not even love him less; but still there was a remembrance that he was his rival; and with it thoughts, strangely blended, of littleness, and the wildest, most extravagant generosity. Alfred should have all—love, wealth, title; and then Lady Palliser could no longer object; but he must wait—it might be for a few days, perhaps only a few hours—nay, the sooner the better; why should he live but to cause and to endure misery? Endure!—did he endure? Can powerlessness to resist the decrees of fate, while yet the heart and feelings openly and wilfully rebel against them, be called endurance? Certainly not. But alas, such rebellion brings with it its own punishment. How often had Willoughby, while fearing the worst, inwardly vowed that were he indeed destined to disappointment, he would never survive the blow. Now the blow had fallen, and though his heart secretly turned towards his habitual, his earliest, his deepest seated affection, the love he bore his twin brother, he was pledged, as it were, to resist every gentler emotion, to embrace despair! and unhappily he did so.

He would carefully conceal every circumstance, every thought; he would allow it to be believed, that the preparations for his marriage were still going forward; nay, he would assume the most exuberant spirits, and to the last moment of existence preserve his fatal secret. When he was gone, when he had found a resting-place for his weary spirit in the grave, Alfred should know all! Reflecting thus, he journeyed on.

Lady Palliser at first took no notice of Sir Willoughby's sudden departure. At a late hour in the evening, however, she received his note. During its perusal she laughed immoderately, then flinging it towards Caroline, said, "Silly young man! my only object in marrying you to him was to chastise you for your improper conduct. It has happened, however, quite as well; for I was getting amazingly tired of the thing. Let the intended punishment," she added, with returning severity of manner, "be a lesson to you, that young women in your station, and with the fortune you will possess, are not to make choice for themselves. When I choose you to marry, and have decided to whom I shall marry you, I shall let you know."

Poor Caroline, how little understood was her position by those, and they were many, the springs of whose peace were poisoned by envy of her greatness! Oh *Pride*, bane of human happiness! mingling bitter mortification in the otherwise palatable cup of humble competency, and lading with its glittering chains, the slaves on whom it seems to heap its choicest gifts.

Caroline, who had apprehended a storm of rage and disappointment, heightened by, perhaps, some suspicion of the truth, was greatly relieved; and, though habituated to the unaccountable caprices of her mother's temper, was somewhat surprised, at the perfect indifference thus shown by Lady Palliser, respecting her ultimate failure on a point, to carry which, so violent a determination had previously been manifested.

On Willoughby's arrival at Arden, he strained every power of his mind to hide from his brother the true state of his feelings; and, to a certain degree, succeeded; his strange manner inducing in Alfred a belief that it was the immediate prospect of the fulfilment of his wishes, which had unsettled his intellect; for, that it was to a certain degree unsettled, this affectionate brother could not help detecting, in the extravagance, the sometimes almost terrific wildness, of the gaiety assumed by Willoughby. It is impossible to describe the wretchedness of Alfred, while with an aching heart, he watched the flushed cheek and flashing eye of his brother, and listened to the strange unnatural sound of his laugh. We may say, without in the slightest degree exaggerating the disinterestedness of our hero, that every thought of self was forgotten, in the miserable excess of sympathy which the extraordinary circumstances of others now called forth. It was not only for his brother, that brother to whom from infancy he had been so tenderly attached, that he now felt the cruellest apprehensions; but what was also to be the fate of Caroline, and what would be the misery of their mother, the sorrow of the whole family, if, indeed, the awful infliction he had so long dreaded, had at length fallen upon them?

Or even, were this excitement which now alarmed him so much, to subside again for the present, how dreadful was the prospect opened by its having ever assumed so serious a form; and the inconsistency of Willoughby's conduct and manner, the incoherence of his expressions in his ill-sustained attempts at conversation, put the fatal truth beyond a doubt. Yet, were all those symptoms so far to abate, that no eye less watchful, less practised to watch than his own, could detect the lurking malady, was it fair, was it honourable, to involve in so frightful a family affliction, the happiness of a being as yet unconscious of it? Yet who could, who would, who ought to interfere? Delicacy and all good feeling for ever forbade that any surmise should proceed from him. Oh impossible! quite impossible! Fate must roll on, and overwhelm whom it would, he must be passive! But he was more: instinctively he strove to conceal from servants, and the few country neighbours whom chance threw in their way, the hourly increasing infirmity of his brother; treating, while such were present, his extravagance as hilarity, and every contradiction and inconsistency as an intended jest; adding thus the while, by the violent and unnatural contrast to his own secret sufferings.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Alfred sometimes thought that possibly he ought so far to conquer his scruples as to write to his mother, and communicate to her, in strict confidence, his apprehensions respecting the state of Willoughby's mind: but he might recover after a short period of quiet, and then his mother might

be spared the pang: and he could not, as he had before decided, even within the bosom of his own family,—he could not, be the consequence what it might, bring himself to be the first to suggest such a thought. His mother, of course, would not suspect him of a base desire to grasp at his brother's birth-right, and of a consequent quicksightedness in discerning the approaches of this frightful visitation; but there were those who might so misjudge him. It was, however, he thought, at least his duty to prepare his mother's mind in some degree for whatever might be the result, by saying, that he did not think Willoughby quite well: this, therefore, he did in one or two of his letters. Yet Willoughby himself made no complaint; and to servants and occasional visitors appeared to be in particularly good health and spirits. We remark this now because the comment subsequently becomes important.

After a few days, however, Willoughby, like one who had run at full speed as long as his strength would permit, flagged; his efforts were first less sustained, then his gaiety became confined to wild bursts of noisy mirth, while at length whole hours, with a seeming unconsciousness of the lapse of time, were passed in gloomy abstraction. The bursts of seeming mirth, however, were always assumed when servants or strangers were present; the gloom and abstraction given way to only when alone with his brother.

Willoughby had always felt, and often expressed, great horror of persons being opened after death: to this subject he now recurred with a frequency, and clung to it with a pertinacity quite extraordinary; adding the most solemn injunctions to Alfred to be the protector of his remains whenever he should die.

"You will then be master here," he would say; "every thing will then be yours; my very body I bequeath to you—I make it your property: do not, Alfred, I conjure you, suffer the defenceless corpse of your poor brother to be mangled. It would be hard indeed," he would sometimes subjoin, with a wild ironical laugh, "if a man could not find rest even in the grave."

On occasions like these Alfred would sit beside him, and endeavour to sooth him by every kind and rational argument he could devise; not unfrequently Willoughby would appear entirely deaf to all that could be urged; while at other times, he would take Alfred's hand, thank him with gentle kindness of manner, and hope that he might yet be as truly happy as he deserved to be; joining with this latter expression an earnest and expressive solemnity which almost seemed a blending of prophecy with the prayer of affection. He often talked of having a foreboding that he should die young.

"But why, my dear brother," Alfred would reply, "give way to such thoughts? Why should you die young? You have no ailment, no care, no sorrow—"

"It may be a silly fancy, yet I am possessed with the idea:"—this much Willoughby said with well-acted carelessness. "My only anxiety in dying," he added, with a suddenly altered tone, and an inquiring look of the most mournful tenderness, "is for you, Alfred; I fear you will feel it severely; but do not!—do not! Why should any one be miserable?—I shall not be missed, except by you: no selfish happiness, I know, will enable you entirely to forget me. My mother is kind, very kind; but you were always her favourite—and that in time will reconcile her—"

Caroline was in Alfred's thoughts; her name even trembled on his lips, but he had not courage to give it utterance.

"You speak wildly," he said, "my dear Willoughby; you not missed! you—who—who—you who love and are beloved." Willoughby laid his hand on Alfred's, and looked anxiously in his face for some moments, but continued silent; at length he moved his lips, as if about to speak; then pressing his brother's hand, dropped it, and exclaimed, "I cannot!—I cannot!" An instant after he burst into a passion of tears, and laying his head on Alfred's shoulder, wept like a child, till relieved by giving way to his feelings, though completely exhausted, he seemed to sleep. In a few seconds, however, he started, looked up, and repeated anxiously once or twice, "What have I been saying, Alfred? what have I been saying? I think I have been asleep," he added; "but I have lately got into a strange habit of laying awake the whole night: it is merely a habit. Sleep is altogether a habit, I think. I don't sleep at all now, as I tell you; and yet you see I am perfectly well!"

Alfred looked mournfully at him, and replied, "Would to heaven you were, Willoughby! Do," he added, anxiously, "let us go to town; you ought to take some medical advice; if, as you say, you do not sleep, you cannot be well."

"Well—I am perfectly well I assure you—shall we ride?" he added, rising and calling his two beautiful greyhounds that lay on the rug before the fire: "I wonder, by the by," he continued, "if they have laid the poison which I ordered for the rats in the stable-lofts; shall we go out at the back way, and I'll see to it myself."

Willoughby hurried out, Alfred followed, and heard him inquire with great precision respecting the poison, and give, in the most rational manner, precautionary directions against mistakes or accidents in its use. A servant in reply pointed out a shelf in the saddle-room, where it lay perfectly apart from all articles of food; and showed both the gentlemen that the outward paper was, according to a usual and very proper precaution on the part of druggists and apothecaries, strongly marked in very large letters—"*Poison, Arsenic.*" The characters too, though done with a pen, were those of print, which made them more strikingly legible to every eye.

The brothers now proceeded to ride as Willoughby had proposed; Alfred, however, could think of nothing but the poison: he had often heard of the most artful preparations on the part of

deranged persons, and he could not banish the idea that Willoughby had made the particular inquiries he had just heard with a view to possessing himself of the arsenic; and he determined, lest this should indeed be the case, that he would, as soon as he returned to the house, privately take away the packet from where he had seen it, and put it in some place of security. If the fearful project of self-destruction did indeed dwell among the wanderings of his brother's mind, the quiet removal of the means would not only prevent the immediate execution of his fatal purpose, but might by possibility change the current of his thoughts into some more healthful channel. Accordingly, as soon after their return as he could find a convenient opportunity, he repaired to the said saddle-room, and not wishing to confide his fears to any one, possessed himself, unobserved as he supposed, of the paper of arsenic, which he locked up carefully in his own escritoire, feeling, as he did so, almost a security, that he had thus for the present, at least, removed one danger from the reach of his poor brother; for as Willoughby had been scarcely out of his sight, since they came back from their ride, there was no reason to fear that the mischief was already done: nor did it indeed occur to Alfred, when he found the packet laying where he had seen it in the morning, that without displacing the whole, sufficient for the purpose he dreaded might have been taken away.

For the remainder of the day, and especially during dinner, he observed that Willoughby's manners were more than ever strange and inconsistent; and that his efforts at gaiety were fewer and worse sustained than on any former occasion; yet, as long as the servants were present, extravagant. While, the moment the brothers were alone, there was an overflow of mournful tenderness, and an expression of the same character in his countenance which filled Alfred with the most harrowing sensations. Yet a circumstance had occurred when they were riding, which had in a great measure allayed his immediate fears, and given his thoughts too, a somewhat new direction. They had met with a neighbouring squire who, possessing little either of tact or delicacy, and also thinking himself privileged as being not only an old man but an old acquaintance, immediately began to rally Sir Willoughby on the report of his approaching marriage.

Willoughby saw that Alfred watched him anxiously; and, being rendered by the presence of a stranger doubly determined to keep his secret to the last, he aroused himself to great exertion and replied with astonishing coolness, at the same time admitting the fact of his intended marriage, that the event to which the squire alluded was not to take place so immediately as he seemed to imagine, for that previously to his becoming a benedict he was to join his friends at Paris, and proceed with them on a tour which would occupy some months.

The old gentleman at parting commended him for showing Lady Anne Armadale so soon how little he thought of her, and congratulated him on the great superiority of his present choice, both in beauty and fortune. The gloom and abstraction of Willoughby after this was so marked that it suggested to Alfred the possibility of his not having yet conquered his first attachment, and of his having entered into his present engagement more out of pique than preference. How strange and absorbing for a time were the speculations occasioned by such a surmise, while some of them were calculated almost to reawaken selfish regrets, yet were these again checked by the appalling thought that such a supposition strengthened his worst fears; contending emotions were more likely seriously and permanently to unsettle the mind than the excitement, however great, of a successful attachment; at least, to suppose such a cause, it was necessary to take for granted a predisposition stronger than there was, perhaps, sufficient grounds to believe did exist.

That disease however, was present, whatever the cause, there could be no doubt; and Alfred firmly resolved, therefore, if he could not the very next day prevail with Willoughby to accompany him to town, that he would send thither for the first medical advice that could be obtained, and also entreat his mother to come to Arden. For he now began to fear with infinite self-reproach that he had already carried delicacy on this point too far.

CHAPTER XIX.

A biscuit and a glass of wine-and-water was usually the temperate supper of the brothers. They generally took it in the library, and read till they felt disposed to retire for the night. This evening Alfred, who had risen from the table for a book which he happened to be some little time in selecting, observed on his return, but without a suspicion at the moment as to the cause, that the water which Willoughby was pouring into his glass looked less clear than usual. He remarked upon the circumstance and advised his brother to put it away and have some fresh brought up.

"It seems very good," said Willoughby, adding wine and taking off the whole at one draught, though in general he sipped it from time to time during perhaps an hour of either reading or conversation.

Alfred accustomed to his brother's love of opposition in trifles was not at all surprised. He sighed, however, for he always considered this infirmity of temper a symptom of the incipient malady he dreaded; so simply saying,

"There is quite a sediment in the goblet you see," he read on, but still without an apprehension. It had somehow never once entered into his calculations, amid all his vague fears, that a mode and

occasion so public as the present would have been chosen.

"Put away your book, Alfred," said Willoughby, a few moments after. Alfred looked up and saw that his brother was pale in the extreme, and with a ghastliness of expression quite alarming.

"I have the idea more strongly impressed upon my mind than ever this evening that I shall not live long!" said Willoughby in a voice changed and hoarse; "and that when I do die," he continued, "it will be suddenly, very suddenly: let our good-night then be also a farewell; we know not what may happen before morning."

"Do not make me miserable by such melancholy forebodings," said Alfred, "surely—there is, there can be no cause for such! Willoughby! Willoughby! you do look ill!" And the thought crossed his mind, that had he not secured the poison he should now be really alarmed.

"It is only a presentiment," said Willoughby, affecting a ghastly smile; "yet, lest it should be verified, indulge me in my childishness, and before I go to bed take leave of me, and—forgive, say you forgive every pettish word, every wilful act, of which I have ever been guilty towards you, my kind, my excellent, my too amiable brother."

"Forgive! dear Willoughby! surely I have all that is kind and noble in intention to thank you for, nothing to forgive—unless indeed," and he paused in silent alarm. "Oh, Willoughby," he added, gazing at the working of his countenance, "I fear—I fear some terrible purpose! speak to me! tell me I am wrong—you have no such thought—no you would not—you press my hand, what does that mean? Speak, Willoughby! Is it to reassure me?—oh, my poor mother—think of her!—think of me, how much, how truly I love you, never should I know happiness again, if—oh misery—those eyes—he does not know me!" Willoughby attempted to speak; the words were not only indistinctly uttered, but evidently without purpose in their arrangement; while unable longer to maintain the struggle against bodily suffering, with the wildness of delirium in his looks and gestures, he sank on a sofa writhing in agonies which partook of the nature of convulsions.

The now terrified Alfred, calling aloud for help, hastily loosed his brother's stock and undid the buttons of his waistcoat; within which, while so employed, his eye was unavoidably drawn from its close connexion with the frightful circumstances of the moment, by a piece of crushed paper, on which the word "*Poison*," in the conspicuous characters already described, was nevertheless strikingly visible. Alfred snatched up this fatal witness; it was a part of what he had seen in the morning, and had but too evidently been thrust into the bosom as a place of concealment after its contents had been emptied into the goblet; nay, it had still a considerable portion of the powder lurking in its folds. The terrible conviction that his precaution had been too late, and that his brother had assuredly swallowed the *poison*, flashed at once upon Alfred, fearfully strengthened by the appearance of Willoughby laying on the sofa, his eyeballs rolling beneath their closed lids, except when they started wildly open for a second and closed again. He still attempted to speak, but now nearly without the power of articulation, saving that the name of Alfred was more than once distinguishable amid a low rapid murmur, which however soon faded into whispers, then subsided into a mere movement of the lips without sound, and then ceased altogether. By this time the poor sufferer had become quite insensible, and no one had yet answered Alfred's continued calls for help. He now ran to the bell, then to the door, giving orders to the servants, who at length appeared, to fly for the nearest medical aid, adding incoherent directions about bringing antidotes for *poison*, and even naming arsenic in particular; yet at the same moment, without any direct consciousness of what he was doing, his fingers with a sort of instinctive movement were thrusting within the breast of his own waistcoat, the fatal scrap of paper he had found in his brother's bosom; for all the while that with the aid of servants he was vainly endeavouring to render assistance to Willoughby, confused notions were floating through his mind of the dreadful addition, that in case of the worst, it would be to his poor mother's grief to know that Willoughby had committed the awful crime of putting a period to his own existence; and mingled with these, were thoughts still more disjointed of Christian rites refused to persons guilty of suicide: so that altogether Alfred was actuated, without any power of defining his motives, by a vague sense, that some sort of necessity existed for suppressing the proofs of his brother having wilfully taken the *poison*. He was of course quite incapable at such a moment of a process of reasoning by which to decide what other supposition it would be either probable or desirable should be formed.

Messengers had been despatched in every direction; yet before any medical man arrived, the convulsions had subsided, and death, accompanied by the most ghastly appearances, taken place.

At length the bustle of an arrival was heard; instead, however, of the expected doctor, Geoffery Arden entered the room.

CHAPTER XX.

The arrival of Geoffery at this critical moment was accidental. He had scarcely time to gather from the appearance of Willoughby, and the incoherent expressions of Alfred, who seemed at one moment half wild, the next stupified by his grief, a somewhat confused notion of what had occurred, when his entrance was followed by that of Doctor Harman.

The patient, however, being already quite dead, there remained nothing for the Doctor to do, but

pronounce his opinion as to the probable cause of death, founded on the appearance of the body, and the symptoms of the attack, as described by those who had been present. This he did by expressing a suspicion that Sir Willoughby had swallowed poison, although he granted that similar symptoms might have been occasioned by a fit of apoplexy, and that such a fit might have had a fatal termination. To all Alfred's anxious inquiries if there was nothing that could be done, he replied decidedly that all was over. Alfred now stood for a considerable time with his arms folded, looking on his brother with a sort of mute despair, when a strange unbidden vision of the appearance which the water in Willoughby's goblet had presented, occurred to his memory. He turned towards the table on which the glasses still remained, and in a species of day-dream, lifted and examined that from which Willoughby had drunk. He perceived in the bottom a considerable quantity of whitish powder. Unfit for cool calculation, as were the powers of his mind at the moment, this, with all the circumstances, seemed to place it beyond a doubt, that Willoughby had taken the poison at the very time he had commented on the want of clearness of the water into which he was pouring his wine. With this conviction came again vague thoughts, as before, of expediency of concealing the fact of the suicide. Too wretched, however, to remember how strange his conduct, if not explained, must appear to those present, he poured some water into the glass, and was about to empty the same into a basin on the table.

"Should not the contents of that glass be preserved?" said Geoffery, aside to the Doctor.

"Undoubtedly!" replied the tatler, darting forward, and seizing the visibly trembling hand of Alfred.

"This may be of consequence, my dear sir," he said, mildly.

Alfred, as though he had been a detected culprit, who had not a word to plead in his own excuse, yielded without a comment, not only his whole attention, but his whole heart and soul, being at the instant recalled to the sofa, whence some of the servants were about to remove the remains of Willoughby, for the purpose of conveying them to a bedchamber. But for this circumstance, he would, in all probability, have explained his motives to the Doctor. Alfred now assisted the servants with as much tender solicitude, as though the unconscious object of his care were still capable of distinguishing affection's gentle hand, from all the aid that may be bought or sold. The Doctor and Geoffery had also approached the sofa, on the impulse of the moment, ready to give their assistance had it been required; it was not required, however, and they stood to let the melancholy procession pass. While doing so, their eyes naturally rested on the interesting figure of Alfred, bending over his poor brother, and consequently it so happened that while he was in the act of stooping, accompanied with some share of exertion, in the performance of his pious task, they both distinctly saw the piece of paper he had so lately placed within the breast of his waistcoat, glide out from thence, and fall to the ground. Geoffery perceived the Doctor's eye follow it; he kept his own upon it, for there was sufficient visible of the conspicuous letters with which it was marked, to draw attention. When all but the Doctor and himself had quitted the apartment, he pointed at it. The large characters, as we have already particularly remarked, being, though strongly done with a pen, those of print, were so distinct, that they were legible, even at the distance where the paper lay on the floor. After both gentlemen had stood looking down upon it for a considerable time, Geoffery said, at length,

"Will you have the goodness, Doctor, to pick up that paper?" The Doctor did so, though not without hesitation.

"I would not have touched it myself for the world!" continued Geoffery, as soon as it was in the Doctor's hand. "You saw whence it fell?" he proceeded. The Doctor was gazing in horror, one after another, at the letters which spell the word poison, and carefully collecting together a minute particle or two of powder, which still remained in some yet unfolded crevices of the crumpled paper:

"I am sorry to say I did," he answered, shaking his head.

"What powder is that?" asked Geoffery.

"It is scarcely fair to form a judgment on so small a portion," replied the Doctor, "but it certainly resembles arsenic."

Geoffery looked very hard at him; he returned the look, for a moment only, then dropped his eyelids, and compressed his lips, as though he feared his thoughts would assume the shape of words, and escape from them unbidden.

"What can be the meaning of all this, Doctor!" said Geoffery, after a pause of some duration.

"I don't know, sir—I don't know," replied the Doctor, hastily, and almost angrily.

"There seems to be no comment necessary," observed Geoffery. "Yet," he added, after another pause, "the only possible solution is too horrible to be thought of."

"Quite so, sir, quite so!" replied the Doctor. "I wish," he subjoined, shortly after, "that any other medical man but myself had been called in."

"That, too, was strange!" said Geoffery, turning towards the table: "what object could Mr. Arden, or Sir Alfred, rather, as we must *now* call him I suppose, have had in attempting to rinse that glass?"

"It is impossible to say," replied the Doctor.

"Why should he," persisted Geoffery, instead of being anxious to ascertain the truth (as every near relative who had not his own reasons for a contrary line of conduct must be), "seek to make away with evidence?"

The Doctor compressed his lips harder than before.

"What do you suppose these dregs to be?" asked Geoffery, after a long pause, devoted to a careful scrutiny of the contents of the glass.

"Arsenic, apparently," replied the Doctor;—this was a point on which he considered himself called upon to speak.

"And you think Sir Willoughby's death was caused by poison?"

"I did certainly from the symptoms described suspect as much; but I should, for the further satisfaction of the family, recommend the body being opened."

"You are quite right," said Geoffery; "it ought to be satisfactory to every member of the family that the cause and manner of Sir Willoughby's death should be clearly ascertained."

The good Doctor moved his head mournfully but made no reply. The paper was still in his hand. Being about to depart, he offered it to Geoffery, saying, "I had better give this to you, I suppose, sir?"

"By no means," replied Geoffery; "but I must request that you will take especial charge of it. 'Tis scarcely to be supposed that circumstances so mysterious and extraordinary will be passed over without some investigation, in which case that scrap of paper will be of infinite importance."

The Doctor took out a memorandum-book with trembling fingers, placed the bit of paper within its leaves, and sighing as he restored the depository to his pocket, said, "Ours is a wretched profession, sir! It is not enough that we must witness every agony that is felt, and see every tear that is shed; but other and still more painful duties, which at first sight one would suppose to be quite distinct from the medical department, are daily thrust upon us by circumstances. The nakedness of human misery as well as human depravity both, are for ever before our eyes!" after a pause he added, "I wish it to be distinctly understood, that I shall decline all interference which is not enforced by law—which is not, in short, matter of sad necessity."

"We must be in a great measure guided by circumstances," said Geoffery, "My situation is peculiarly painful and delicate; I heartily wish I had not arrived when I did—had my own suspicions never been awakened, I had not been called upon either by honour or by feeling, to take a part which may, notwithstanding, be supposed by many to be very invidious. You don't think I could with propriety allow this affair to blow over without an investigation? What do you say, Doctor?"

"I can offer no advice on such a subject," replied the Doctor, "it would be quite stepping out of my sphere, sir."

"I commend your prudence," observed Geoffery, "It is time enough for you to answer questions when you are on your oath."

"A surmise at least," interrupted the Doctor, with the air of one who had suddenly recollected an important fact, if not an absolute knowledge that poison had been taken, "must have existed previously to my being sent for, as the servant who came for me, desired that I should bring antidotes; and, by-the-by, arsenic was particularly mentioned. Possibly Sir Willoughby is known to have put a period to his own existence?"

"Wherefore, in that case," replied Geoffery, "should the paper which had contained the poison have been so carefully concealed, where both of us saw it come from? Besides, Sir Willoughby's affairs were in the most prosperous state possible. He was also on the point of marriage with a very charming young woman. A match quite of his own choosing, too."

After a slight degree of hesitation, Geoffery assuming a look of affected mystery, through which, however, flashed that fiendish sparkle of the eye, which betrays the self-gratulatory acumen of knavery, added,

"I should scarcely suppose that there had existed much cordiality between the brothers of late. Both were pretenders to the hand of the same lady, and the feeling of mutual jealousy on the subject was, I myself happen to know, very strong. The lady in question, too, is an heiress of considerable wealth, by whose means there is little doubt that Alfred Arden had, before poor Sir Willoughby became his *rival*, hoped to mend his fortunes as a younger brother. Indeed, I think he was very ill treated in the business from first to last. It was enough to exasperate the feelings of any man;—not that I mean to justify a crime like this."

"These are family matters with which I can have no concern," interrupted the prudent man of medicine. "As it is highly probable, however, that some investigation of the sudden death of Sir Willoughby must take place, it becomes, I apprehend, my imperative duty, being the medical attendant on the occasion, to take charge of the contents of this glass."

So saying, he rang the bell, asked for a bottle, and carefully putting every particle of the supposed poison into it, took his departure, carrying the bottle with him.

CHAPTER XXI.

As soon as Doctor Harman had taken his departure, Geoffery, with an officious affectation of sympathy, followed Alfred up stairs.

He found him seated beside the bed on which the deceased was laid, and leaning against it, with his face buried in both his hands.

The attendants had all quitted the apartment; Geoffery attempted some commonplace expressions of condolence. Alfred moved his head in a desponding manner, but did not raise it.

Geoffery while standing waiting, as it were,—for he deemed it necessary to remain a few moments with his cousin,—cast his eyes, from mere unfeeling idleness, round the apartment, when something on an adjacent table arrested his attention. He looked down upon it for a few seconds, then raised his eyes cautiously in the direction of Alfred, and perceiving that his face was still covered, lifted the object of his curiosity, which appeared to be a letter, slid it into his pocket, and after repeating his expressions of condolence and adding some sage advice respecting firmness under the unavoidable trials of life, and the expediency of courting the salutary influence of sleep, was about to retire; but Alfred, while he was bidding him good night, looked up for a moment, and said,

"I would not on any account have it known that poor Willoughby had been guilty of suicide. They may deny him Christian burial;—besides it would add greatly to my poor mother's affliction. Did not the doctor say something of a sudden seizure, a fit, having similar symptoms, and of its being likely to prove equally fatal?"

"He did."

"Let it be so supposed then, and discourage all further inquiry. Good night—" and here he again covered his face; on which Geoffery sought his own room, and having carefully shut and bolted his door, drew the purloined letter from his pocket, and without waiting to sit down, perused its contents with a countenance of eager satisfaction. He then proceeded to unfold and read an enclosure which seemed to make him look grave. After this he paced the apartment lost in thought, from which he broke into occasional soliloquy, thus: "My coming over too, just at this juncture, was the merest chance: if I had not been short of cash, I should not have thought of it." A long pause followed.—"He was always a vain fool," he recommenced: "the dread of being laughed at, I make no doubt, has goaded him to this! There must have been derangement of course, temporary, at least." He opened the letter again, and looked at a passage or two—"Incoherent enough!" he ejaculated. "But my happening to see the packet," he pursued, "was so fortunate—He had not noticed it, I should think—that, however, is a point which I must ascertain, for he appears to be by some means, aware of the suicide—but can he prove it, if necessary?—at present he seems desirous to conceal the fact, which is so far well, the mystery will look suspicious.—" Here he again opened the enclosure, shook his head, looked serious, and paced the room once or twice—"Their being abroad, however, just at this time, has happened well," he said—stopped and stood still—then added, after a long pause of deep and motionless thought, "This is most probably the only proof—It would certainly appear from its style that he had made no previous disclosure—I must talk with him—I shall easily perceive how far he is informed, and, at any rate, it is highly improbable that the letter has been seen by any witness."

CHAPTER XXII.

The slumbers which followed the prolonged reveries of Geoffery Arden, were rendered unrefreshing by feverish dreams, some of a truly horrible character; in particular the vision that presented itself on his first closing his eyes; which was, that he had himself for some reason or other been condemned to be hung; that it was the night before his execution, and that he was laying trembling in the condemned cell, dreading the approach of dawn. The agony of his feelings awoke him. What he had just suffered, and his infinite relief on finding that all was but a dream, had for some moments a salutary effect, even on his heart, which, if ever heart of man was justly entitled to the epithet, was indeed "desperately wicked;" now, however, the scheme with which he had laid his head on his pillow, seemed almost too diabolical to be attempted; he almost shrank from the idea of inflicting on any human creature the intense suffering with the recent escape from which his own heart still beat audibly.

These were the thoughts of solitude and of darkness. He slept again, and awoke only to fear, as he beheld the full light of day penetrating every where, and making the true forms of all things evident, that his scheme of murderous treachery was too monstrous to be practicable. No one would listen to such a proposition: and as for proofs, could circumstances be indeed tortured into any strong enough to meet the powerful current of opinion, flowing in the opposite direction? Yet, on the other hand, such things had been heard of, and without one-tenth part the stake as to property, which in this instance might be alleged as one powerful incentive, while there was room also to suppose the workings of violent jealousy, and even of revenge. His own mother,

moreover, could be summoned to prove that he had actually been accepted, and that he himself ascribed his disappointment afterwards to the rivalry of his brother.

At this moment a servant answered Geoffery's bell, prepared to assist him at his morning toilet.

The man's face was full of importance and mystery; Geoffery noted this, and willing to encourage the fellow, in whatever he might have to tell respecting the opinions of servants, &c., said,

"Why, Davison, you look absolutely frightened! What is the matter?"

"I don't know that I have got any occasion to look frightened," said the man, "for whatever way the poor gentleman came by his death, whether by a fit, as some *sais*, or by poison, as others *thinks*, it was nearly over with him before ever we came to the house. But there's no saying, for that matter, who'll be blamed, or who wont; they are all in such a taking about it below, as never was."

"How do you mean?"

"Why the coachman thinks that as it was he that went to Arden for the arsenic for laying for the rats, for it was in the stable-lofts they were most troublesome, that he'll get brought into some mischief, although he had his master's orders; but who is to prove that, now poor Sir Willoughby's dead and gone? And for the butler, he's afraid of his life, but people may think that something must have been wrong with the glasses or the water, when he carried them in; and so he took Johnson and myself to the saddle-room, that we should see where the arsenic lay, and so judge that it was impossible for it to come near any thing that was for eating or drinking. When we got there, however, the packet with the poison was nowhere to be found, although it had lain on the very shelf he showed us, in that selfsame room (the butler *sais*), no longer ago than yesterday forenoon, when poor Sir Willoughby and Mr. Alfred looked at it themselves."

"Strange indeed!" said Geoffery, "and has inquiry been made? Does any one own to having moved the packet? This may throw light on the whole affair. It is rather too bad that gentlemen are to lose their lives in this manner by the shameful carelessness of servants. How are they to prove it carelessness either? How are they to show it was not intentional? The half of them will be hung, I make no doubt, and richly they deserve it."

"The servants are all ready to swear, that not one of them touched it, or so much as went near the place," replied Davison; "and what's more, the groom who was leading the horses round, after the gentlemen returned from riding, *sais*, that he saw Mr. Alfred coming out of the saddle-room with a paper parcel in his hand; so that if one of the family thought proper to remove the arsenic himself, and an accident happened in consequence to any article of food, the servants all say that was no fault of theirs."

"Can the man swear to this?"

"So he *sais*."

"If this could be proved it might certainly clear servants from blame, but it is, I must say, altogether a very improbable story. If Sir Alfred had wished to have the arsenic removed to any other place, he would have given orders to that effect, and not have gone about the thing himself in the clandestine manner you describe. No, no, this won't do, it is but a flimsy excuse, and as I told you before, gentlemen are not to lose their lives by the shameful carelessness of servants; nor are their nonsensical excuses to be taken, and the thing hushed up. As for poor Sir Alfred, he is too much overcome by his grief to attend to any thing; it necessarily devolves upon me therefore to make the proper inquiries.—Send Johnson here, I must question him. I shall, in fact, examine them all, both separately and face to face."

Geoffery was determined, by this means and on this pretext, to collect all the information he could as to what were the surmises of others, and what the facts of the case, that admitted of proof or of distortion. He knew enough to be perfectly aware that the servants were not in fault, but he considered it his most judicious play, to pretend to blame them; exciting their ignorant and selfish fears, might be useful, and at length make them willing to hear even their master accused rather than themselves. Although he had sources of information not open to others, he could by no means understand the extraordinary circumstance of the paper which had fallen from Alfred's bosom. The attempt to rinse the glass, he now indeed thought might be ascribed to the wish Alfred had since expressed to conceal the fact of the suicide; but as he had not explained his motive to the doctor at the time, the circumstance looked so very suspicious, that he hoped it might be turned to account. He could of course deny what his cousin had said to him in private. Knowing however, as he did, that the inference to be naturally drawn from all that had at present transpired was false, he was aware that he must proceed with caution; something positive might yet come to light, which would do away with all fallacies, and render it imprudent in him, or at least invidious to breathe a suspicion against his cousin.

Before he took any step, therefore, he must find out what all the servants had to say; and as he had already determined to do, sound Alfred himself,—without any witness present, however; for if, as he now began to hope, his cousin's exculpation should rest entirely on explanations to be made by himself, his not offering such till after formal accusations were brought against him, would look very suspicious. He would, therefore, make himself the medium of communication between Alfred and all others; and, if possible, encourage him not to see any one else. In the end, if necessary, he could and would firmly and boldly deny every word which had been said to him

only, and so give to his cousin's motives the colouring of excuses, subsequently invented to cover guilt. This, however, was a desperate game, which he would not venture to play till he could see that his card would sweep the board.

The circumstance of Alfred's having been seen bringing away the packet of poison, would certainly be very strong if it should so turn out that it could be proved; he feared, however, that it must be a mistake: he had his own reasons for thinking that it would be found to have been Sir Willoughby whom the groom had seen pass and carelessly mistaken for Sir Alfred.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Pray, Johnson," said Geoffery, when the person so named made his appearance, "what is all this that Davison has been saying, about a paper of arsenic being missing from where it lay no later than yesterday; and the groom's absurd assertion, that Sir Alfred was the person who removed it? This is a mere excuse, to hide the carelessness of some of you servants, who have probably flung the paper of poison in among the glasses; and now that you see the consequences of your own misconduct, you are all terrified. And very justly, for I make no doubt of it, the half of you will be hung!—The plea of carelessness, let me tell you, and I know something of the law, will not be taken; malicious interest will be supposed. As I told Davison, if Sir Alfred chose to have the arsenic removed, he would have given his orders to that effect, and not have gone about the thing himself, in a skulking clandestine manner: why should he take so much trouble, unless concealment were his object; and what motive could he have for concealment?"

"The lad *sais* it was Sir Alfred," answered Johnson.

"Can he swear to the fact?"

"He *sais* he can."

"Poor Sir Alfred," proceeded Geoffery, "is not in a state of mind to be spoken to; or the thing might be cleared up in a moment, by my asking him the question. Indeed he has given orders that no one shall go near him; besides, it would be the utmost cruelty to allude to such a subject at present; particularly if he really has, by any carelessness about this paper of which you speak, been the cause of the accident, he will never forgive himself;—so that, in that case, from respect to his feelings, the circumstance ought in fact to be hushed up." Geoffery was well aware that ordering servants to hush a thing up, was the best possible mode of giving it publicity.

The groom, when he appeared, was so firm to his text, that Geoffery began to hope the assertion, whether true or false, might be turned to account. He endeavoured, accordingly, to terrify the lad into a steady evidence, by telling him, that what he once said, he must, on his peril, stand to throughout; for that the slightest prevarication, or even hesitation on so serious an affair, might hang him. "And I know something of the law," he added, as usual. So saying, he dismissed the groom, desiring him to send up the butler.

"This is a shocking business, Thomas," said Geoffery, as the butler entered.

Thomas made no reply.

"Poor Sir Alfred," continued Geoffery, "thinks, it seems, that his brother died of a fit, and it is better for his peace of mind, that he should think so; although there is no doubt, that Sir Willoughby was poisoned. Do you think, Thomas, that you will be able to clear yourself?"

"Clear myself!" answered the man, his eyes flashing with rage, through the honest tears he had been shedding for his master. "I'd be glad to know who'll accuse—I who have served his father, and his grandfather before him, man and boy these fifty-five years, and have nursed himself and his brother one on each knee, many's the time."

"Far be it from me, Thomas, to accuse you or any one else of such a crime as murder; I only suspect you of unpardonable carelessness; but I must say, and I know something of the law, as you may suppose, that circumstances are very strong against you; it may be thought that you intended to poison both brothers, and rob the house; my arrival was unexpected; such things you know have been done! Nothing I should think can clear you, but its being satisfactorily proved who is to blame. You brought up the glasses; poison has been found in one of them, and there was no one in the room but Sir Willoughby, his brother, and yourself. You certainly would get nothing by the death of Sir Willoughby, unless, as I said before, you had made away with both gentlemen, and robbed the house; that is so far in your favour: yet no one, you know, could think of suspecting his own brother, and circumstances seem to lay the mischief, however it happened, at the door of one or the other."

"No one who had not got the heart of the devil in his breast would lay it at the door of either," replied the man, angrily.

Without noticing his irritation, Geoffery proceeded, "I still mean in the way of accident or mistake. Some of you talk, I understand, of Sir Alfred having been the person who removed the paper of arsenic." And here he enlarged as before, on the affliction our hero would no doubt suffer, could he at all blame himself for any thing that had happened, and how cruel it would

therefore be to mention the subject to him.

"Was the arsenic at any time kept in the same place with the glasses? Do you think you might have scattered any quantity about, in lifting it from shelf to shelf?"

"I wiped out the glasses with my own hands, the moment before I carried them in. Besides, the arsenic was never in the cupboard with my things at all, it lay on a shelf in the saddle-room, quite out of the way of what was for any one's use, and was marked in large letters, "arsenic, poison"; for Sir Willoughby was very particular in his orders to me to be careful about it, and made me show him where I put it, and that Mr. Alfred knows, for he was with his brother at the same time, no longer since than yesterday forenoon."

"If your statement is correct, I do not see how it was possible for an accident to have happened," said Geoffery, "could you swear that it was not possible for an accident to have occurred?"

"Yes, I could," he replied, though sulkily. "That is," he added, "as long as the arsenic lay where I left it."

This was one of the main points which Geoffery wanted to establish. He now dismissed the butler, who was sobbing so violently, that he could scarcely answer the questions put to him.

The coachman next entered; and it being Geoffery's object, with the views already stated, to alarm all the servants for their own safety, he looked extremely austere, and, aware that the individual he had now to deal with was not overburdened with wisdom, began thus:

"So I find, James, you don't pretend to deny that you brought arsenic from Arden, and the defence which I understand you pretend to set up, is, that you did so by your master's orders, for the purpose of poisoning rats. Now, this is quite too hackneyed an excuse; as to the orders you say you received, I fancy you have no proof that you received any."

"I told the groom that went with me, and the boy at the apothecary's, that my master sent me."

"You told them! What sort of proof is that? You don't suppose that your own word will be taken for yourself, whatever it may be against yourself! This will never do. I know something of the law, and unless there is stronger evidence against some one else, you will certainly be hung for the murder. The only thing in your favour is, that you would get nothing by Sir Willoughby's death."

"If they *chooses* to hang an innocent man," replied James, very philosophically, "I can't help it, I dun as I was bid."

"It's a very awkward thing having no witness in your favour but a dead man. Are you sure it was not Sir Alfred who gave you the orders? for if so, he is there, you know, to say so, which might save you."

"No, it was Sir Willoughby himself."

After a little more cross-questioning, James retired to the servants' hall, where the effect of Geoffery's interference, was just what he intended it should be: the utmost excitement existed. The one general argument in their own favour, cunningly suggested to each by Geoffery, that they would get nothing by the death of poor Sir Willoughby, was constantly recurred to, while every time this was said, the remembrance naturally suggested itself of who it was that would gain everything by the melancholy event; not that any of the household yet dared in word, or even perhaps in thought, to connect accusation or suspicion with the mental recognition of the abstract fact. The strangeness, too, of attempting to rinse the glass, and the strangeness of taking away the paper of arsenic were named, while other still stranger circumstances were from time to time, as they transpired, cautiously whispered to a chosen few, by Geoffery's man, Davison, but no one ventured to draw inferences. As the servants, however, of neighbouring families came in to make inquiries respecting the sudden demise of Sir Willoughby, already beginning to be generally known, many very extraordinary rumours soon got abroad.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Alfred, wholly unsuspecting of the evil thoughts which dwelt in the minds of others, was seated in the retirement of his own chamber, writing the melancholy announcement of Willoughby's death to Lady Arden. With the idea, however, that the knowledge of his brother's having put a period to his own existence would add much to his mother's affliction, he made no allusion to that part of the subject; nor any mention of the supposition, that Willoughby's death had been occasioned by poison; he merely stated, that it had been very sudden, and that Dr. Harman was of opinion, that something of an apoplectic fit, had been the cause.

While he was thus employed, Geoffery presented himself, and renewed his officious offers of condolence.

Alfred thanked him, but begged to be left alone. While Geoffery stood behind his cousin's chair, his restless eye (expressive at once of outlook and precaution), wandering as usual in every direction, and scanning every object, descried, as much to his astonishment as delight, in one of the recesses of the escritoire, the paper packet marked arsenic, which it may be remembered,

Alfred had put there the day before. How it had got there, which to Geoffery was of course a mystery, there could be little doubt that this was the packet spoken of by the servants as missing. Here indeed was a powerful circumstance in favour of a scheme, so diabolical in purpose, so improbable in execution, that it was his wishes, not his hopes, which had first given entertainment to the thought. This monster, this creation of the evil one, was now assuming an almost palpable, or at least plausible form. If, as he had strong reason to suspect, the entire truth was known only to himself, it seemed now, no great stretch of probability to hope, that this extraordinary combination of unlooked-for circumstances might establish, by apparently irresistible evidence, the next to incredible accusation, which, could it indeed be established, would in the selfsame hour build up at once his own long despaired-of fortunes. Caution, however, must still be observed, while steps must be taken, to procure the interference of the coroner; and get him to require that the body should be opened; he must also receive a hint to search the escritoire; and the result of the coroner's inquest must decide him, whether or not it would be prudent to take any further steps. In the mean while, however, lest the poison should be removed, previously to the time of a legal search being made, he must contrive, that the packet, where it now lay, should be seen by an impartial witness. His own evidence might not be received, as he was known of course, as heir at law, to have an interest in Alfred's being proved guilty. These were his thoughts, while descending to the hall. Here he summoned Davison, and instructed him to go up to Sir Alfred's room; to enter quietly, as though fearful of disturbing him; to proceed to the back of his chair before he spoke; then to apologize for his intrusion by saying, Mr. Geoffery had sent him for his gloves, which he had laid on the table and forgotten. While pretending to search for the gloves, he was to fix an attentive eye on the part of the escritoire described to him by Geoffery, till he saw with sufficient distinctness to be able to swear to the fact, a paper packet with the word arsenic marked upon it. He was of course not to make a comment, or even allow Sir Alfred to observe the direction of his eyes.

This service punctually performed, but the gloves, which, by-the-by, were on Geoffery's hands, still unfound, Davison returned to his master, who, after ascertaining that he could swear to having seen the arsenic, added,

"You must have perceived, Davison, by the delicacy of my conduct from the first, how glad I should be to retain the charitable opinions of every one as long as possible; but at the same time I have a duty to perform, though a painful one, and so may you, perhaps, when called upon in a court of justice. In the mean time, however, be prudent, and don't hurt the feelings of the older servants, by any rash or premature remarks. As for strangers they don't care, and every one must know sooner or later, so that your denying facts to them would be wrong, and might invalidate your future evidence."

Davison looked half puzzled and half frightened, but said nothing.

"Doctor Harman," proceeded Geoffery, "has not been quite prudent; he has, I find from one or two neighbours who have called this morning to make inquiries, been gossiping already." And here, under pretext of repeating what the Doctor had been saying, though poor Harman, to do him justice, had not opened his lips, Geoffery, in an under voice, and with much mystery of manner, mentioned the suspicious circumstance of the paper which had fallen from Sir Alfred's bosom. As for the attempt to rinse the glass, several servants had been present at the time.

Geoffery, now thinking that he had supplied his attendant with sufficient topics of conversation for any servants' hall he might enter, ordered his horses. He had several objects in view in his morning ride, one of the principal ones, a call on business at Doctor Harman's.

CHAPTER XXV.

With what indescribable feelings of exultation did Geoffery ride through the splendid park, look back on the baronial remains of the ancient castle, and the grandeur of the modern mansion, then around them on the immeasurable extent of the grounds, the endless variety of the scenery, the magnificent, unfathomable woods, the beautiful openings, displaying in the distance the rich low pastures, with their grazing flocks; the bare hill rising beyond, crowned with herds of deer; bends of the picturesque river, with here the swan or the wild duck sailing on its smooth bosom, there a waterfall, veiling its rocky sides in spray, and clothing its surface with a sheet of foam; all, in short, on which he had so long looked with corroding envy, and fierce thirst for possession, but for many years without a hope.

He checked the bridle of his horse on the centre of a little eminence, inhaled a long draught of the fragrant air, and smiled with supercilious self-importance while he thought of the cheering probability, to which time and chance had at length given birth, that all might yet be his.

He found Doctor Harman at home, and with great solemnity and well-acted sorrow, made known to him the discoveries of the morning. The packet of arsenic being missing, Sir Alfred having been seen coming from the place where it had lain, and the still more extraordinary and, he feared, perfectly decisive circumstance of his having himself seen a packet marked arsenic in Sir Alfred's escritoire.

It was too shocking to be thought of, he said, yet how were such staggering facts as these,

together with those which had previously come under the Doctor's own eye, to be got rid of? He wished to retain charitable opinions to the very last. Investigation, however, had become a duty, although he would certainly wish it to be conducted in the most delicate manner possible. In answer to an inquiry from Geoffery, the Doctor said he had already tested the dregs found in the glass, and proved them to be arsenic; to obtain full satisfaction, he added, that it would be very desirable to open the body, and examine by similar tests the contents of the stomach. "But," he proceeded "the request must come from Sir Alfred."

"Which we know will not be the case," replied Geoffery; "on the contrary, I fear he will refuse to permit an examination, and if so, the proper authorities must enforce submission; but I am so anxious to proceed in this affair with the utmost delicacy, that you would greatly oblige me, Doctor, if you would first urge it as your own request—as a matter of favour to yourself—as throwing a light on science. I do not wish unnecessarily to hurt the feelings of Sir Alfred, and if ever I am myself compelled to yield my belief to the frightful suspicions which circumstances, I am sorry to say, almost justify, it must not be till the most ample proof has no longer left me free to doubt."

His object in wishing to act with this affected delicacy was, that Alfred might refuse to allow the body to be opened; as such conduct, under the circumstances, would look suspicious, and he felt certain, knowing as he did Alfred's wish to repress the suicide, that so requested he would of course refuse, while, if he were informed that suspicions already existed, it was to be supposed that he would for his own sake instantly consent. The Doctor, however, still objected to attend unsummoned.

As soon, therefore, as Geoffery returned to Arden, he despatched a servant on horseback with a verbal message, requesting that Doctor Harman and two surgeons would attend prepared to open the body of Sir Willoughby. This succeeded in taking in the honest-hearted Doctor, to whom it did not occur to inquire who had given the message to a servant who was one of Sir Alfred's household.

On the arrival of the medical gentlemen, Geoffery, who was determined that every point unfavourable to his cousin should admit of proof by other witnesses than himself, sent a servant up to Sir Alfred with a message purporting to be from Doctor Harman to say, that if Sir Alfred had no objection, the Doctor was very desirous of being permitted to open the body of the deceased, for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not his view of the case were correct, in supposing that the sudden death of Sir Willoughby had been occasioned by a fit of apoplexy.

Alfred, surprised at the officious impertinence of such an interference to which he had no idea of sacrificing the solemn injunctions of his dying brother, sent back an immediate and positive refusal; on which Geoffery with a face of solemn sorrow, dismissed the medical gentlemen, adding many flourishes and innuendoes, and confessing that he certainly had ventured to send for them himself, in the hope that Sir Alfred might have been induced to permit an examination, for which the circumstances of the case so loudly called. This might be thought officious in him, but his motive was, to combine delicacy with a step he felt it his duty to take.

Alfred had many reasons for his refusal; first, and above all, were his brother's anxious and repeated injunctions, which, except superseded by sad necessity, would of course be laws to him; next, he was, as we have already said, very desirous that the idea of a suicide should not be even suggested; lest it should come to the ears of his mother, and add to her distress: and, finally, he wished, that if the idea were suggested, the fact should not be proved, lest as we have already hinted, Christian rites should be refused. At the same time, feeling himself but too certain, that his poor brother must have put a period to his own existence, he had no anxious doubts to be satisfied by an examination. As to the opinions which might be entertained by others, though the doctor had said at first, that the symptoms resembled those of poison, he had, at the same time allowed, that an apoplectic fit might have caused the sudden death, and been attended with similar symptoms. Alfred naturally thought, therefore, that the family appearing satisfied with this solution, it would become the prevalent opinion, and the melancholy event pass over, as little noticed by the public, as the private sorrows of individuals generally are.

This honourable and exalted mind never once conceived the idea, that any combination of circumstances whatever, could have suggested to any human being such a thought of horror, as that of his having shortened the life of his dear brother; much less did he imagine, that by the part he was now acting, he was actually furnishing a treacherous enemy with a sort of presumptive evidence that such was the fact: so that while every unfortunate coincidence, on which the ignorance of some, and the malignant designs of others, could found an evil report, was being universally disseminated, and discussed. Alfred sat apart, unsuspecting of evil, yielding to his grief, and communicating with none, except to give such orders as were absolutely necessary; while the arts of Geoffery, and the delicacy of friends, prevented any creature's offering him a hint of what was unhappily, by this time, passing in the minds of many. For, not only were all the particulars which the servants had witnessed, already in circulation; but, the circumstances of the marked paper falling from Alfred's bosom, and the missing packet being seen in his escritoire, were also beginning to be pretty generally known, to the great surprise of the poor Doctor, who, as we said, had never breathed a hint on the subject. Yet had his prudence gained him no credit; for Geoffery had not confined his insinuations against the Doctor's talents for taciturnity, to what he had said to his man Davison; but had also complained to several confidential friends, how that meddling, gossiping fellow, Harman, had been saying so and so—giving here each particular, in the form of a quotation. If his auditors *chanced* to reply, that they

had heard nothing of the kind before, Geoffery would express his surprise; assure them that every one else had; lament that such should be the case; and add, how much he had wished, to suppress unpleasant reports; at least, until the whole affair should necessarily become matter of public discussion.

Geoffery having, as we have said, his reasons for being aware that Willoughby had taken poison, was determined, for the furtherance of his diabolical schemes against Alfred, that the body should be opened; and proof thus furnished, of the fact of poison having been swallowed. He took care, therefore, that not only reports, but direct information should reach the coroner, of a nature to render it his duty to demand an investigation of the whole affair.

END OF VOL. II.

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