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MARGARET CAPEL.

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1846.

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By the Author of "The Clandestine Marriage," &c.

"One of the best kind of fashionable novels, not only free from the vulgar impertinences of the 'silver-fork school,' but has the tone of good society, and better still, a vein of pure and healthful sentiment. The grave incidents of the story are treated with good taste and genuine pathos, but enlivened by very amusing scenes, in which the

ridiculous and vicious peculiarities of character, so often met with in real life, are cleverly hit off with a pencil which emulates the witty drollery of caricature without its coarseness."—*Spectator*.

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CHAPTER I.

And he had ever on his lip some word of mockery. [Pg 1]
MAISTRE WACE.

Therefore whenever that thou dost behold
A comely corse with beauty fair endewed,
Know this for certain, that the same doth hold
A beauteous soul, with fair conditions thewed;
Fit to receive the seed of vertue strewed,
For all that fair is, is by nature good;
That is a sign to know the gentle blood.
SPENSER.

"Left guardian to her, are you?" said Mr. Casement, looking with an expression of much satisfaction at his friend Mr. Grey.

"I told you so three months ago," returned Mr. Grey, in a tone of voice that betrayed his vexation. [Pg 2]

"I have been very busy for these three months, and forgot all about it," said Mr. Casement.

"I thought you never were busy, Casement," remarked Mr. Grey.

"One of your mistakes," returned Mr. Casement, as if Mr. Grey's mistakes were a synonyme for the dullest of all possible blunders. "Why, you seem to have the luck of it; you are always being made guardian, or executor, or what not."

"I know I am," said Mr. Grey, looking more and more cold, and vexed, and peevish; and rubbing his knee with great perseverance, as he drew closer to the fire; "but never before to a girl."

"What has become of the two young Trevors?"

"One of them drowned near Ilfracombe the summer before last—the other in India."

"Can't you marry her to one of them?" [Pg 3]

"Which?" asked Mr. Grey shortly, "they are both equally within my reach."

"I thought there was another—Alfred Trevor?"

"He is married already."

"And how old is the girl?"

"Seventeen, I told you."

"When did you close accounts with young Haveloc?"

"Last Christmas, didn't you know?"

"I forgot. Sharp work, Master Grey, upon my word. If you are to have a ward every year, I don't envy you. As well open a boarding-school at once. That is the good," continued Mr. Casement, turning round and addressing the fire, "that is the good of being a single man; he is bothered with every body's children. Now, I never was appointed guardian in my life. You had better, my good friend," said he, turning again to Mr. Grey, "you had better cajole Master Haveloc to take the young lady off your hands as quickly as possible. There is an arrangement which would please all parties." [Pg 4]

"I have a great regard for young Haveloc," said Mr. Grey seriously; "and I don't wish him so ill as to force a wife upon him. I never saw any good come of making matches. Margaret Capel is nearer to me than the Trevors, who are only second cousins. She is my own sister's child. She will inherit my property in all likelihood, and then she will find no difficulty in obtaining a husband without the disgrace of going in search of one."

"That's a long speech," remarked Mr. Casement.

Mr. Grey made no reply to this statement.

"That is to say," resumed Mr. Casement, "if you don't leave your money to a hospital."

"I have no intention of leaving a doit to any hospital in the world," said Mr. Grey.

"But Master Haveloc would make her a nice husband," said Mr. Casement maliciously, "you have heard of the pretty things he has been doing at Florence." [Pg 5]

"Yes," replied Mr. Grey shortly.

There was no excuse for repeating the "pretty things," as Mr. Grey professed to recollect them; and Mr. Casement looked a little baffled for a moment.

"Mrs. Maxwell Dorset must be a delightful woman," said he, at length. "It is a pity Haveloc could not manage to run off with her."

"Do you think so?" retorted Mr. Grey, still more shortly.

"He don't do you much credit," resumed his provoking companion, "I am afraid you did not bring him up in the way he should go."

"I did not bring him up at all," replied Mr. Grey. "I had the direction of him, or his affairs, for a couple of years, from nineteen to twenty-one. There began and there ended my control." [Pg 6]

"And so," said Mr. Casement, "you expect Miss Peggy here every minute."

"I expect my niece, Margaret, to arrive before nine o'clock."

"Fresh from a boarding-school, good luck!" exclaimed Mr. Casement, "with her head full of sweethearts. You must go over to S——, and call upon the red-coats, only you must get a better cook, let me tell you, or they won't come very often to dine with you. I thought the *fondu* worse than ever to-day. Miss will never want amusement as long as there is a lazy fellow to be found, with a spangled cap on his head, to go about sketching all the gate-posts, far and near, and keep her guitar in tune."

Mr. Grey employed himself busily during this harangue in making up the fire; then suddenly dropped the poker and started. A carriage stopped at the door. Now, he had been cross, not because he was expecting his sister's child; but because he did not know what on earth to do with her when she came. [Pg 7]

He hurried out into the hall regardless of the wintry wind, and received the new comer in his arms.

"You are kindly welcome, my dear, to Ashdale," he said, as he led her into the drawing-room. "Casement, this is my niece, Miss Capel."

"Well, I suspected as much," said Mr. Casement, staring into her bonnet; "and now the first question to be determined is—who is she like?"

"I am considered like my mother," said Margaret, in a very quiet sweet voice, laying aside her bonnet as she spoke, almost as if to facilitate Mr. Casement's impertinent scrutiny; but with so self-possessed a manner as to perplex even his degree of assurance.

"Why then your mother was—a very pretty creature, that's all," said Mr. Casement, turning away.

Most persons would have been disposed to echo Mr. Casement's remark, as Margaret brought to view a profusion of bright hair of a rich deep brown, falling in low bands over cheeks of velvet softness, where the warm colour glowed like gathered rose leaves upon the pure white surface, a small accurate nose, short curved lips, as red and almost as transparent as rubies; and long almond-shaped blue eyes, with a fringe of black lashes curved outwards from the upper and under lid, so as to deepen and almost change the colour of the eye itself. [Pg 8]

While Mr. Casement was taking note of these particulars, Mr. Grey placed his niece beside him close to the fire; and rang for tea, with such accompaniments as he thought might be acceptable to her after her long journey.

Margaret, who had been attentively perused by the two gentlemen, now took a survey of them in return, although in a more guarded manner. Mr. Grey was a small, quiet old gentleman, with a thin, pale face, wearing his white hair cut almost close to the head; very mild and pleasing in his address, with a little of the kind and polished formality of the old school. She thought she never [Pg 9] had seen so hideous an old man as Mr. Casement, with his snaky grey and sandy hair, his ragged teeth and long projecting upper lip. As he sat, with the lamp on the other side of his head, the exaggerated shadow traced upon the wall perfectly amazed her when she reflected that it belonged to a human creature. She then looked with some curiosity at the room, which was large though not lofty, with dark oak panels, and heavy crimson curtains; all the furniture was of carved oak and crimson velvet, which gave a rich but somewhat gloomy appearance to the apartment.

"You are very hungry, ain't you, little woman?" said Mr. Casement, who generally knew exactly what would most annoy those to whom he spoke. A school-girl never likes to be thought very hungry; and as Margaret was not tall, she was extremely sensitive to her small stature. With hands and arms like a Greek nymph, and a small round neck that would have delighted a [Pg 10] sculptor, she envied every girl in the school, however ugly, who measured any thing above her own five feet two inches. She was very shy, with all her apparent self-possession; and she sat deeply colouring, first at the imputation of being hungry, and secondly with a distressing consciousness that she ought, as the only lady present, to offer her services in making the tea, instead of allowing the old butler to prepare it.

The tea being made, and Mr. Grey informed of the fact, the butler withdrew; and then Mr. Casement remarked that the little girl would pour it out, and it would be good practise against she grew to be a woman, and had a house of her own.

Margaret went to the tea-table, and Mr. Casement followed her to explain his peculiar fancies. "That large cup is mine," he said, "give me four lumps of sugar, and put the cream in first; it makes all the difference." [Pg 11]

She complied with his directions in silence; but she turned to Mr. Grey and asked if she had made his tea right for him, in that soft low voice which is in itself a courtesy.

"Quite right, my dear," said Mr. Grey, "a great deal better than when Land makes it."

"And so, you left school to-day;" said Mr. Casement, as soon as tea was over.

"Yesterday," replied Margaret, "I went as far as Winchester with a school-fellow, and staid all night there, and came on here to-day."

"Are you sorry you have left school?"

"No, Sir."

"What—did you not like it?"

"Not much, Sir."

"How's that? Were you a naughty girl, eh? Did you not learn your lessons?"

"Yes, Sir, I learned my lessons."

"Why did you not like school, my dear?" asked Mr. Grey, kindly.

"Didn't give her enough to eat, I dare say!" exclaimed Mr. Casement.

"Quite enough, Sir," replied Margaret; "but I felt I was wasting my time there." [Pg 12]

"Ay!" cried Mr. Casement, delighted at the reply; "no young sparks there, eh? No inamoratos! A little in the convent style, is it not? Ugly old music master, ditto drawing, and dancing taught by a lady!"

"Don't mind him, my dear," said Mr. Grey, taking Margaret's hand in his, "tell me about it."

Although the indignant blood flashed fast over neck and brow, Margaret made no answer to Mr. Casement, but turned to Mr. Grey.

"I was learning words all day, Sir," she replied, "and music; they gave me no time for thinking. I should be sorry if there was no more to learn than what they teach at school."

"You will have plenty of time here for thinking, little woman," said Mr. Casement, "for hardly a soul ever crosses his threshold; but I am afraid you will have nobody to think about, if you have [Pg 13] not a spark already, I don't know where you are to find one. Such a neighbourhood for young men!"

"There are as many young men hereabouts as there are in other places, I suppose," said Mr. Grey. "What has become of the young Gages?"

"He lives in the Ark," said Mr. Casement, pointing to Mr. Grey. "The Gages are all flown. George

is in Ireland, and Everard in Canada, and Hubert I hope from my heart at the bottom of the sea! But they won't do for you, my dear, naughty, swearing troopers. You don't like troopers, do you?"

"I don't know any, Sir," returned Margaret.

"I thought Hubert Gage was a sailor?" said Mr. Grey.

"Right as my glove," said Mr. Casement, "so he is, I forgot. I hate the Gages. George Gage drew a caricature of me; and Everard used to take me off to my face; and Hubert, he used to bolt out of my way as if I was poison. I have known him jump out of the parlour window as I came in at the door." [Pg 14]

Margaret found nothing singular in the conduct of the young Gages, she only wondered what a caricature of Mr. Casement could be like.

"The only one of the family worth any thing is Elizabeth. I mean Elizabeth for my second," said Mr. Casement.

This remark let Margaret into the secret that he had one wife to begin with, a thing she would otherwise have thought impossible.

"Though I don't know, now I have seen you," he said turning to Margaret.

"Casement, be quiet; you shall not teaze my child," said Mr. Grey, drawing Margaret towards him as he marked the angry flush again rise to her brow.

Neither of them were prepared for what followed—she burst into a passion of tears.

Mr. Grey passed his hand over her hair, and pressed her closer to him. Mr. Casement was confused.

"I am really very sorry I have made you cry—I am, indeed," he said. [Pg 15]

"You did not, Sir," returned Margaret, becoming calm by a single effort, and wiping the tears from her bright eyes.

"What was it then, my darling?" asked Mr. Grey.

"You said, 'my child,' and it is so very long since—" A choking in her throat prevented her finishing the sentence.

"Well, I'm glad it was not my fault," said Mr. Casement. "Good night, I must be going homeward, or my old woman will scold."

"Does he come here very often, Sir?" asked Margaret, looking up into Mr. Grey's face, as Mr. Casement closed the door after him.

"Yes, he does, my dear," replied the old gentleman; "but you need not mind that. You will get used to his ways, and he does not mean any harm."

[Pg 16]

CHAPTER II.

Ma chi conosce amor, e sua possanza
Fará la scusa dí quel cavaliero
Ch' amor il senno, el' intelletto avanza,
Ne giova al provveder arte, o pensiero;
Giovanni e vecchi vanno a la sua danza,
La bassa plebe col signor altiero;
Non ha rimedio amor, se non la morte,
Ciascun prende d' ogni gente, e d' ogni sorte.

BOIARDO.

When Mr. Grey came down to breakfast the next morning, he found Margaret sitting close by the fire reading from a large book. She advanced to greet him, half shy, half smiling, and looked more fresh and softly beautiful from a long and undisturbed night's rest. As soon as Mr. Grey had inquired, with scrupulous care, how she had slept, and whether she had found everything comfortable in her room, he begged to know what book it was she had been reading. It was Josephus. He laughed a little, and stroked her hair, and told her not to read too much for fear of spoiling her good looks; but he was glad, he said, that she liked reading, because he lived very much alone. He was a great invalid, and unable to pay visits, or receive company. As he spoke he led her to the window, and remarked that there was but a dreary prospect for her at present; but that in summer she would find the grounds very pretty. [Pg 17]

Immediately under the windows the men were sweeping the snow from a broad terrace. Beyond that, lay a wide lawn, dotted with clumps of shrubs, and skirted by magnificent cedars, whose boughs lay darkly upon the whitened grass.

Margaret was sure the garden must be beautiful in summer. She wished to know if there were many flower-beds, and whereabouts the violets grew, and the lilies of the valley. [Pg 18]

Mr. Grey was very much amused by her questions, though he hardly knew how to answer them;

but as he had some curiosity in his turn, he asked her, as they sat at breakfast, what made her wish to read Josephus, and whether she had not learned Sacred History at school?

"Yes," she said, "but that consisted of Bible stories, which she had rather read from the Bible itself. She had heard of Josephus, and she thought she should find there what she wanted to know of the Jews between the Old and New Testaments."

"And had she not read," Mr. Grey asked, "about the Greeks and Romans?"

"Yes; but she wished to know something of the States which had existed before the foundation of Rome, and particularly the Etruscans. And she had read nothing upon Grecian art or poetry. She felt," she said, "that she knew very little."

Mr. Grey could not forbear a smile as he thought of Mr. Casement's prophecy about his niece. He imagined that he should not be compelled to call in the aid of the red-coats to amuse her, if her researches fell upon Etruscan relics, or the dythyrambics of the early Greek bards. He puzzled a short time in silence, and then said he had forgotten all those things; but he would introduce her to the Vicar, who was his only visitor except Mr. Casement; and the Vicar was a very good-natured man, and would, he was sure, explain to her every thing she wished to know. He only hoped she would not find herself very dull. There was a piano in the drawing-room, and he had a fine organ in the gallery up stairs. [Pg 19]

"An organ!" cried Margaret, her eyes sparkling with delight. "Oh, Sir! may I try to play on it?"

"Yes," Mr. Grey said, "she might if the gallery was warm enough. He would ring and ask Land if it was safe for her."

Land's answer was satisfactory, and he was directed to wait on Miss Capel in the gallery; and then Mr. Grey said that he was going to be busy all the morning, and that she might walk with Land whenever she pleased; and that Land would be very glad and proud to take care of her. [Pg 20]

So Margaret was left, with the beauty of a Juliet, and an old butler for her nurse, to do as she liked with herself from ten in the morning till seven at night. But what a luxury was this compared to the irksome restraint of a school. She was her own mistress. She might learn what she pleased, walk out when she liked, go to sleep if she had a mind—and play the organ!

She was as impatient "as a child before some festival" till she had tried this organ. The grey-haired servant smiled to see her stand chafing her hands with eagerness, her parted lips disclosing her glittering teeth, as he pulled out the stops, and prepared the noble instrument.

"And who ever plays on it here, Land?" asked Margaret, as she took her place before the keys. [Pg 21]

"Nobody but Mr. Warde, our Vicar, Miss Capel," said the butler, "sometimes he comes here and runs over a few psalm tunes."

"Is he an old man?"

"Yes, Miss Capel, older than Mr. Grey."

"Perhaps he will tell me how to use these pedals. Do you know what that note is?"

"No, Ma'am, I do not."

"Well, I will leave alone the pedals, give me Judas Maccabæus, that thin book; and let me have the trumpet stop. Oh, dear, it is all trumpet! What shall I do for a bass?"

"Take the choir-organ, Miss Capel."

"So I will, you do know something about it. What is this thing? A swell? Oh! this is what we should call a pedal. I see I shall make nothing of it by myself. I'll try if I can play Luther's hymn." [Pg 22]

"Very well—very well; a little too staccato, young lady. Keep your left hand down."

Margaret sprang from the organ in a panic. Mr. Grey had brought Mr. Warde to see her. But he was such a delightful looking old man, with long white hair falling over his collar, and such a benevolent expression of face, that Margaret felt acquainted with him directly. He gave her a good lesson on the organ to her great delight. Let her into the secret of stops, and pedals and swell, and told her she was the quickest scholar he had ever had; and yet he had taught quick pupils too. "That young man, Mr. Haveloc," he said, turning to Mr. Grey, "who had such a fancy for the organ; it was surprising how he improved in those few months he spent with you. What has become of him lately?"

Mr. Grey said he believed he was on his road to England.

Mr. Warde, who was seated at the organ, began to play the Kyrie of one of Mozart's Masses. Talking of Mr. Haveloc, he said, had put him in mind of it—it had been one of his favourite movements. He had a taste for the highest order of musical composition, that seemed to be very rare among Englishmen, indeed, Mr. Warde said, he had thought him full of fine qualities. [Pg 23]

"A mingled yarn," said Mr. Grey.

"So we are all," said Mr. Warde, "so we are all." He glanced at Margaret as he spoke, and seeing her seated in one of the deep window seats, looking eagerly through a volume of Masses, he took

it for granted that she was out of hearing, while she listened in breathless silence to every word of the conversation that followed.

"And now that he has left Florence," said Mr. Warde, "I trust we may conclude that the influence of that designing woman has ceased."

"No doubt," replied Mr. Grey, uneasily. He did not seem as if he liked referring to the subject, and he began to pull out the stops and put them in again, as if his thoughts were occupied by one engrossing topic. [Pg 24]

"How greatly the world fails in its measurement of a character like his," said Mr. Warde.

"True—true," returned Mr. Grey.

"Proud, susceptible, extreme in every thing, and easily deceived from the very integrity of his own nature. I can scarcely picture to myself a character more likely to become the dupe of an unprincipled woman; for while her vanity prompted her to make him her slave, he firmly believed that her heart was devoted to him, and a mistaken sense of justice impelled him to return her supposed regard."

"You know that he did not elope with her," said Mr. Grey.

"So I heard," replied Mr. Warde; "but it was said that the husband intercepted them."

"Her tame husband," remarked Mr. Grey, "there was no duel." [Pg 25]

"Thank God for that!" said Mr. Warde, "matters were quite bad enough."

All this passed in a very low voice, but Margaret listened with all her might, and caught nearly the whole of the discourse. The iniquitous conversation of a boarding-school had rendered her no stranger to histories like the present; but she had rather considered them in the light of improper fictions, which it was very naughty in the girls to talk about, than as some of the actual occurrences of life, such as might be discussed by two grave old men like those before her. She looked at the music-book which she held in her hand, and seeing the name of Claude Haveloc on the title-page, she laid it aside, and resolved to play from her own music in future. She was in many respects a remarkable little creature.

It might be reckoned one of the greatest advantages of her earlier life, that she had not been sent to school until the death of her mother, which took place when she was fourteen years old. Until that time she had been well and delicately brought up. Her father, a Colonel in the Company's service, had sent her to a highly respectable school, intending at the end of three years to return to England, and place her at the head of his house; but not long afterwards, he was killed in an engagement under circumstances that in Europe would have exalted his name to the stars, but which never transpired beyond the confines of the distant province in which it took place; if we except a brief and inaccurate statement in the papers, coupled with a hasty regret that the Company should have lost an efficient servant. [Pg 26]

The school he had chosen for his daughter was a religious and remarkably select academy; but there were plenty of spare minutes during the day, when the young ladies could tell each other who had looked at them at church, and who they could not help smiling at when they took their daily walk. While the girls were discussing the eyes and waistcoats of the young men they knew by sight, Saint Margaret, as she was called, would steal away to her books, and endeavour by study to drive from her head the trifling conversations that went on around her. [Pg 27]

Still, histories like the one hinted at, possessed to her imagination a fearful interest. She regarded Love as a mysterious agency which swept into its vortex all those who suffered themselves to approach its enchanted confines. She imagined that the first steps to this delusion might be avoided; but that once entranced, the helpless victim followed the steps of the blind leader through danger, or neglect, or guilt, without the will or the power to shake off its deadly influence. She had much to learn and to unlearn.

"But what was that affair in Calabria? Not another entanglement, I hope," said Mr. Warde, content in seeing Margaret still at the window arranging her books.

"Oh! that was a harmless affair enough," said Mr. Grey; "if you mean that encounter with the brigands?" [Pg 28]

"I heard something of brigands," said Mr. Warde, "and something about a lady and her daughter."

"Aye—aye! the lady and daughter had taken shelter in a hut, having received intelligence that there were brigands on the road. It was a lonely spot, and you may suppose that Haveloc and his servant, chancing to come up at the time, were pressed into their service. The brigands were as good as their word, and did come; but found the hut so well lined that they marched off again. Still, in the scramble, Haveloc was hurt by a shot from one of their carbines, which I dare say rendered him very interesting in the eyes of the ladies. I think he mentioned in one of his letters to me, that he fell in again with them at Sorrento; but I imagine that they were nothing more than a passing acquaintance. That was before his stay at Florence." [Pg 29]

"Oh, yes! a very satisfactory version of the business," said Mr. Warde; "but I must now be going. I have a sick person to visit. Good bye, Miss Capel. I expect you to be wonderfully improved by the

time I come again."

Margaret rose, bade the old gentleman good bye, and offered him her best thanks for his kind instructions.

As soon as she was left alone, she began to think over all she had heard. She felt as if she had been transplanted into the regions of romance—so strange was it to think that Mr. Grey actually knew somebody who had defended two ladies against an attack of brigands, and been wounded in the contest. This somebody, it was true, was very wicked; but still so very brave, that she could not but admit she should like to see him of all things. She thought he must resemble one of Byron's heroes, and she detected herself wondering whether he had blue eyes or brown. [Pg 30]

She was interrupted in her reverie by Land, who begged to know whether she would like to walk; and advised her to wrap up very warm, for it was a bitter frost.

Her heart beat with delight as she hurried on her furs, and ran down the great staircase to meet her old escort. She felt free as air, she could walk exactly which way she liked, with only a servant behind her, instead of being linked arm-in-arm during the whole promenade with some young lady, who was uninteresting if not disagreeable as a companion. It was as Land had predicted, a bitter frost; her breath whitened her veil, and the ground felt like granite under her feet. Every thing around had been transformed, as Ariel says, "into something rich and strange." The trees stood like coral groves; every branch thickly crusted with sparkling crystals; every brook was ice-bound; every roof pendant with icicles. The sharp air seemed filled with a visible brightness. The pale blue sky appeared to have receded into a farther distance, and the silent fields and hill-side deserted by the grazing flocks, presented an unbroken extent of dazzling snow. Margaret bounded forward with an elasticity of spirit that seemed as if it could never tire. She could not sympathise with old Land when he begged her to walk a little slower; but she wrapped her furs more closely round her, and complied. She had a thousand questions to ask as they proceeded. She must know who lived in every house they passed, and the direction of every road and narrow lane that crossed the highway. [Pg 31]

Mr. Land passed over the village dwellings very slightly; but when they came in view of a large white house standing on the river-side with broad lawns and clustering elms, he pointed it out to her with an air of great dignity.

"That seat, Chirke Weston, belongs to Captain Gage. Quite the gentleman, Miss Capel."

The father of the young Gages who disliked Mr. Casement. Margaret looked with much interest at the white walls of the house. [Pg 32]

"They are expecting home, Mr. Hubert," said Land, "such a fine young gentleman. A sailor like his father—they are a fine family. Miss Gage is the handsomest young lady in the county."

Margaret felt interested in the Gage family, she begged Land to point out to her where they sat at church, that she might know them by sight. They came to some fields which took them another way to Ashdale.

"Is this field, my uncle Grey's?" asked Margaret, "what a large pond! I say, Land, when I was a little girl I could skate very well. Could you get me a pair of skates? I will give you the money."

Land looked very grave; but Margaret coaxed and begged so much, that he said he would see about it; and the next morning a small pair of skates was laid beside her shoes outside her bed-room door.

The frost continued: she hurried over her organ practice; and went down to the pond with Land. Her skates were on in a moment; and had there been any spectators, they might have enjoyed the sight of an old man holding a young lady's muff and boa, while she amused herself by skimming over the ice. She was never weary. Poor old Land walked up and down the side of the pond with his hands in her muff, wishing every minute that she would bring her sport to a conclusion, until he was forced to tell her that his time was up, for he had to go in and see to the cleaning of the plate. The next day she managed to go out earlier, for the frost was still hard, and she determined to make the most of it while it lasted. [Pg 33]

She excited the unqualified approbation of Land by her performance, for, as she bade him observe, she was fairly getting into practice.

She flew round the pond, and across, and back, until he was almost tired of watching her.

"Miss Capel—Miss Capel! quick! here comes Mr. Casement," cried Land, but Margaret was careering round the pond and did not hear him. [Pg 34]

"Miss Capel! Bless the child, he will go and say all sorts of things to Mr. Grey. Oh, dear me! Miss Margaret—"

"Well, Land, what is the matter? You look in such a bustle. You don't mean to say the ice is giving way?"

"Mr. Casement is coming across the field, that's all, Miss Capel."

"Oh! I don't care for him—horrid old man! Just look how nicely I can turn this corner."

Mr. Casement passed through the field on his way to the house, and Margaret continued her

skating with great eagerness.

Presently a footman was seen running towards the pond followed by the gardener's boy at a little distance; then appeared the fat coachman, and, in the farthest distance, Mr. Grey himself.

The footman, quite out of breath, brought his master's compliments, and he begged Miss Capel to [Pg 35] come off the ice: then up came the boy, grinning, but saying nothing, then the coachman toiled up, and said that master was in a mortal fright lest the young lady had come to any harm; and informed Mr. Land, aside, "as how that cankered old toad, Casement, had been telling master a pack of lies about a thaw;" and by the time Margaret had disengaged the straps of her skates from her little feet, Mr. Grey had reached her all in a tremble, and taking her in his arms had begun a gentle remonstrance on her imprudence in venturing upon thin ice. Land came forward, and vowed that the ice was as firm as the rock of Gibraltar, and recommended, in proof thereof, that the fat coachman and the gardener's boy should cross the pond arm-in-arm. But Mr. Grey's fears once excited, could not so easily be set at rest; if the ice was not thin, it would probably be slippery—not an uncommon attribute—people had broken their limbs before now by a fall on the [Pg 36] ice; indeed, he was not sure that there was not a case of the kind at present in the village, which he hoped would be a warning to Margaret never to skate again. And seeing that she was half crying as she resigned her skates to Land, he promised her a plum-cake for tea as the only means that came into his head of softening the bitterness of her disappointment. [Pg 37]

CHAPTER III.

The red rose medled with the white yfere,
In either cheek depeinten lively chear;
Her modest eye,
Her majesty,
Where have you seen the like but there?

SPENSER.

Mr. Grey did not go to church on the Sunday after Margaret's arrival. He very seldom ventured during the winter to encounter the cold and damp common to most village churches at that season; from which some persons augured that he had a bad heart, while others contented themselves by supposing that he had a delicate chest.

Having seen his little niece warmly packed up in the carriage, he returned to his library to read [Pg 38] the service to himself, and she proceeded, with some little elevation of feeling, on her way. It was new to her to have a carriage all to herself, to recline alone in the corner with her feet in a carriage-mat; and to have Land to hand her out, and carry her prayer-books to the pew-door. Having deposited Margaret and her books, and having whispered to her that the Gage's seat was next to hers, Land withdrew to his own part of the church.

Presently, a tall, elderly man of imposing appearance, with an empty sleeve, and hair touched with grey, opened the door of the Gages' seat, and stepped back that the young lady by his side might pass in. These, Margaret was sure, were Captain Gage and his daughter. Captain Gage cast one quick glance from his clear blue eyes at Margaret, and then took his seat. Miss Gage lingered a second longer, without any apparent rudeness of manner, from a genuine reluctance to remove her eyes from so lovely a face. Although Miss Gage was all fur and black velvet, yet her [Pg 39] regal figure and magnificent stature could not be mistaken.

She was strikingly like her father, with straight features, light brown hair, and calm, clear, full-opened blue eyes; but although it was impossible to deny to her face the regularity of an antique statue, and the sweetness of expression that almost always accompanies regularity, she possessed one drawback in the eyes of Margaret; she must have been two or three and twenty, at least, an age that to a girl of seventeen seems to approach very near to the confines of the grave.

Margaret possessed too correct a sense of her religious duties to spend her time in watching her neighbours, but as they sat just in front of her, she could not raise her eyes without seeing them; and before church was over, she had become perfectly acquainted with Miss Gage's appearance, from the large ruby that flashed on her white hand, to the purple prayer-book inlaid with silver in [Pg 40] which she looked out all the places for her father.

Mr. Grey was very much amused by her account of what she had seen when she came home. He was very careful that she should have plenty of sandwiches, and hot wine and water for luncheon to counteract the cold of the church, and sat listening and smiling to hear her describe Miss Gage's velvet pelisse and little ermine muff. He saw plainly, he told her, that she would like a black velvet gown herself. Margaret coloured and laughed, but could not deny the fact, and the next morning after breakfast, he told Land to go over to the next town and get one.

"Ready made, Sir?" asked Land, endeavouring to impress upon his mind the exact height of his young lady.

"No, no, Land; black velvet enough to make a gown for a lady. That is the way, is it not, my darling?"

Margaret was profuse in her thanks, and was beginning to imagine what a grand appearance she [Pg 41] should make, in it; when Mr. Grey told her, after looking at her attentively with a smile, that it

would make her look like a little old woman. Her unfortunate height was one great obstacle to her enjoyment.

Once when she was out walking with Land, she met the Gages. Captain Gage was pacing leisurely up and down before a cottage, sometimes looking sharply up into the sky as if watching the weather; and just before Margaret came up, Miss Gage joined her father from the inside of the cottage, and said, "I have kept you waiting unmercifully, to-day, my dear father, but she was so very ill."

"Ill, was she, poor old soul!" said Captain Gage, "take care that she has all she wants. Give me your basket, Bessy."

But Bessy would not give her father her basket, and they walked out of hearing.

Margaret grew to be interested in the Gages; she liked to hear all Land had to tell her in their daily walks about them; and as Captain Gage divided with Mr. Grey the honour of being the [Pg 42] greatest person in that neighbourhood, he paid the usual penalty of greatness, and could not stir abroad, or stay at home without having his doings registered. Land knew to an hour when the ship in which Mr. Hubert was second Lieutenant arrived at Plymouth, and when Captain Gage set out to meet his son, and accompany him home. He was likewise well informed as to whether Miss Gage drove out in the chariot or the britschka, and how many people were staying at Chirke Weston.

This sort of gossip was certainly not the best thing for Margaret, and it was contrary to her habits to seek for such amusement; but she felt a kind of interest in the family, particularly in Miss Gage, that she could hardly explain to herself.

With regard to her own occupations, she played the organ, she read history, particularly the books that Mr. Warde either recommended or lent; as she could not skate, she walked with Land [Pg 43] every morning, and after luncheon Mr. Grey's carriage was at her service if she chose to drive out. She was quite a little Queen in the house; she had only to express a wish, and it was fulfilled. She had a very skillful maid entirely for herself, her dressing-room was fitted up in a style of elegance that might have served a duchess; in short, her uncle did not quite know, as Mr. Casement told him, how to spoil her enough. It may be supposed that she became exceedingly attached to him, in the evening she sang to him, or sat on a low stool by his side, telling him all the little pieces of news she might have heard during the day, or relating with equal interest the historic tales that she was reading, or exciting his sympathy, by a detail of the uncomfortable period she had passed at school.

It happened one morning that Margaret walked down to the Vicarage with Land to exchange a volume of history she had borrowed, and when she was shown into Mr. Warde's morning room, [Pg 44] she found him talking earnestly with Miss Gage.

"I beg your pardon," said Margaret, drawing back, "I did not know you were busy."

"Oh! come in, come in, little one," said Mr. Warde, "we were talking no secrets. Ah! you want the second volume. Why, what a reader you are!"

"And will you not come nearer the fire, while our good friend is finding your book?" said Miss Gage to Margaret.

"Thank you," returned Margaret, drawing towards the fire, and ungloving her beautiful hands.

"Do you like this cold weather?" asked Miss Gage, kindly.

"Yes, when it is a hard frost," returned Margaret; "but I am looking forward very much to summer time."

"You will find the neighbourhood beautiful in spring," said Miss Gage, "and I think Mr. Grey has [Pg 45] the prettiest place in the county."

"I am glad of that," said Margaret, "I have not half explored it yet."

"I dare say you have plenty of amusements in-doors," said Miss Gage, "I am sure you have an unfailing one if you are fond of reading."

"Yes, reading and music," said Margaret, "and the house is kept so warm, that I can play wherever I like on wet days."

"And what do you play at?" asked Miss Gage.

"Battledore," said Margaret, blushing as she made the confession; "but it is rather stupid with only one player."

"You will give this note to Mr. Grey, little one," said Mr. Warde, returning to Margaret with her book, "and make good haste home, or you are likely to be caught in the rain. And now, Miss Elizabeth, I have done your bidding." [Pg 46]

"Thank you very much for your kindness," said Miss Gage, as she shook hands with him. Then turning to Margaret with a sweet smile and a bow, she said, "I hope it may happen that we shall be better acquainted with each other."

Margaret endeavoured to say a few words expressive of her pleasure in the idea; and then

hurried off to Land with her book and note.

Now Miss Gage had begged Mr. Warde to write to Mr. Grey, that she might know whether it would be agreeable to him that she should make the acquaintance of his niece. He was recognised as such a determined invalid by all the country round, that she never thought of calling upon Margaret, taking it for granted that such a step would be an intrusion upon Mr. Grey's habits. But she wished much to show her every attention in her power, from a sincere desire to make her happier than she was likely to be if always shut up with a nervous old man for her only companion; and from a hope that her society might be of some advantage to a girl so [Pg 47] much younger than herself; for Margaret was right, Miss Gage was turned of two-and-twenty.

For acts of disinterested kindness are not quite so frequent as good people imagine, nor yet so uncommon as selfish people, who never perform them, would fain make out. The pitiful phrase of nothing for nothing being unceasingly used by those sorry persons, who give nothing, it is true; but who invariably take all they can pillage, or beg from every human being they approach.

Mr. Grey accepted Miss Gage's kind advances with much gratitude, and she immediately wrote to ask Margaret to dine with her the next day, that they might lose no time in becoming acquainted with each other. Margaret was equally pleased; to be sure, the idea of going to a strange house all alone was rather formidable, but there was a sweetness in Miss Gage's manner that gave her [Pg 48] some confidence. However, the day was not to be one of unmixed satisfaction, for Mr. Casement came to dinner; and she was obliged to take his arm into the dining-room instead of her uncle's, and as they were crossing the hall, he asked her if she did not wish he was a nice young man; which question had the desired effect of making her blush, though she longed to tell him that it would be a great gain if he could be changed into any thing that was nice, young or old. Then he began to teaze her about her skating, which she bore in silence till Mr. Grey interfered, and begged him to talk of something else, which request he complied with immediately by changing his point of attack, and laughing at her dress, which was in the fashion of the day, and consequently quite different from any thing that his "old woman" wore.

This strain of banter, Mr. Grey interrupted by mentioning Miss Gage's kind invitation.

"Oho!" said Mr. Casement, "then there are some hopes for you, little woman." [Pg 49]

The very manner in which he uttered the interjection, oho! with a little jerk at the end, was unpleasing to Margaret: she sat with her beautiful lips compressed, resolved to be silent.

"It is particularly kind in Miss Gage," said Mr. Grey, "knowing the state of my health to be so bad."

"There is nothing the matter with your health, I am sure," said Mr. Casement, "you will live to be a hundred!"

Mr. Grey smiled quietly, and made no reply.

"It is all nerves—what are nerves? Don't tell me!" said Mr. Casement.

Mr. Grey did not seem at all inclined to tell him; and Margaret, rising pettishly from the table, pushed her chair back, and her dessert plate forward, and turned about to leave the room.

"Going, little woman?" said Mr. Casement, "going to sit in state in the drawing-room, and play at [Pg 50] being grown up?"

"Going away from you, Sir;" returned Margaret, taking courage from being almost outside the door.

Mr. Grey laughed; although he tolerated Mr. Casement's caustic remarks from very long habit, he was not at all sorry that any other person should be less forbearing.

Meantime Margaret had much to think about as she sat over her embroidery; she was considering first, how she should be dressed on the morrow, and next, how she should behave. Her one anxiety was always to conceal her shyness, which she did beneath a repose of manner that deceived almost every one.

When the gentlemen joined her at tea-time, Mr. Grey was in excellent spirits. The evening post [Pg 52] had brought him a letter from Mr. Haveloc, announcing his arrival in England, and saying he would be at Ashdale in a day or two. He was very much attached to his former ward, and the idea [Pg 51] of seeing him so soon gave him great satisfaction; he could not avoid expressing this feeling several times, unawed by Mr. Casement's satirical glances, which were alternately directed to Mr. Grey and to Margaret. She heard the news with anything but pleasure. It would materially alter her comfort and freedom to have any one staying in the house; and she forgot Mr. Haveloc's picturesque encounter with the brigands while musing on the annoyances she was likely to experience during his visit to Ashdale.

CHAPTER IV.

She is a child in years,
And though in wit a woman, yet her heart
Untempered by the discipline of pain
Is fancy led.

Margaret felt terribly shy as the carriage stopped at the Gages' door. Not all the beautiful basket-work of her elaborate plaits of hair; not even the long coveted black velvet which set off to so much advantage her snowy neck and shoulders; not the pearly delicacy of her white and silver gloves could reconcile her to the distress of entering the drawing-room alone. She was tremblingly alive to everything; to the stately appearance of the hall with its marble columns, and the beautiful exotic creepers trained round them; the powerful scent of the choice hot-house [Pg 53] plants; the pompous manner of the servants, who took her cloak from her; and when the drawing-room door was thrown open, she did not see distinctly anything within, so overpowering was her shyness. But Miss Gage met her almost on the threshold, took both her hands in hers, and welcomed her so kindly and yet so calmly, that she felt quite happy.

Captain Gage came forward, shook hands frankly with Margaret, and asked after Mr. Grey's health; and then Miss Gage turned round and presented her brother to Margaret. She saw then for the first time that he had been standing on the hearth-rug beside his father. Indeed, it would not have been particularly easy to have long overlooked him. All the Gages were on a large scale, and Hubert Gage was as like his father and sister as it was possible to be, except that his blue eyes had more of mischief than Elizabeth's, and it may be said, rather less intelligence. Like her, [Pg 54] he had light brown hair of that silken texture which is stirred with every breath of wind, straight features, and a fine upright carriage which joined to his unusual height would have given an air of great dignity to his deportment, but that his manner partook of that restless enjoyment, and that careless frankness which is still not uncommon among men of his fine profession. Directly Margaret was named to him, he shook hands with her as if he took it for granted she was somebody he ought to recollect very well, and sat down beside her.

"I am very sorry to hear that Mr. Grey has become such an invalid," he said, "when I was last at home he did not shut himself up in this way."

"I did not know my uncle till lately," said Margaret, "but I understood he was always in delicate health."

"So he was," remarked Miss Gage, "but as Hubert had the full range of his orchards, and preserves, and sometimes met his kind old friend walking on the terrace, he never had an idea [Pg 55] that there could be anything the matter with him."

"A pretty couple you were to be turned loose upon an invalid," said Captain Gage, "you and Claude Haveloc."

"I am sure we always behaved admirably," said Hubert, "all the old women in the parish used to hold us up as a pattern to every mischievous urchin who plagued them. Did they not, Bessy?"

"I never heard it before," said Elizabeth, laughing.

"I allow we got into a scrape with the poachers," said Hubert; "poor Mr. Grey was really frightened then."

"You came home on a pair of shutters. Did not you?" asked Captain Gage.

"Not so bad as that," replied Hubert; "but Haveloc had his arm broken. You know Bessy, how I used to teaze him about it. I always declared that one of the poachers struck at him with a broomstick." [Pg 56]

"And did they?" asked Margaret, with wide opened eyes.

"No. It was the stock of a gun, I believe," said Hubert Gage, looking at her with much complacency: "but if you had ever seen Claude Haveloc you could imagine how little he would enjoy such an undignified catastrophe."

"And poor Mr. Grey gave up game-keepers ever after," said Elizabeth, "and entirely neglected his fine preserves. He was so shocked at the danger two silly boys had brought upon themselves."

"And Claude got a shot in the shoulder in that adventure with the bandits," said Hubert; "some people have the luck of it."

"Your father to wit," said Captain Gage.

Margaret noticed the proud admiring glance that Hubert Gage threw on his father as he spoke; but at that moment dinner was announced. Captain Gage came up to her and offered his arm; Hubert Gage whispered something in her ear about his father cutting him out, which did not [Pg 57] lessen the tints on her cheek, and then fell back and led his sister from the room.

At dinner, Margaret sat with perfect tranquillity listening to the conversation, and replying quietly to everything said to her. Hubert was exactly opposite to her, and though she seldom lifted her eyes to him, she felt that he was looking at her much more constantly than he ought. She was a rapid observer of character, a faculty common to shy people; for the very sensitiveness which occasions that feeling, quickens their perception of the qualities of others. She detected that Hubert Gage, with a great deal of candour and good-nature, had but little enthusiasm—his father had tenfold more ardour in his composition, even at his age. He was anxious that no one should be able to discover that he was a sailor by his language or appearance; took the greatest

pains that his dress should not betray the secret; never used a technical term; affected not to know which way the wind was; and prided himself with some reason upon his horsemanship; and this not because he had the least dislike to his profession, but from an idea that it was vulgar to display any traces of it. [Pg 58]

Elizabeth was talking to Margaret about some book she was reading, when she caught something her brother was saying to her father, and paused to listen.

"What did you say, Hubert, about Sir Philip?" she asked.

"That he is to undertake this survey," he replied; "he has scarcely returned before he will go out again. Before I landed, he was on his road to London for his instructions, and he will be off I dare say in a few days. Just the thing for him, Bessy."

"Very unwise in his state of health," said Captain Gage.

"Oh, Sir! pray let him kill himself his own way," said Hubert, laughing; "he enjoys it amazingly."

"I wonder at you, Hubert," said Miss Gage, "such an honour as you ought to feel it to have sailed under such a Captain." [Pg 59]

"It is an honour I am very willing to resign," said her brother, laughing still more, "we were always on the best of terms, but I don't much like him."

Elizabeth regarded her brother in speechless amazement. Had he said he did not like King William IV., she would hardly have thought the remark more treasonable. Sir Philip d'Eyncourt, whose ship was a model ship, whose scientific knowledge was quoted as infallible; who had been her father's favourite officer; who had seen real service; who had been shipwrecked in a romantic manner, on a romantic island; who was going out to make a survey, when he ought to have come home for his health; who pursued his profession after he had succeeded to a baronetcy, and a large estate; who knew how to manage his crew, a very different thing from commanding them. However, as she was struck quite dumb, she was unable to inquire of her brother whether he was in the enjoyment of his right senses.

"Oh, look at Bessy!" exclaimed Hubert, "I forgot that Sir Philip was her hero." [Pg 60]

"Never mind, Bessy," said her father; "I like Sir Philip, let that content you."

Miss Gage smiled her approval of this sentiment; and nothing further occurred until she left the table with Margaret.

"I must do the honours of my own sitting-room to you," said Miss Gage, as she ushered Margaret into a room plainly furnished; but adorned with abundant book-shelves, and a few pictures and busts. There was a round table of green marble between the windows, on which stood a small bust of Lord Nelson in white composition under a glass. Two masterly water colour sketches of Captain Gage, and of Hubert, her favourite brother, hung over the mantelpiece. She showed these to Margaret with a calm pride in her eye and voice, that pretty plainly discovered the estimation in which she held them. If she had a weakness, it was her ardent admiration of the navy. If she could have been brought to confession, I believe she would have owned that she thought it a contemptible waste of time in any man to adopt another profession, if he could by any means go on board a ship. She adored her father, not only with the affection which so delightfully attaches parent and child; but with a boundless admiration, a devoted pride, that made her seriously consider him unequalled in character both private and professional. She told Margaret of the engagement in which her father had lost his arm:—a desperate encounter with a French ship shortly before the close of the war. [Pg 61]

"They tell me," she said, "that his arm might have been saved, if he would have consented to leave the deck in time; but he knew his presence was needful, and he remained until the Frenchman struck. My father—there was always an accent on the word—would fight his ship as long as he had a stick standing, and then blow it up, rather than strike his colours. I am glad he lost his arm!" [Pg 62]

Margaret shuddered, and looked with wonder at Elizabeth, who stood with her bright eye kindled as if she were quite equal to perform the actions she applauded. Yet there was nothing masculine or ungraceful in her emotion. The phrases she used were those she had alone heard employed from her childhood to describe certain transactions, and she would have found it difficult to allude to them in other terms.

"But I must show you my other brothers," said Miss Gage, "or you will call me an unnatural sister."

She opened two miniature cases which lay on the table.

These were the "troopers" Mr. Casement had mentioned. George Gage stared arrogantly out of the ivory over an immense pair of very light moustaches, and Everard stood looking so exceedingly languid, that he threatened to drop into the background altogether. Miss Gage clasped them up, rather carelessly, as Margaret thought, and then held a taper to the bust of Nelson. "That is my hero, of course," she said, "that, and the gallant King Christian IV.; here is a small oil painting of his Danish Majesty. Have you read Carlyle on 'Hero Worship?'" [Pg 63]

"No," Margaret said, "she feared she had read very little. It was so difficult to find books, or time

to pursue any study at school but those assigned to you."

"I do believe," said Miss Gage, "that you are wise enough to begin your education just where everybody ought to begin it; as soon as other people have done teaching you."

"I have need to begin it," said Margaret looking round on the book-shelves. "How much you know! Here are books in—how many languages?"

"Oh!" said Miss Gage smiling, "I should never measure a person's knowledge by the languages, or the accomplishments they happen to have learned." [Pg 64]

Margaret looked inquiringly at her, but had not courage to ask for an explanation of so strange a remark. She knew that at school a girl who learned German was thought more highly of than one who only learned French, and one who played the guitar took precedence of the young lady who only paid for lessons on the piano.

"I mean," said Miss Gage, "that the education which is of most value to us through life, is that which teaches us to think and act with judgment and integrity, which is quite independent of the knowledge of Spanish and German, or of any accomplishment, however pleasing."

This was a new idea to Margaret, but before she could make any observation upon it, a servant came to let them know that coffee was ready, and they went immediately to the drawing-room.

After tea, Hubert Gage asked his sister for some music.

"Will you have the harp?" said Miss Gage ringing the bell, "I will just give my father his book, and then play what you like. My harp, Davis." [Pg 65]

"Why don't you keep it down here?" asked her brother.

"Ah! you know nothing of female politics," said Miss Gage, smiling; "the young ladies like me a great deal better for keeping my harp, and some other things in the background."

"But the young gentlemen don't;" said Hubert, as he stood leaning on the harp.

"I am very sorry," said Miss Gage laughing, "I cannot arrange it to please all parties; but in society where every one is anxious to play a prominent part, I feel it to be a real kindness not to take up their time by my performances."

"Don't you think Bessy spoils me?" asked Captain Gage of Margaret, as his daughter found the place in his book, and arranged the wax lights beside his chair. [Pg 66]

She had not courage to make any other reply than a blush and a laugh.

"After all, Bessy, I am half tired of this book," said Captain Gage, "I shall never have patience to get through it. Have you seen it?" he asked, holding out the volume to Margaret. It was the 'Tour to the Sepulchres of Etruria.'

She could hardly read it aright in her impatience. Here was undoubtedly all she wanted to know—she would be able to find out at last who the Etruscans were.

Elizabeth smiled, and told her when her father had made up his mind not to finish it, which she foresaw would be very soon, she would send it to her. "But," she said, "you must not expect too much; this is an account of a lady's visit to some tombs. There is but little information regarding the people, except what may be inferred from the degree of excellence they displayed in the decoration of their sepulchres."

"But you know, Bessy," said her brother, "that a people's progress in art is the best standard you can have of their degree of civilization." [Pg 67]

"Yes; if you had looked upon them as a barbarous race," said Miss Gage to Margaret, "you will find sufficient proof in this book that you had not done them justice."

"Why, Bessy," said Hubert, "no Phœnician colony ever was, or could be, in a state of barbarism."

"Assuming that they were Phœnicians," said Elizabeth.

"There can be no doubt of that," returned her brother, "their character is sufficient evidence of their origin. The old Greek character, written from right to left, after the fashion of the Phœnicians."

Elizabeth unlocked a cabinet, and took out a gold serpent-ring—she showed it to Margaret as an undoubted Etruscan relic, which her brother had brought her from Rome. Margaret looked at it with great reverence—it was thick and heavy, and the gold was of a dull colour—not like the bright trinkets in a jeweller's shop; but it was delightful to hold in her hand something that was two thousand years old. [Pg 68]

Miss Gage went on to talk of the circlets of gold leaves found in some of the tombs; of the city of Cœre, and the origin of the Vestal Virgins; and the degree of religious knowledge enjoyed by the Etruscans; and Hubert took pencil and paper, and sketched for Margaret one of the allegorical processions painted on the wall in the tombs; taking care to exaggerate, as much as possible, the evil spirits which figure in those decorations.

Margaret listened earnestly—she was afraid to lose a word—it was not to her a dry narrative of

facts, but a dim unfolding of the pages of a gorgeous and mystical romance. A people so magnificent, and of whom no written literature remains, appeared to her so contradictory and so tantalising, that she longed to seize the book at once, and never rest until she had read it through. She hoped Miss Gage would say something more on the subject, but just then Elizabeth [Pg 69] saw Captain Gage trying to open one of the illustrations in his book, and she went to his chair to help him. Margaret noticed that Miss Gage was always on the watch, and whenever her father was at a loss, from having only one hand, she supplied the deficiency; and that so quickly and quietly that few people would have been aware of it.

"Now for your harp, Bessy," said her brother, "we had forgotten all about it."

"Because we have been better employed;" said Miss Gage, placing herself at the harp; "music is always a *pis aller*; when people cannot talk, they very naturally have recourse to a noise."

Margaret could not echo this remark: she loved music from her heart, and she sat absorbed in the sweet sounds, quite unconscious this time that Hubert Gage's eyes were fixed upon her face. Elizabeth played splendidly—better than any young lady at her school, and without a book. She [Pg 70] sat watching her fine marble hand and arm as she stilled the harp-strings, and began to fancy that she should like to play the harp instead of the organ.

Hubert Gage pressed her very much to play in her turn, but she declined with a feeling of panic that almost made her giddy; and Elizabeth, at her request, sung her a ballad. It was the first time she had ever heard a song *spoken*, if the phrase may be applied to vocal music, and it moved her almost to tears. Hubert asked her if Bessy did not sing very well, and Margaret, lifting up her dewy eyes, said, "beautifully!" and looked so beautiful when she said it, that he leaned across to his sister, and declared that there was not upon the face of the earth such an exquisite little creature as her friend.

Miss Gage rose from the harp, and they sat round the fire for a chat, but there was no time for any more conversation, for Margaret's carriage was announced.

Captain Gage told her that she must soon come to see Bessy again. Elizabeth took an affectionate [Pg 71] leave of her, and Hubert led her into the hall and wrapped her cloak all round her, much as one would muffle up a little child, talking and laughing all the time, and stopping to gather her flowers from the creepers in the hall in the intervals of handing her gloves, and winding her boa round her neck. He then went to the door, and assuring her that it was a hard frost, he offered her a cloak of his own, which she had some difficulty in preventing him from putting on, and which he absolutely insisted on throwing to the bottom of the carriage to keep her feet warm.

Margaret drove off a little taller than she was before. She wondered what the girls at school would have said if they had heard a young man declare he thought her an exquisite creature. She believed nobody thought her so at school. Girls had often told her that young men had quite looked at them, and squeezed their hands at a Christmas dance, but she wondered whether they [Pg 72] ever threw their cloaks at their feet, almost like Sir Walter Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth. She had learned some few things that evening. She had spent several hours with a young lady who had not acquired a proficiency in an accomplishment for the sake of exhibiting to her acquaintance, but in order to make her home cheerful. Miss Gage had never asked her for a list of the things she had learned, a list so important to school girls who graduate, by its length, their good opinion of every girl they met.

Margaret had always a thirst for knowledge, and she felt more desirous than ever to cultivate her intellect, now that she found how agreeable it was to converse, or to listen to persons who talked well. She was ashamed to think that she did not know who King Christian was; she had been hurried, when at school, through a compressed History of England, but there had been no hurry in the way she had journeyed through Chaulieu's and Czerney's Exercises. Once impressed with [Pg 73] the importance of acquiring information, she determined that nothing should divert her from a steady course of application.

In the midst of these reflections the carriage stopped, and she hastened to the drawing-room to give Mr. Grey an account of her visit before she went to bed. To her great vexation, she found him seated in earnest discourse with a stranger. The candles had burned low, one of the lamps had gone out, and the room was only half lighted. Margaret paused at the door, but Mr. Grey called her in.

"Come here, my child," said he, "I am afraid it is a very cold night. I hope you have taken no chill. Claude, my niece. Well, did you pass a pleasant evening?"

Mr. Haveloc, on being named to Margaret, rose and bowed slightly, placed her a chair, and returned to his own. She felt all her shyness return: coloured, bowed without raising her eyes, and went up to Mr. Grey.

"Well, and how are they all?" said Mr. Grey. [Pg 74]

Margaret, standing with her back to Mr. Haveloc, and her hand in Mr. Grey's, felt her courage somewhat restored. "I dare say they are all very well, Sir," she said in a low voice: "but oh! I wish you had heard Miss Gage sing, Sir, and play on the harp; and she has such a nice sitting-room of her own, Sir, and so many books! She is going to lend me one about Etruria. Elizabeth wore such a beautiful nosegay, Sir, of azaleas—sweet smelling ones. May Richard get me some azalias?"

"Yes, my love, that he shall—to-morrow," said Mr. Grey. "And what did you talk about?"

"Oh! most about Etruria. I wish Miss Gage had told me some more curious things. I think she knows more about it than Mr. Warde. He told me if he met with some things in Livy, he would mark them and read them to me; I wish he would. Look, Sir, I cannot think how this stain came on my glove. Oh! I recollect: I was gathering myrtle in the green-house just before I went." [Pg 75]

"What a little bit of a hand it is," said Mr. Grey, "are you sleepy, my child?"

"A little, Sir. Mr. Warde said he would teach me Latin, if I wished to learn it, but I think I had better leave it alone till I know more of other things."

"Oh, my child! don't learn Latin whatever you do," said Mr. Grey, "it really will—quite wrinkle her, won't it, Claude?"

Mr. Haveloc gave a short laugh, and Margaret recollected that he was in the room, and grew uncomfortable again.

"Elizabeth never plays in company, do you know," said she, after a short pause, "Is not that odd? Oh dear, Sir, what a dreadful thing it is to have only one arm!"

"Why, my child, Elizabeth Gage has—oh true! she is thinking of the father—yes, very awkward indeed!"

"Well, I shall wish you good night, uncle, I am quite tired," said Margaret, and stooping her head [Pg 76] a very little as she passed Mr. Haveloc, who held open the door for her, she went up-stairs without having the slightest idea of his personal appearance, for she had never once raised her eyes to his face. She merely thought, as her maid brushed out her luxuriant hair, that Mr. Hubert Gage had taken a great deal more notice of her, and was a much more agreeable person.

CHAPTER V.

Oh! how much more doth beauty beauteous seem, [Pg 77]
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give!
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.

SHAKESPEARE.

The next morning when Margaret came down to breakfast, she enjoyed in perfection all the feelings which shyness produces in very young people.

She hoped that Mr. Haveloc would not be in the library, and that he would not speak to her if he was there; and she tried to recollect what people always tell very shy girls, that she was not of sufficient importance to be taken notice of. This, by the way, is not exactly the means best adapted to the end in view; a sense of insignificance is a very material cause of shyness, and to [Pg 78] strengthen this idea is one way to confirm a person in shyness for the rest of their lives.

Her colour mounted as she opened the door, and she was not a little relieved to find the library vacant.

While she was employed in making the breakfast, she saw Mr. Haveloc pass the window apparently in deep thought. He was accompanied by a couple of beautiful dogs, a spaniel and a setter. But he paid no attention to their movements, except by sometimes passing his hand over their silken heads in return for their caresses.

A recollection of his adventures induced Margaret to regard him with some attention, now that she was able to do so unseen. He would not have been generally considered handsome. His forehead was remarkably massive, and his eyes a dark hazel, capable of every variety of expression: he was, to say the truth, very much sun-burned; and he wore his black hair, not long, indeed, but turned inwards like a scroll, after the fashion of some of our early Kings. There was [Pg 79] an expression of discontent and disdain on his face which Margaret thought very disagreeable; but at any rate he was just as much discontented with himself as he was with other people, and no doubt with equally good reason.

Mr. Grey came down, and received Margaret with his usual affection, and seeing Mr. Haveloc walking at a little distance, he called to him, and bade him come in, saying to Margaret as he returned from the window, "That young man now, is the only one who reminds me of what they used to be in my young days. They are quite altered now, my dear; they are much more selfish and calculating; they don't neglect their own interests so much, but they neglect other people's feelings a great deal more. There was some vice certainly; they drank hard, my dear, but they told the truth, and that is a great blessing. I think when I was young, a man would be ashamed to [Pg 80] tell a falsehood. It could not be done, my dear; they do it now every day."

Margaret said, "Yes, Sir," to every clause in this speech, and wondered to herself whether all the young men used to look so gloomy and distracted as Mr. Haveloc looked when he entered the room. He bowed to her, and she thought he said "good morning." She returned the salutation, but not the words; and then he turned to Mr. Grey and offered to banish his dogs, which had followed him into the room.

"By no means," Mr. Grey said, "he liked animals about him, unless Margaret was afraid of them."

"Oh, Sir! I am afraid of nothing," said Margaret, smiling at Mr. Grey under shelter of the urn.

Whether the sentiment, or the delightful voice in which it was uttered, struck Mr. Haveloc, is uncertain; but he moved his chair with the intention of gaining a better view of the fair speaker. The urn was, however, unfavourable to him, and she afforded him little more opportunity of [Pg 81] hearing the sound of her voice during breakfast. As soon as breakfast was over, Mr. Haveloc asked Mr. Grey how soon it would be possible for him to call on Mr. Warde. He had yet to learn, he said, how these things were managed in England.

Mr. Grey was certain that Mr. Warde would be glad to see him at any time, such an old friend as he was.

Mr. Haveloc asked if Mrs. Somerton and her daughters were staying at the vicarage?

"No," Mr. Grey said; "they had been on a visit to one of their relations for some months."

Margaret thought she heard Mr. Haveloc mutter a thanksgiving as he turned away. He walked to the window and began caressing his dogs.

"And what are you going to do, my darling?" asked Mr. Grey.

"A great many things, Sir. First, I shall practise as soon as ever Land—oh! come here, Land; when [Pg 82] can you spare time to come with me to the organ? Not before twelve—very well. I shall read till Land is ready for me, and then—oh! dear Sir, there is Miss Gage on her beautiful grey horse. Oh, Sir! it is not a very hard frost, it is very nearly spring. Will you soon buy me a pony? That is to say a horse, dear uncle; I should look so little on a pony. There is nothing in the world I wish for so much, and it is so long to wait until spring."

"But which is it?" said her uncle stroking down her soft thick tresses of hair, "is it a very long, or a very short time till spring?"

Margaret paused a little—she wished to make it appear short; but early in February it would not do. "The truth is uncle," said she blushing with the effort, "it is a long time."

"Right, my child, the truth!" said Mr. Grey; "you shall have a horse as soon as I can meet with [Pg 83] one; only we will not ride him until the weather is a little warmer."

Margaret was almost speechless with delight, and had fairly forgotten the presence of Mr. Haveloc, who stood regarding her with a smile of such softened expression, that she would scarcely have recognised him.

Miss Gage was riding with her brother, and when they arrived before the house, they pulled up their horses. Hubert Gage dismounted, ran up the hall steps, rang the bell, pushed open the door, and came into the library without any farther ceremony.

Mr. Grey welcomed him very warmly. He was very fond of young people, and felt sincere pleasure in seeing him again. Mr. Haveloc came forwards with more animation than Margaret had seen him express, shook hands heartily with Hubert, and remarked that he was very glad their return to England should chance at the same time.

"Why did not you tell me he was here?" said Hubert turning to Margaret, "when we were talking [Pg 84] over old stories last night?"

"I did not know it," replied Margaret.

"Well, Bessy will not dismount, it is such a trouble to mount her again," he said; "so she desires me to ask if you will drive out with her after luncheon?"

"I shall like it very much—it is very kind of her," said Margaret. "I may, Sir?"

"With all my heart, my child," said Mr. Grey.

"Ay, I should first have asked your uncle, should not I?" said Hubert laughing. "Have you been out to-day?"

"No—not yet."

"Oh! bless me, of course it is too early," said he, taking out a diminutive watch, which looked more striking on him than on a person of ordinary dimensions. "I wonder you are up at this hour."

"You are keeping Miss Gage in the cold all this time," said Margaret.

"So I am, but I cannot get away," he returned, looking archly at her. [Pg 85]

She wished she could help colouring, but the beautiful crimson stole over her cheeks at the implied compliment.

"Don't you think us half mad to ride in such weather?" asked Hubert. "The truth is, I wished to see Bessy in her habit again."

"I think it is better to ride than sit still in the cold," said Margaret. "I shall run out, and tell Miss Gage it is not my fault."

"You will not do any such thing," said Hubert, placing himself in the doorway, "you shall not catch cold for my sins—I am off."

"But Hubert," said Mr. Grey, detaining him, "will you dine with us? Claude will be very glad, I am sure—and if you could prevail on Miss Gage to accompany you, it would give great pleasure to my little niece."

"I am sure Bessy will be very happy," said Hubert, "as for me, I shall be delighted." [Pg 86]

This was said with a distinct bow to Margaret, which left but little doubt of his meaning.

"Only allow me to say to-morrow instead of to-day, because my father goes to a county meeting to-morrow, and so—"

"That will do just as well," said Mr. Grey, "very considerate of you, Hubert."

Mr. Haveloc, who had been standing with some hesitation of manner for some moments, now took a sudden resolution, dashed down the steps, and spoke to Miss Gage. Margaret could see from the window that she greeted him with her usual sweetness of demeanour; and, when her brother was mounted, that she stretched her hand out, which he took with an air of great respect.

Little Margaret, whose brains were somewhat active in giving to every day occurrences the colourings of romance, fancied that their interview was like that of a Queen with some favoured [Pg 87] noble, and as Land's gossip had assigned Mr. Haveloc to Miss Gage in common with a crowd of other suitors, she fancied that, in this instance, there might be some truth in the report. And such a wicked young man! She supposed Miss Gage did not know the dreadful story she had heard about him.

"What a fine young man Hubert Gage has grown," said Mr. Grey, as he returned from the window, "the finest young man I ever saw!"

Margaret coloured as the remark was addressed to her, and went off to her own occupations.

She saw nothing more of Mr. Haveloc during the morning; her studies kept her employed until luncheon, and she had hardly finished her cold chicken when Miss Gage's carriage drove up to the door. She put on her bonnet in a hurry, flew into the hall, and almost ran against Mr. Haveloc, who was coming up the steps at the moment.

He stopped, took off his hat, and handed her into the carriage. Miss Gage greeted her very kindly [Pg 88] —asked her which way she would like to drive; gave her orders; drew up the glass and drove off.

After a few general remarks, Margaret coloured, paused, played with her boa, and then said:—

"I should like to talk to you about something, if you would not think me foolish."

"What is it, my dear?" asked Elizabeth, taking Margaret's hand; "never mind if it is foolish—we are all foolish sometimes."

"It is such a plague to me, Mr. Haveloc coming," said Margaret. "It spoils everything. I cannot talk to my uncle, or play the organ, or do anything so comfortably now that he is in the house. I cannot stand on the library steps, and read from the shelves;—perhaps you would laugh at this, but you don't know the difference it makes."

"I can very well understand that it does," said Miss Gage, "but Mr. Haveloc's society is a great happiness to your uncle, and you must weigh that against the embarrassment he makes you feel." [Pg 89]

"So I ought," said Margaret.

"I recollect when I knew him, several years ago," said Miss Gage, "although he possessed great powers of pleasing where he was intimate, yet he was a little too reserved in general society."

"And I am sure he is very proud!" said Margaret, eagerly.

Miss Gage laughed at this remark, and made no attempt to exculpate him from the charge: she merely added that she thought him very much altered in appearance, but that a person of his character would be less troublesome as an inmate, to her, than one of a more sociable disposition, since she would very rarely be obliged to enter into conversation with him.

Margaret agreed to this, and the subject was dropped.

Now, had Miss Gage chosen to exercise her wit by jesting with Margaret upon her timidity [Pg 90] instead of calmly talking it over, she would have confirmed her in a silly bashfulness, as much opposed as possible to real modesty. As it was, she felt a sort of composure from having *talked through* a subject she rather dreaded to mention; and her feelings acquired an equilibrium, that very much added to her comfort when she again encountered the person in question. But how few people could have resisted the pleasure of laughing at a young girl about any young man who might chance to be staying in the house.

Mr. Warde came to dinner. Margaret was very glad to see him; but there was so much to be talked over between him and Mr. Haveloc, that there was little time for her to make any historical enquiries. The conversation did not prevent Mr. Haveloc from being very attentive to her, as far as actions went. He took the carving out of her hands—saw that she had every thing she wanted—directed the screen to be altered which protected her but imperfectly from the fire, [Pg 91] and mentioned to her that Richards had brought a whole forest of azalias into the library while

she was taking her drive; with which piece of information he began and ended his discourse.

She learned, during dinner, that he was very near-sighted, which circumstance gave her great satisfaction. The certainty that he could not distinguish her across the table, unless he took up his glass, which she had never seen him do, gave her a confidence and a feeling of freedom, which removed one strong objection she had felt to his presence.

The evening passed as usual; as they dined late, the serving of coffee and tea nearly took up the time until they separated. Mr. Warde talked kindly to Margaret about the books she was anxious to read, and Mr. Haveloc played a game of piquet with Mr. Grey. When she saw how very attentive he was to her dear uncle, she could not help wishing that he was less wicked, but as she remarked to herself, it was no business of hers. [Pg 92]

CHAPTER VI.

The passions will dispense
To such a wild and rapid eloquence,
Will to the weakest mind their strength impart,
And give the tongue the language of the heart.

CRABBE.

It was a very eventful day for Margaret on which Miss Gage and her brother were to dine at Ashdale, for it might actually be termed a party, and she was to preside at the head of the table.

She took infinite pains with her toilet; chose her very prettiest silk, and allowed her maid as much time as she liked to dress her hair: instead of starting up, as she did on common occasions, after the first half-minute, wringing into a perfect cable the beautiful profusion of her tresses [Pg 93] behind, and fastening them up with a comb to the great discomposure of her attendant. All the time the airy plaits were weaving, which were to form the pretty coiffure, designated as the *antique moderne*, Margaret was convincing herself that she was not taking all this trouble because Hubert Gage was coming. Nothing could be so unlikely, or so undignified; it was entirely on account of his sister Elizabeth.

She was dressed so early, that she had plenty of time to spare. She thought she should like to play on the organ; but Land was busy, so was the footman, she dared not ask the coachman to blow: Mason would, she knew, be shocked at the idea; so she sent down to the gardener's boy, who spent the best part of his time in the kitchen, and he came up, shy and awkward enough, but very willing to do his best. Unfortunately, he occasionally left off blowing to listen with open mouth to her performance, thus causing a sudden stop that was very provoking to her. She was [Pg 94] improving so nicely too—her little foot stole over the pedals with as much ease as her fingers over the notes; and when she was in the midst of a very pretty effect, that sharp cessation of sound quite destroyed her patience.

"There, you naughty little boy," said she, "don't you see the wind is out? You must not do that again!"

The little boy, who was a great deal bigger by the way than herself, *did* do it again, and always in the most provoking places, though the moment she looked he began to blow with renewed vigour.

"I declare," cried Margaret, stamping her foot on the pedals, and producing thereby an awful roar, "I will tell my Uncle Grey the very next time!"

This was not a very formidable threat; but the boy pleaded that she did play so beautiful he could not help it; and she forgot her anger.

Now, at the moment she stamped, one of the gallery doors opened, and Mr. Haveloc came out, [Pg 95] intending to go down to the drawing-room; but attracted by the singular sound that met his ear, he remained in the doorway listening. He was very much amused by the short dialogue which he overheard, and delighted when Margaret resumed her more regular performance; for she had that fine sensibility for music which imparts to the finger a charm that cannot be acquired, but which is an absolute requisite to persons of the same temperament.

"There goes seven, Miss," said the boy, as Margaret was bringing to a conclusion one of Handel's choruses.

"How tiresome!" cried Margaret, "Oh, dear! and I promised Mr. Grey that I would always shut up the organ. I shall be late, that I shall! Oh! do hold the candle for me!"

"Allow me to save you the trouble," said Mr. Haveloc, coming forward, "it is the least I can do in return for your music." [Pg 96]

"For my music!" gasped Margaret; while all the blunders she had been committing rushed into her mind, turning her quite sick with shame.

"You may trust me to leave all right," said Mr. Haveloc, beginning to put in the stops, "I am used to an organ."

"Oh! thank you, I will then," said Margaret, and taking up her gloves, she lost no time in making

her way down stairs.

The Gages' carriage was drawing up as she took her seat beside her uncle. She could not command her complexion, and it rose amazingly as Miss Gage entered with her brother.

Elizabeth was more dressed than at her own house, and poor Margaret ascribed her calm, graceful appearance to the stiff violet watered silk, and the delicate pearl brooch and bracelets which she wore. Her bouquet was composed of geraniums this time, and Margaret began to undervalue her azalias now.

While Mr. Grey was talking to Miss Gage, Hubert Gage, leaning on the back of Margaret's chair, [Pg 97] entered into conversation with an air of so much intimacy, that she could hardly feel shy of him. He enquired about her pets, and she confided to him that she had a beautiful bullfinch which could whistle two tunes, and draw up a bucket of water; and that Mr. Grey had an eagle in the court-yard which had a great many odd ways; and that she had not a lap-dog yet, but that Mr. Grey meant to see about it.

Hubert Gage, with an air of great interest, recommended her to have an Italian greyhound, and then told her that her hands were like snow; but Margaret never could recollect how he managed to introduce that piece of information.

Then Mr. Haveloc came down and planted himself beside Miss Gage's chair until dinner was announced.

Mr. Grey gave his arm to Miss Gage, and Hubert took possession of Margaret, begging her to observe how much more fortunate he was now, than the last time he had the pleasure of seeing [Pg 98] her.

As they entered the dining-room everybody was surprised to see Mr. Casement calmly standing before the fire.

Mr. Haveloc, who followed Hubert Gage, caught up his eye-glass, dropped it with an air of great vexation, and exclaimed, in a suppressed tone, "Good Heaven, Hubert! is that fellow not dead yet?"

"I wish anybody could tell me when he *would* die," said Hubert, laughing; "but I am firmly persuaded, for my part, that he is the Wandering Jew."

"Ay! here I am," said Mr. Casement, in reply to Mr. Grey's exclamation of surprise; "Miss Gage, your servant. So you two young fellows are returned at the same time. No fear of your not coming back—eh! a bad shilling! you know the saying."

Hubert Gage burst into a hearty laugh at this address; but Mr. Haveloc knit his brows with an air of extreme disgust.

By this time, as everybody was seated, and Hubert helping the soup for Margaret, Mr. Casement [Pg 99] bethought himself of something disagreeable to say to her.

"Ain't you very much obliged to me, little woman," he said, "for coming straight in here, and so leaving you to the young sparks? Suppose I had taken you into dinner?"

"Mr. Casement," said Miss Gage, in her very calm manner, "you know I always keep you in order. You must not forget I am here."

Mr. Casement made a contortion he meant for a smile, and vowed he was her slave.

Mr. Haveloc told Miss Gage that everybody present owed her a vote of thanks. A remark which Mr. Casement did not forget.

When a convenient pause occurred, he leaned forward, and said, in a sufficiently marked tone, "Oh, by the bye, Claude! and how are all our friends at Florence?" Margaret absolutely turned pale, and could not avoid glancing anxiously at Mr. Haveloc. [Pg 100]

He merely replied, taking up his glass to examine the dish he was about to carve. "I did not know, Mr. Casement, that you had any friends in any part of the world."

Margaret was the only person who observed that his hand trembled.

Miss Gage was pleased with his reply, for she knew the ill-natured point of the remark. Hubert laughed so heartily, that he was forced at intervals to beg Margaret's pardon for being so rude. Mr. Grey tried to turn the conversation. Mr. Casement looked sullen; and Mr. Haveloc, still appearing occupied with the dish before him, said, "There are two ways of carving these birds; which do you like best?"

"Oh! the old fashioned way, don't you Sir?" asked Miss Gage of Mr. Grey, "it is much the best."

"Yes; all old fashioned ways are in my opinion;" said Mr. Grey smiling, "but then I am an old [Pg 101] man."

Margaret could not easily regain her composure of feeling after this incident; she pitied Mr. Haveloc, she admired Miss Gage, and she envied the readiness with which she directed the conversation into other channels until all constraint seemed banished from the party.

In the evening Hubert Gage beset Margaret with entreaties that she would play; and with a feeling of intense misery, she sat down to the piano and played a Fantasia by Moscheles with great delicacy and effect. Miss Gage turned round in the midst of her conversation with Mr. Grey, and told Margaret that she could take no excuses from her in future, now that she had shown how she could perform.

Then Mr. Casement begged Miss Gage to play some old airs, which she did with the utmost good humour; and afterwards sang whatever she was asked with an ease and sweetness that delighted Margaret; who for her own part would have much preferred dying at once to singing before half-a-dozen people. [Pg 102]

In the midst of the singing, Mr. Gage begged Margaret to tell him the names of some fine prints he was looking at, which she did as far as she knew them; while in return, when he came to any very beautiful face in the collection, he informed her that it was strikingly like her's, with any little additional compliment that his fancy suggested. Margaret was not quite so over-powered by this as might have been expected, for she was listening all the time to a conversation between Miss Gage and Mr. Haveloc.

Elizabeth had risen from the piano, and was standing with a sheet of music in her hand talking to Mr. Haveloc about Metastasio: this led to some remarks upon the early poetry, and the early paintings of Italy, and the infancy of art in general.

Miss Gage remarked that the infancy of poetry was unmarked by those signs of feebleness and inaccuracy that denoted the first stages of painting. [Pg 103]

"It was true," he replied, "the imagination was at once transferred into words, unfettered by those mechanical means which were needed to express thought upon the canvass; because the soul was the elder and the nobler born, and its work was performed without the tedious interval of experience which was necessary to bring to perfection the physical powers. He thought the best that could be said of painting was, that it was a high order of imitation."

Miss Gage mentioned the delight bequeathed to a succession of ages by a beautiful picture or statue.

"It is true," he said, "but it is a delight for which the eye must be trained, and the mind prepared. It is in a great measure an artificial enjoyment; for I need not remind Miss Gage that the raptures of most persons with regard to art are purely affected. But every poet who deserves the name, appeals at once to the common and spontaneous feelings of mankind; and can be discerned, not by the ignorant indeed, but without any especial cultivation." [Pg 104]

Miss Gage said something of the difficulties of art, and the respect due to those who surmounted them.

"I confess," said Mr. Haveloc, "I cannot see much to respect in a successful painter. I allow him great acquirement; a highly trained eye; the mastery of a very difficult and laborious process, and certainly a perception of the most ingenious arrangement of his subject. But, good Heaven! at what an immeasurable distance are these from the gifts that constitute a poet. Where is the exquisite atmosphere of music that suggests to him his delicious rhyme? Where the invisible and mystic shadows that invite him to weave his tissue of unreal scenes? Where the deep and solemn philosophy which reveals to him the strange sources of those emotions which are known to common men by their outward workings alone? No, Miss Gage, I cannot admit toil is a sign of worth, for I know many baubles that are difficult of attainment." [Pg 105]

"Ah! you think all that very fine!" said Mr. Casement looking up from his game of piquet, "but it is sheer nonsense every word of it."

Mr. Haveloc did not deign to utter a word in reply to this flattering tribute. Elizabeth smiled, and moved to the table where Hubert and Margaret were looking at the engravings.

"Do not these," she asked, "go far to shake your opinion? And is not the ideal in art worthy of as much veneration as the highest efforts of the poet?"

"I must be uncourteous enough," said Mr. Haveloc, "to differ from you in your estimate of the Ideal over the Real in art. I do not think that the purely Ideal either elevates or instructs; in fact unless the Real is the basis of the design, it is an illusion that only makes one discontented with nature." [Pg 106]

"But in that case, the antique——" said Miss Gage.

"It is the exquisite reality of the greatest works of ancient art which makes them so invaluable;" said Mr. Haveloc, "the form may be ideal, but the expression is real. It is the concentration of all nature in its fitness for the quality or emotion intended to be displayed, that constitutes their inapproachable beauty and grace. Beauty being the proportion of form; and grace, the proportion of action to the feeling meant to be expressed."

"I am not quite willing to cede the Ideality of the ancient statues," said Miss Gage; "but I can conceive that a different order of excellence is demanded of sculpture from that of painting."

"For sculpture is to painting what Epic is to Tragic poetry. The External against the Internal;" rejoined Mr. Haveloc, "the one demanding perfection of form—the other relying chiefly upon truth of expression."

"Guido then ought to have been a sculptor," said Miss Gage. [Pg 107]

"Yes!" he replied. "In Guido's pictures the Ideal prevails after this fashion; in the omission of accident, or defect in his forms—that is, in the omission of character or individuality. They are beautiful embellishments to a room—great technical achievements; but they do not appeal to the depths of the heart, although much beauty will often affect the feelings."

"I understand the distinction," said Elizabeth, "Murillo appeals to the sympathies by taking beings made of common clay, forms that have existed—more powerful agents than only such as might exist—and elevating them by the profound sensibilities with which he has endowed them."

"Exactly," returned Mr. Haveloc. "His Virgin, in his great picture of the Holy Family, is a woman of humble life, in simple garments, and not remarkable for beauty of form; he has painted her with faultless truth, and inspired her face with an expression of maternal love, so tender, so [Pg 108] earnest, so overwhelming in its fulness and its anxiety, that I should think few people could view it without being deeply affected."

"It is only when truth is outdone," said Miss Gage, "that I object to the Ideal. As for instance, when Raphael, a name I do not mention but with the deepest respect, depicts the Virgin Mary with all the delicate beauty of a pampered Princess, and attired in the most gorgeous garments."

"Yes," he said, "although he has thrown into the features all the refinement of intellect and tenderness of feeling of which woman is capable; high-born, caressed, educated, magnificent woman. I do consider that Murillo has bequeathed a grander lesson to the future, has achieved more in art, and awakened our sympathies at a purer source, by his strict adherence to nature, than Raphael by his exquisite and ideal conception of female grace."

"In fact," said Miss Gage, "to go a little aside of the old saying, you think that truth is the well [Pg 109] from which every poet and every artist should draw their inspiration; and that no important, no ultimate good can result from any exaggeration, even when the falsehood is enlisted on the side of unearthly and transcendent beauty."

"I need not say, Miss Gage," said Mr. Haveloc, "that I could not have expressed my meaning so completely as you have done."

"You young fellows," said Mr. Casement, rising from the table, "you think you know everything now-a-days."

Margaret who had been looking up in Miss Gage's face listening—her features radiant with breathless and earnest attention—looked round at Mr. Casement with something like horror in her countenance. She was shocked that he should interrupt a discourse so replete to her with new and interesting ideas.

Mr. Haveloc's scorn prevented his taking up the remark; Miss Gage who was well accustomed to [Pg 110] tolerate Mr. Casement, turned round with some playfulness of manner:

"If I were not going away, Mr. Casement," she said, "I hear the carriage, Hubert—I should take you very seriously to task. Pray, Mr. Haveloc, before I go, acknowledge that Murillo is a poet of the highest order, and an exception to those artists whom you have praised for mere mechanical excellence."

"I do acknowledge," he replied, "that in his hands the pencil becomes a sceptre, to which every enlightened mind must do homage."

When Mr. Haveloc returned from seeing Miss Gage to her carriage, he found Mr. Grey just concluding his encomiums upon Margaret for having behaved so very prettily to his guests. He turned round and asked Mr. Haveloc if Miss Gage did not sing charmingly.

Mr. Haveloc hesitated a little, and at length said, "that her singing was rather sensible than [Pg 111] impassioned."

"Why really, Claude," said Mr. Grey, "in a wife I should prefer the sensible style."

"My dear Sir," returned Mr. Haveloc with a short laugh, "I have no idea of presuming to aspire to Miss Gage's hand. I imagine that even the industry of scandal could attribute nothing to our intercourse but the most distant acquaintance."

He spoke with some bitterness, but Mr. Grey who was singularly exempt from irritable feelings himself, seldom detected them in others.

"I don't know, Claude," he said; "I thought she looked splendid this evening. She is the handsomest woman in the county; and when I saw you talking so nicely together, I wished with all my heart it might come to something."

"I wish her a better fate, Sir," said Mr. Haveloc turning away.

"Why, Claude, ay to be sure! One should not talk of such matters before little people. Going away [Pg 112] my little pet? Good night—sleep well!"

Margaret had a great deal to think about when she found herself in her own room. Miss Mason tangled and untangled her hair at pleasure; her thoughts were too busy in recalling all that had been said and done that evening. She had heard persons talk who possessed ideas; who had

thought, and formed opinions upon different subjects; this was such a different thing from school knowledge, that she felt confused for some time in the uncertainty she felt as to the means of acquiring such mental power herself. She determined at least to be guided by Miss Gage, who she was sure would direct her as to the books she ought to read; and perhaps in time she might become wise enough to talk to persons who knew as much as Mr. Haveloc. She wished again that he had not been so wicked; but she remembered with displeasure Mr. Casement's impertinent allusion to his former conduct. She was convinced he was very sorry for it, and though she [Pg 113] sincerely wished him out of the house, she was employed in pitying him, when Miss Mason having concluded her duties, wished her young lady good night. [Pg 114]

CHAPTER VII.

A melancholy, grounded and resolved
Received into a habit argues love,
Or deep impression of strong discontents.

THE LADY'S TRIAL.

Since my coming home I have found
More sweets in one unprofitable dream
Than in my life's whole pilgrimage.

SUN'S DARLING.

Now Mr. Haveloc was at this time enjoying the delightful consciousness that he had been making a great simpleton of himself; but this is a state of feeling which indicates some superiority of character; for your common people when they have been exposing themselves to the derision of all their acquaintance, generally parade themselves with all the dignity of a peacock, and feel [Pg 115] convinced that they have been behaving with singular discretion. This state of feeling was agreeably relieved by the knowledge that people had said a great many things of him which were untrue, and which were particularly exasperating to a person of his temperament.

They had filled up the outline of his attentions to Mrs. Maxwell Dorset—attentions far more marked than was consistent with propriety—by a variety of incidents, extremely wrong, but, which was much worse in his eyes, exceedingly ridiculous. They had exaggerated the regard which the lady had abundantly professed for him into an idolatry that was painfully absurd; and they invented a narrative of an unsuccessful attempt on his part to carry her off, which drove him from Florence, and very nearly frantic into the bargain. As he returned to his senses, he contemplated Mrs. Maxwell Dorset with unmixed contempt and disgust. Very exacting and fastidious in his ideas of women, he could imagine nothing more opposed to all his demands of [Pg 116] female delicacy and dignity, than this woman, who had for a time blinded him by her flattery, and her foolish and criminal preference. He was angry with her, and still more angry with himself, and yet more enraged against society at large for the unceremonious manner in which they had discoursed of his proceedings; and his feelings of dissatisfaction on the subject were by no means diminished by the knowledge that he was not the first person by very many whom her artifices had enslaved. This fact which of course reached his ears when it was too late—for your friends never tell you of a thing when you might profit by it—in divesting her attachment of the complimentary aspect it might otherwise have worn, opened his eyes more effectually than a score of homilies could have done.

In this happy frame of mind, he came to Ashdale, thinking that it would be a relief to plunge into solitude with his friend, Mr. Grey. He was very much annoyed to find that Margaret was residing [Pg 117] with her uncle; but Mr. Grey pressed him so warmly to take up his abode with him for a time, that he hardly knew how to decline his hospitality. He could scarcely tell Mr. Grey that he detested the idea of remaining under the same roof with his niece. It was a great relief to him when he found that Margaret was entirely different from any young lady he had ever seen. She never entered into conversation with him, and never, if she could help it, remained in the room with him for a single moment. He began to be disappointed that she invariably stole out after her uncle as he left the breakfast-table, and came down into the drawing-room exactly as the bell rang for dinner. He became more and more struck with her beauty and her simplicity, and he felt a curiosity to know whether her intellect at all responded to the beautiful countenance which varied with every shade of thought that floated through her mind.

It so happened that he was not able to pursue his investigations for some time, for some affair of [Pg 118] business required his immediate return to his own home. He mentioned this to Mr. Grey as they were standing round the fire just before dinner, and would have given much to have seen Margaret's face at the moment.

It was too late when they took their places at the table to hope that any expression of emotion, or surprise would be visible. Indeed it was not being quite so reasonable as men ought to be upon those subjects, to expect that she should regret the departure of a visitor, who, though perfectly courteous to her, had been remarkably deficient in those attentions which a beautiful girl might almost expect from one of the other sex. In fact, Margaret was exceedingly glad to hear the news. She felt that among other advantages, the library would be no longer forbidden-ground to her. She would again be able to loiter among the books and maps, instead of carrying those volumes [Pg 119] she wished to read into her own room, and sending them back by Land when she had done.

Mr. Haveloc was always in the library, reading or writing, which was one of his most serious offences in her eyes. As for her attempting to attract or interest him, she would have considered such a thing as seriously and entirely out of the question. She knew very well that the girls at school would have called him a capital match, and she knew also that there would have been no end to their jests if they had heard that she was staying in the house with so desirable an article of property as a rich young man. But Margaret was romantic. She thought him very much in the way; and she was rather shocked that any one so immoral should help her to salad, or to orange-jelly.

"The Somertons are come back, Claude," said Mr. Grey; "I wish you were not going away just now. They always make the place gay." [Pg 120]

"Thank you, Sir," returned Mr. Haveloc, "I dare say I shall not much regret losing the Somertons."

"Let me see," continued Mr. Grey, "Blanche must have been about sixteen when you left England."

"Very likely, Sir, I never attempt to guess a lady's age."

"I hardly know," said Mr. Grey, musing over his scalloped oysters, "which of them is considered the beauty; but I rather think it is Blanche."

"Oh both, my dear Sir," replied Mr. Haveloc, "Mrs. Somerton tells everybody that each of her daughters is the belle of whatever place they may be staying at."

"A great satisfaction to their mother, I am sure," said Mr. Grey, never dreaming that there was anything like satire in Mr. Haveloc's remark; "and very nice companions they will be to my little niece during the summer; perhaps we may prevail on Mrs. Somerton to spare one of her daughters sometimes to stay here for a week or two." [Pg 121]

Mr. Haveloc knit his brows, and looked so much discomposed at this proposition that Margaret was perfectly astonished. How could it concern him if her uncle succeeded in obtaining a companion for her? Some of the wonder she felt must have made itself very visible in her face, for he turned and said to her in a constrained voice, "I hope you will find much enjoyment in the society of the Miss Somertons."

"I shall like to know them," said Margaret quietly, "but Miss Gage is kind enough to prevent my ever feeling the want of society."

"Very kind she is," said Mr. Grey; "but my love, I know young people like to be together; now, Blanche is hardly a year older than you are."

"You see," said Mr. Haveloc smiling, "that you are fated to become intimate with the Somertons." [Pg 122]

Margaret smiled too. She recollected that at school she had made no one intimacy; and she thought it was very easily avoided with any person whom you did not completely approve—especially if you did not live under the same roof.

Nothing more was said during dinner; but in the evening when Margaret was making tea, and her uncle dozing in his arm-chair, Mr. Haveloc, contrary to his custom, took a chair next to her's, and after a short pause—for the subject was rather embarrassing—said, "I am afraid you thought me guilty of some rudeness at dinner in allowing you to perceive the surprise I felt at your uncle's proposition. I am aware that I have no right to interest myself in your affairs."

It would have been difficult to convince any body of the extent of Margaret's shyness, for she had the advantage of a very self-possessed manner; therefore, though her heart seemed dying within her, at the effort of making a reply to such a speech, her sweet voice was as calm as ever, when she answered: [Pg 123]

"I did not think you rude at all, Mr. Haveloc, for you said nothing; and it would be hard indeed to deny people the free exercise of their thoughts."

"Thank you," said Mr. Haveloc with energy. "I will not be so presumptuous as to offer you any advice; but I hope you will allow me to recommend that you ask Miss Gage her candid opinion of those young ladies. She is so much your friend, that I believe she will have no hesitation in giving it."

"I will, indeed," said Margaret, "you could not have given me better advice."

She smiled and blushed as she spoke, and looked so very lovely, that it was no wonder Mr. Haveloc retained his chair, and made some attempt to draw her into conversation.

Mr. Grey woke up, took his cup of tea, and looked very much pleased to see them talking together, although no two strangers could carry on a more distant and disjointed discourse. He so completely recognized Margaret as a child, that his fancy never suggested to him the possibility of a future attachment being formed between his favourite ward and his beautiful little niece. He merely thought to himself that if Claude would but brighten up a little, and forget all that Italian business, it would make the evenings much more cheerful for poor Margaret. [Pg 124]

His musings were interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Casement, whose "old woman," as he informed Mr. Grey, had two or three village gossips to drink tea with her, and therefore he had

been driven out this miserable night to take his chance of a cup of coffee, and a game of piquet with his friend, Mr. Grey.

"And glad enough you must be to see me," he remarked, "for I suppose these two young people chatter together, and leave you to count the bars of the grate all the evening." [Pg 125]

Mr. Grey eagerly disclaimed being ever left to the consoling occupation suggested by his friend.

"Never," he said, "were there kinder or more attentive companions than Claude Haveloc and his niece."

Margaret rang for more coffee, and made up her mind with a look of calm endurance to pass a disagreeable evening. Among other annoyances to her, Mr. Casement was very fond of music, and always insisted on her playing to him while he was engaged at cards.

Mr. Haveloc, highly indignant at being accused of chattering, flung himself into an arm-chair at another table; begged Margaret's pardon when she half rose to give Mr. Casement his cup, made some show of taking it from her, and then threw himself back in his chair with the Quarterly Review in his hand, and a very tolerable share of contempt in his features.

Then Mr. Casement managed to teaze Margaret by asking her to play 'The Roast Beef of Old England;' or, 'The Girl I left behind me;' airs that she had never heard of; and by turning into ridicule the names and compositions of Doehler and Moscheles, with whose works she was familiar. And every now and then he looked up from his game, and asked Mr. Haveloc what he was about, that he did not turn over the young lady's book, and praise her music; until at last Margaret left the piano in a great pet, and sat down to her netting. [Pg 126]

"Well, now, little woman," said Mr. Casement, as soon as he had won his game, "how do you get on with Hubert Gage?"

Mr. Haveloc's eyes were full upon her, and she felt the question to be embarrassing. She blushed, indeed, but she drew herself up, and replied that she got on with him quite well enough. Her acquaintance was with his sister.

"And this young spark, too," said Mr. Casement, turning to Mr. Haveloc. "What! you are letting him slip through your fingers? He goes away to-morrow, I hear." Margaret, changing from red to white, persevered with her netting. Mr. Haveloc dashed his book down on the table, and stalked out of the room; muttering something as he went about "the greatest bore in existence;" and Mr. Grey began a gentle remonstrance with his friend on the impropriety of talking in such a manner to young people. [Pg 127]

"They don't like it, Casement. These jokes never please the parties concerned. There's Claude gone out of the room in a rage, and my poor little Margaret seems disposed to go out of the room after him."

"I think," said Mr. Casement, with a chuckling laugh, "I tell you what, in my young days, the fancies of old people were to be consulted. Now, we have nothing to do but to think how we can please the young ones."

"Nobody can accuse you of that, Mr. Casement," said Margaret, who had taken refuge by the side of Mr. Grey. [Pg 128]

"Egad, that's true enough, Miss Peggy," returned Mr. Casement. "No one shall ever tax me with helping to spoil the rising generation."

Mr. Grey said he was no advocate for spoiling people; but he really could not see why such silly remarks should be made on persons; that Claude Haveloc did not like to be the subject of Mr. Casement's raillery, and therefore he did hope—

"Why," interrupted Mr. Casement, "the remark, as you call it, that made Master Claude bounce out of the room in such tragedy fashion, was addressed to this little woman here. I asked her, as any body would, how she could let such a sweet-tempered, well-behaved young gentleman slip through her fingers."

"Well—well—the child does not like it;" said Mr. Grey, rather shortly.

"Beg your pardon. Miss Peggy, like other young ladies, has no sort of objection to a hint of that kind. But you don't relish it, that is very plain; so I'll mind my manners for the present, at least. Hadn't you better step out to the young man, my dear, and say that it's all right, and he may come back again?" [Pg 129]

Angry as Margaret was, she could not help smiling at the idea of being sent out to call Mr. Haveloc back like a child. She was very angry, however, and said, that she supposed Mr. Haveloc would return when he chose; but that she imagined few people would be longer than they could help in Mr. Casement's society.

"She is too sharp for you, Casement;" said Mr. Grey, laughing.

"I have raised a hornet's nest about my ears, I think," said Mr. Casement, laughing in his turn. "I did not know the child had so much spirit. Well, my old woman, will be on the look out for me, so I will wish you good evening."

As soon as the door closed on his friend, Mr. Grey began to find all the excuses he could for his rudeness. Nobody, he affirmed, had a better heart than Mr. Casement, although his manners might lead a good many people to doubt the fact. He was sure that if any body was in distress, Mr. Casement would do them a kindness if he could; and, after all, that was the main point—the disposition was of more importance than the manner. [Pg 130]

Margaret was quite ready to admit the truth of this observation; she merely asked, casually, "whether Mr. Casement had been ever known to relieve anybody, because there is always opportunity to show kindness among the poor, if people are inclined to do it."

Mr. Grey said, "he did not know any particular instance of Mr. Casement's good works; but he was not the less convinced that he had the disposition to be kind."

Margaret smiled, and kept her own opinion in silence.

Mr. Haveloc returned to the room soon after;—replied to some qualifying remark of Mr. Grey's, that Mr. Casement was a pest to society, and worse than all the plagues of Egypt; and then, taking up his book again, went on reading with much apparent tranquillity. [Pg 131]

Margaret continued her netting by the fire-side, and seemed to be quite unconscious of his presence. Mr. Grey, satisfied that the storm had blown over, soon went to sleep, which he frequently did, until roused by the entrance of Land with the candlesticks and a great bunch of keys.

Suddenly Mr. Haveloc started forward, and picked up a mesh which had fallen from Margaret's work-box. She had been so much accustomed to all those attentions from him, which do not involve any speaking, that this sudden movement did not surprise her. She took her mesh, bowed her head in silence, and went on with her work. She really did not know, for some minutes, that he was leaning on the top of the screen he had placed between her and the fire, and looking earnestly into her face.

"I hope," he said, as soon as she happened to lift her eyes from her netting, "I do hope that miserable old man has not annoyed you very much. I am sure you must feel his vulgarity. If it was not for Mr. Grey, I—but I am afraid he is rather too old to be thrown out of the window." [Pg 132]

"Oh, dear, yes!" said Margaret, frightened at the very idea of such extreme measures. "I don't very much mind him now, I certainly did, at first. But my uncle says he has—some—good qualities."

This confession came out slowly, as if she was by no means willing to admit the possibility of such a thing.

"Mr. Grey has so many good qualities," said Mr. Haveloc, "that he makes over a few, in imagination, to his neighbours. That is the only way I can account for such an assertion on his part."

Margaret looked up and laughed at this remark. She had a charming child-like laugh.

"Perhaps;" said she, after a short pause, "perhaps, in time, he will leave off teazing me." [Pg 133]

"Never!" returned Mr. Haveloc, "never while he has breath."

"Then it can't be helped," said Margaret, with a sigh. "But there is one comfort, my dear uncle always takes my part."

"Who would not?" muttered Mr. Haveloc.

Margaret did not laugh at this remark. She blushed instead, and busied herself very earnestly with the beads on her silk.

"You are about something very pretty!" said Mr. Haveloc, bending over her work.

"It is a great deal of trouble," said Margaret, "but it will look very well when it is done. It is a purse with beads."

"I am afraid I shall not see it finished," said Mr. Haveloc. "It will be done, and sent off long before I come back."

"It takes me—oh, let me see!—about a week," said Margaret.

"Not longer? Why you must furnish all your friends with purses."

"But I seldom make them. This is only the second I have made with beads; one to learn by—and this other, to give to—somebody." [Pg 134]

"To Mr. Grey!"

"You cannot be sure of that. It is a very good guess; but I have other friends. I might mean it for Mr. Warde."

"You glanced at Mr. Grey when you spoke of giving it away."

"Did I, indeed? You should not watch people."

"Is that a general rule? Or only applicable to the present company?"

Margaret laughed, and made no answer.

"Pray, has Mr. Warde begun to teach you Latin yet?" he asked.

"No," said Margaret.

"How is that? Are you afraid of your complexion? I think Mr. Grey threatened you with premature age, if you meddled with Latin. Did not he?"

"That is not the reason," said Margaret, "but I am too busy at present."

"I should like very much to know what is your favourite study just now. Waltzing, I think." [Pg 135]

"Waltzing, indeed!" said Margaret; "I could waltz years ago."

"You won't tell me then, what pursuit engrosses you at present; it must be something mysterious. Judicial astrology?"

Margaret turned away laughing, "I wish first that it was true, and next that I knew it," she said.

"Would you then like to read the future?" he asked.

"Perhaps not, when it came to the point," she replied.

"What, Land, here already?" said Mr. Grey, waking up at the jingle of the keys and candlesticks; "who would believe it was eleven o'clock?"

"Not I for one," whispered Mr. Haveloc, as he moved to open the door for Margaret.

She did not know how it was. She supposed he must have held out his hand; but she found herself actually shaking hands with him for the first time. [Pg 136]

CHAPTER VIII.

Ray. You have a merry heart if you can guide it.

Fol. Yes faith, so, so; I laugh not at those whom I fear; I fear not those whom I love; and I love not any whom I laugh not at. Pretty strange humour, is't not?

Ray. To any one that knows you not, it is.

THE SUN'S DARLING.

The next morning Mr. Haveloc went to his estate as he had intended; and Margaret found herself again in undisturbed possession of Ashdale. But for fear she should enjoy her liberty too much, Hubert Gage found his way to the house almost every morning. He knew very well that when he could not obtain his sister's company, Margaret would not come down to see him, if he seemed to pay a formal visit, but he always contrived to have some message, or some piece of music, some [Pg 137] excellent advice about her greyhound, or other trifling passport to her presence; and when Elizabeth did go with him, it was very easy to loiter the whole morning there; that is to say, from a little before luncheon to a little before dinner.

Mr. Grey's only idea on the subject was, that Hubert Gage was a very fine young man, and very attentive to his sister.

Captain Gage was more clear-sighted; he told Elizabeth that Hubert seemed to have taken a fancy to Margaret; that she was a very nice little girl, well born and handsome; that he understood she had ten thousand pounds for her fortune, and it was very likely that Mr. Grey would leave her something very considerable; so that a younger son, as Hubert was, would have reason to think himself very well off if he could win her. That they were a couple of children, and that it was quite a consideration for the future. He should get him afloat again as as soon he [Pg 138] could, and if he came back in the same mind with regard to Margaret, then they would see about it.

Just at this time, the stability of his attachment was put to a slight test.

When he first returned home, his father wrote to his brother George who was with his regiment in Ireland, urging him to obtain leave of absence, that he might come over and see his brother. Captain Gage thus counted on having two of his sons at home together, for he was very much attached to his children, and nothing gave him greater satisfaction than to have them about him.

Now George Gage liked his brother very much, and would have had no objection to pay his father a visit, but it happened that a steeple-chase, in which he was deeply interested, was coming off at that time, so he wrote to say that he could not get leave of absence, which was so far true that he had never applied for it; but strongly recommended Hubert to take the trouble of crossing over to see him, holding out many inducements to that effect; the most powerful of which was the [Pg 139] steeple-chase.

Captain Gage, who had passed his life in the delusion that it was impossible for a gentleman to swerve by a hair's breadth from the truth, firmly believed his son's statement, and advised

Hubert to set off at once for Ireland. It was provoking enough, he said, that George could not get leave at present, but since there was a way for them to meet, why the best thing was to avail himself of it without delay.

He was very glad, he said to Elizabeth, to find by George's letter, how very anxious he was to have Hubert with him; for there was nothing so delightful as to see the members of a family attached to each other.

Elizabeth acceded to this remark, although she had not as firm a persuasion of her brother's warmth of feeling as her father had.

So Hubert set off in a day or two; after having called at Ashdale to take what he intended to be a very impressive farewell of Margaret; but it so happened that the antics of her Italian greyhound, which had become entangled in its silver chain, amused them both so highly, that they spent the whole time in laughing, so that when he rose to go, it was as much as he could manage to make his adieux intelligible. [Pg 140]

Mrs. Somerton and her youngest daughter had returned to the vicarage, where they spent that part of the year which was not passed in visiting among their relatives and friends. The eldest daughter had been invited by an aunt to spend the season in London, and Blanche took up her abode in the retired village of Ashdale with very decided feelings of discontent and mortification.

Now I am sorry to say that Blanche Somerton, although very pretty, was not very good. She was rather tall, and slightly made, with very small head, hands, and feet. Her complexion was delicately pale, and her face like a child's with bright black eyes, a short nose, and a pretty mouth always half open and displaying a set of small and pearly teeth. But as a set off to these attractions, she hardly ever told the truth, even in the veriest trifles. She would tell a falsehood about the colour of a ribbon, and would say that a friend wore a white dress, simply because it happened to be green. Sometimes these mistakes assumed a more serious character, but if she was found out in any of them she merely laughed. [Pg 141]

They were very poor. Her mother was always embarrassed in money matters, and although she had recourse to many contrivances to eke out her small income, they were insufficient to keep her out of debt. Had it not been for Mr. Warde's frequent kindness, I really believe the poor woman would have found her way to a prison. Their's was bitter poverty; far more bitter and hard to bear than the physical poverty of the poor. Their's was the constant effort at maintaining an appearance among their friends, almost all of whom were in a condition of life superior to their own. The wearing anxiety of heavy and increasing debts, and the dread lest the fact should become known, and prevent the girls from settling. She had applied so often and drawn so largely upon Mr. Warde, that she could not reasonably expect that he would do much more to assist her. She was again in debt, yet she continued to order at every house, where she had any credit left, all sorts of finery for herself and her daughters, in the hope that it might facilitate their establishment. She thought under these circumstances that it would be advisable for Blanche to marry Hubert Gage. He was a second son, and a Lieutenant in the Navy. These were not agreeable facts, but she took it for granted he would be made a Commander in a year or two, and then he might afford to marry if his father chose to "behave handsomely;" a comprehensive term, which seems to mean, a behaviour as opposed as possible to what you have any right to expect. [Pg 142] [Pg 143]

But although Mrs. Somerton sketched out a plan of action with great ease and rapidity, it was necessary that she should engage her daughter to carry it out, or her trouble would be in vain. These cabinet councils were seldom of a very placid character. It was, perhaps, natural that poverty should have embittered Mrs. Somerton's temper—it was never very even—and at this period it might be aptly described by the word fractious. One of Blanche's greatest faults was, that she would never submit in silence to her mother's peevish remonstrances, although they seldom made her angry; she either laughed, or turned them into ridicule.

Mrs. Somerton now stated the case to her daughter as strongly as she could, reproached her with being still single, reminded her that sailors were very easily attracted, and urged her to lose no time in supplanting Margaret, who she said must be a shockingly forward little creature to have made herself already the talk of the place with Hubert Gage. Blanche was lying on the sofa reading a novel, and the only notice she took of her mother's eloquence was to nod her head, and turn over a page. [Pg 144]

Mrs. Somerton naturally grew irritable and impetuous, and it was not until she was fairly angry that her daughter threw aside the book, and joined in the conversation.

"Yes—yes. Dear me! don't disturb yourself," said the amiable Blanche. "I mean to detach Hubert from that pretty little doll; but I shall not throw myself away upon a beggar, and a second son, I assure you."

"Hubert Gage is not a beggar," interposed Mrs. Somerton, "he has five hundred a year of his own."

"The mighty sum!" exclaimed Blanche, "but I intend to have somebody else."

"Well, let me hear who it is?" [Pg 145]

"Do you suppose I mean to tell you?" asked Blanche, "pray let me read in peace."

"Is it the eldest Gage? Because I can tell you he is not to be caught."

"Yes," retorted Blanche, "it is likely I should go on a pilgrimage to Cork for the purpose of making George Gage an offer. That is so like you!"

Mrs. Somerton was highly exasperated at this reply, and upbraided Blanche with obstinacy and ingratitude, and want of feeling, and want of prudence, until her exordium was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Warde. It was a contrast which would have struck painfully upon some people, to see the kind old gentleman come in, quite unconscious of the occupation of his sister and niece, engrossed with the cares of his parish, full of some touching history of want and sorrow, which he would sit down, and relate at full length, not believing that any one could hear it without interest. Years ago, when Blanche was a child, she would have cried heartily at such a recital, and have [Pg 146] done her best to send some relief to the sufferers; but time and bad training had done their work. She cared less about the matter than if an accident had happened to her spaniel, and was turning over in her mind, the trimming she would have to her next bonnet, while she went through the proper exclamations during her uncle's narrative.

About this time some races were held, at which all the neighbourhood were to attend. There was [Pg 148] a ball in the evening, and Captain Gage desired to fill his house with company, that they might go in a party to the race and ball. Miss Gage asked Margaret to stay with her during these festivities, and her father sent an invitation to Mrs. Somerton and her daughter, which was gladly accepted. Hubert Gage was on his road home, and was bringing his brother George with him. He had obtained leave suddenly, for he recollected the spring races, and had some curiosity to see [Pg 147] Margaret. It had been difficult to make Hubert talk of any body else, and he thought if she was really very beautiful, and had slender ancles, and a good prospect of inheriting Mr. Grey's property, besides her own ten thousand pounds, she *might* do for him. She was worth looking after at any rate; and as these things can seldom be transacted by proxy, he was forced to take the trouble of coming over to decide upon her merits.

CHAPTER IX.

> Ma pur mostrava anchor grand' arroganza,
> Tanto superbo havea l'aspetto fiero,
> E qualunche il mirasse in su Bajardo,
> Direbbe, quest'è 'l fior d'ogni gagliardo.
>
> BOIARDO.

A few minutes before Margaret was setting out for Chirke Weston, Mr. Grey called her into the library, where he was standing at one of the windows, with a letter in his hand.

Margaret threaded her way through the heavy carved oak furniture, and joined her uncle. A groom was leading a beautiful bay horse slowly to and fro before the windows.

"Oh, uncle! is it really—I can hardly believe that beautiful creature is actually for me." [Pg 149]

"Yes, my child, if he suits, which I feel no doubt of—for Claude is very careful, and he writes me word that the horse was the property of a lady. You will meet him at the Gages, and he comes on here after the ball. You may tell him, I take it very kind that he bore in mind that I was looking out for a horse, and that I feel sure I shall buy him."

Margaret much as she felt obliged to Mr. Haveloc for having found her a horse, had no intention of giving him Mr. Grey's message. It was an exertion to which she could not feel equal, unless he should introduce the subject.

She arrived at Chirke Weston about an hour before dinner, and having made her toilet, came down to the drawing-room with some trepidation; for Miss Gage had told her that there was a large party expected.

Sir Evan and Lady Conway were already in the room with their two daughters. The girls were [Pg 150] tall, bright-eyed, dark, dashing, and well-dressed: they were practising the Mazourka, which was then just beginning to turn people's heads, and looked so formidable to poor Margaret, that she involuntarily shrank closer to the side of her friend Elizabeth. They left off their dancing to be introduced to Margaret, and stood clustered round the fire, talking with more ease and friendliness than she would have imagined from their appearance. She rose a step in Miss Conway's opinion, when she said she knew the Mazourka, and another step or two when she avowed that she liked it very much.

Harriet, the younger sister, fixed her immense dark eyes upon her, and then said, laughing, "You are too young to be stared at—but it is a great temptation."

Margaret felt glad that she had come to that determination, but she liked the appearance of Miss Harriet more than that of her sister.

She appeared to be in very ill-health; her hair had been cut off in an illness, and was now [Pg 151] beginning to grow in tendrils all round her small head. She was very thin and pale, and her dress was made high, and finished with costly lace. And whenever a person ventures upon such a toilet, it gives an air of 'retenue' to the figure, which might almost point out to other women, that there is a little want of refinement in the wanton exposure with which they too often favour the public.

Nothing, on that score, however, could be urged against Elizabeth and Margaret, who though they conformed to fashion, were careful to mark a distinction in their dress between a gentlewoman and an opera-dancer.

Mrs. Somerton and her daughter now made their appearance; then some people who were entire strangers to Margaret; then Mr. Conway with his glass in his eye; and after him Hubert Gage and Mr. Haveloc.

These last both made their way to Margaret at the same time. Mr. Haveloc merely made the [Pg 152] usual enquiries about herself and her uncle, and then leaned against the mantle-piece in perfect silence. Hubert Gage had more to say. He had to describe his passage and his visit to Ireland, and all the things which happened on his return. He had to invent a storm, which made Margaret turn pale; and a variety of dialogues between the passengers upon their supposed danger, which set her laughing merrily.

Blanche Somerton, who was sitting near, did not quite like this prolonged conversation. She turned round and summoned him to her side.

"I am so sorry to trouble you, Mr. Hubert," she said, "but do look at my bouquet. I came away in such a hurry—see, it will not fit my bouquetiére; the stalks are too long."

"That is a difficulty very easy to remedy," said Hubert, taking the bouquet from her. "Now I wish young ladies were always as modest in their demands; they do ask one such impossible things [Pg 153] sometimes."

"No, but what sort of things?" asked Blanche. "Do tell me, I so long to know. I really believe that you are very severe upon women."

"By no means. I am too sincere an admirer of the fair sex to be exacting. Stay, this is not quite right yet—let me shorten these stalks again."

"You will spoil that nice penknife, I am afraid."

"That is not of the slightest consequence," said he laughing, "particularly as it is not my property."

"Then you mean to say that if it was yours—"

"I should feel double pleasure in sacrificing it of course. Dinner already! Now you must take my arm, you see. I have not quite finished the arrangement of your flowers. It is certainly a beautiful bouquet. I hardly know which to admire most, the flowers or the bouquetiére. Quite new this sort [Pg 154] of thing—is it not?"

Every body was rising and pairing off—Hubert Gage, with Blanche on his arm, sauntered past Margaret, arranging the bouquet as he walked along.

Margaret looked after him with some surprise; his attendance had been a thing that she was so certain of late to meet with, that she could scarcely comprehend his transferring it to somebody else. There was a little mortification in her mind for a minute, for no one likes to be robbed of an admirer, however willing she may be to give him up. But she understood it in a moment. Love hangs on such a slender thread with every one, that she could never, and did never regard Hubert Gage with a warmer interest than what might belong to a pleasant acquaintance. She was too romantic, too exacting in her ideas of love to suppose, for a moment, that a man who once entertained a serious thought of her could be engrossed in her presence by another woman.

Mr. Haveloc was at her side almost as soon as Hubert passed, and she felt grateful for the [Pg 155] attention. It prevented the awkwardness of seeming to wait till some one was desired to take her in to dinner.

Just as all the company were arranging themselves round the table, George Gage clattered into the room exactly as he came off his journey, not appearing to have thought it worth while to undergo the trouble of dressing for dinner. He noticed two or three people at table, found a vacant chair just opposite to Margaret, and seeing a new and beautiful face, glared at her over his soup-plate without remorse.

Certainly there was a great contrast between the two brothers. Whereas Hubert endeavoured, for no earthly motive, to efface all traces of his profession from his dress and language, George Gage, with as little show of reason, seemed never for a moment to forget his calling.

He stalked about as if the world was made for his sole benefit and pleasure, and contrived to make such a great jingling when he walked, that Margaret seriously thought, the first time she [Pg 156] heard him cross the marble hall, that a dray-horse had broken loose and was making his way to the drawing-room. This was the more strange as he did not dress in chain armour, but in a costume, something between a farmer and a baker's apprentice. He flourished his walking-stick as if he were leading a charge of cavalry; or held it in the pocket of his coat, which seemed an equally odd way of disposing of it. He was very arrogant in his manner to every body, except the few ladies who were deemed by him of sufficient birth and beauty to be honoured by his notice, and to them his manner assumed a softness and an assiduity which rather puzzled Margaret, who was edified by his laconic replies to the country gentlemen, and his haughty mode of speaking to the servants. But, as she was one of the chosen few to whom he condescended, she at least had no reason to complain.

He was attached to his father; though, (and this was a heavy objection,) he did not like the fashion of his cravats, and respected him too, without being quite satisfied with his choice of a boot-maker. This was an instance of filial virtue which would hardly have been believed by his companions, but which was true notwithstanding. [Pg 157]

These several traits, however, did not flash upon Margaret all at once, but became evident in the course of her acquaintance with him. At present she was merely aware that his great blue eyes were perusing her with an expression to which she was not accustomed, and to which no modest woman can ever become accustomed—the critical and scrutinising expression of a Turk in a Slave Market.

It was a relief to her to turn to Mr. Haveloc, who was rendering her the common courtesies of the table, with an earnestness which formed a sufficient contrast to the laughing manner of Hubert Gage. It seemed almost as if meeting at a strange house put them more at ease with each other.

"You remain here some days, do you not?" asked Mr. Haveloc. [Pg 158]

"Yes, until after the races and the ball, and the early flower show at S——."

"You mean to see a great deal of the world then before you come back to Ashdale."

"Yes," said Margaret, "I shall have so much to tell my uncle about."

Mr. Haveloc gave her one of those softened smiles, which changed so entirely the expression of his features.

"You look forward with pleasure," he said, "to giving Mr. Grey an account of your adventures."

"I do indeed," said Margaret.

"And so do I."

"You, Mr. Haveloc!"

"Yes, I shall come in for the narrative. Perhaps you do not know that I shall return to Ashdale before you do."

"Yes, my uncle told me so," said Margaret, with something like a sigh.

Now, nothing in general so much offends a man as not appearing extremely delighted with his society; but Mr. Haveloc, perhaps from the novelty of the thing, seemed rather pleased than otherwise. [Pg 159]

"You don't look so glad as you ought," he said, with a smile, "which is rather ungrateful on your part; for to me Ashdale would lose very much of its attraction if you were absent."

It was enough to make her blush, such a marked compliment, and from such a person; and, to heighten her confusion, there was George Gage still staring at her on the other side of the table, as only a military man can stare.

"I suppose," said Mr. Haveloc, "the truth is, that you think you cannot tell Mr. Grey your little secrets when I am present; that is why you wish me away."

Margaret had not said she wished him away, but she did not contradict him.

"Of course I should not tell my uncle many things before you," she said, "because little circumstances, which are new to me and strange to him, now that he never goes out, would seem very trifling to a third person." [Pg 160]

"Don't you know," said Mr. Haveloc, "that first impressions are always interesting? You must not therefore prevent my hearing yours."

Miss Gage was rising at this moment, and Margaret availed herself of the move to avoid giving a reply.

When the ladies returned to the drawing-room, they gathered round the fire, and began to discuss the amusements of the next day. Margaret, who was standing by Elizabeth Gage, looked earnestly in her face to see whether she could really enter into conversation of so trifling a nature as that which was going on among the ladies.

Yes,—Elizabeth patiently heard Miss Lawson Smith's complaints of her crape ball dress, which had not been trimmed with roses of the proper tint, and gave as much comfort as she could under the circumstances; and she endeavoured to decide upon a bonnet for Miss Conway, when that young lady professed to be unable to bring the matter to a conclusion for herself. [Pg 161]

"Recollect, my dear Lucy," said she, "that if the Fates grant us a fine day to-morrow, it will be made up of a bright sun and a keen north wind; the only advantage of an airy toilet, is to make you look blue upon the course, and send you home with a severe cold."

The prospect of a cold did not seem to frighten Lucy, but she was keenly alive to the disadvantages of looking blue.

Harriet Conway looking up from the footstool upon which she was seated close to the fire, remarked that, "her costume gave her no sort of trouble, as she was to ride on horseback to the

races."

Margaret looked at her with some surprise and no little envy, thinking what a bold, accomplished horsewoman she must be.

"How do you feel to-night, darling?" asked her mother. [Pg 162]

"Oh! very comfortable," said Harriet, leaning her head on her mother's lap, as Lady Conway took the arm-chair beside her; "quite well as long as I have nothing to do that I don't like."

"How I wish that you could go to the ball to-morrow, dearest," said her mother.

"Thank you," said Harriet, "but that is one of the things I don't like; besides, after being on horseback all the morning, I shall be glad to go to bed as soon as I have seen you all off in your finery."

"Such a pity, so well as you dance the Mazourka," said Lucy Conway, "for one meets such nice people at this ball. I really think if you took proper care—"

"Oh! we will run no risks," said Lady Conway, anxiously, "you coughed at dinner, I observed."

"It was the pepper, *mamma mia*," said Harriet; "but I have no intention of going to the ball. Bessy! send me over that pretty little thing by your side. I have a mind to talk to her." [Pg 163]

"What say you," asked Elizabeth smiling, "will you venture?"

Margaret complied with a little timidity in her manner.

"Why, you don't mean to say you are afraid of me," said Harriet taking Margaret's hand in her long, slender fingers, "I would excuse you, if I were a man. Well now, are you fond of riding?"

"I am just going to learn," said Margaret "it is the thing of all others I wish for."

"You ought to have begun younger," said Harriet, "but we will see what we can make of you. What is the colour of your riding-habit?"

"Blue," replied Margaret.

"True blue," said Harriet looking intently into the fire; "how do you like Hubert Gage?"

"I don't see how that follows," said Margaret smiling; "but I like him very well." [Pg 164]

"Good," said Harriet; "I see it is not a tender subject. You know the Gages are relations of ours. Are you not, Bessy?"

"Connexions, my dear Harriet; but I am quite ready to acknowledge the relationship."

"And is this your first ball?" said Harriet, turning again to Margaret.

"Yes."

"Don't you feel very nervous, and pleased, and frightened, and impatient?"

"Not very," said Margaret. "I wish very much to go, and I know Bessy and—and—two or three people."

"Are you engaged yet?"

"No. But if I do not dance, I shall be so amused with looking on, that it will be no disappointment to me."

"Very modest on your part; but I hear the gentlemen coming, so I must leave this charming footstool, or I shall be accused of fifty things. Here in this corner is room for two, so let us continue our conversation." [Pg 165]

"Everything is so new to me," said Margaret, as she surveyed the room lit up with clusters of lamps, the heavy crimson curtains, the splendid gilt furniture, and the groups of gentlemen standing about the lady's chairs, drinking coffee, "this seems to me a very grand party; but perhaps it appears to you nothing."

"An ordinary dinner party," said Harriet; "perhaps they run rather large at this house. Uncle Gage, have you quite made up your book? Because I shall be happy to offer you odds upon Rory O'More."

Captain Gage who was passing with Sir Evan Conway, stopped short before the two girls.

"I will have nothing to do with you," he said to Harriet, "you are far too deep for me. I believe you are hand in glove with Lord Raymond's groom."

Sir Evan and Captain Gage both laughed very much at this charge.

Harriet with a deepened colour protested against having ever seen the groom, or the horse. [Pg 166]

Captain Gage turned to Margaret, and asked if she had been taking lessons in the science of book-making; adding, "that as she must be a novice as yet, he was willing to risk a pair of gloves with her."

Margaret said "she was not going to bet at all; that Bessy had advised her not."

"Bessy is a prude," said Captain Gage, looking much pleased, "you should never mind anything she says to you."

Margaret laughed, and shook her head, and the gentlemen passed on.

Then Hubert Gage made his way to the sofa, and began to rally Harriet and Margaret upon the retired spot they had chosen, admired Margaret's fan, and Harriet's gloves, and in fact went on as young men generally do when they wish to render themselves agreeable; in the midst of which discourse, Mr. Haveloc walked straight up to Margaret, and without any prologue, begged to [Pg 167] have the honour of dancing the first quadrille with her the next evening.

Margaret blushed and consented, and Mr. Haveloc bowed and walked away, while Hubert Gage drawing a chair close to the sofa, dropped into it and laughed immoderately.

"I never knew such a fellow," he exclaimed, "just at the moment that I was gaining courage to make such a request, he must needs step forwards and cut me out. It is too bad—don't you pity me? The second quadrille then, if you have any compassion."

"Mr. Hubert," said Blanche Somerton coming up, "we want your help so very much in this glee of Gödbe's. Will you take the tenor part?"

"Oh! if I am wanted," said Hubert, rising. "Miss Capel, I do not mean to stir without your answer."

"The second quadrille?" said Margaret.

"Exactly; unless you prefer the first Mazourka." [Pg 168]

"Oh! but you do not know the Mazourka."

"No; but you can teach me so nicely in the morning."

"I will not undertake you," said Margaret laughing.

"Then I fall back upon the quadrille. Miss Somerton I am at your service."

Mr. George Gage now loitered up the room very slowly, and planted himself against the wall, close to Margaret. He first took her cup out of her hand and set it down, and then after a very careful survey of her from head to foot, he "hoped he should be so fortunate as to secure her hand for the first waltz. He confessed that he never danced quadrilles."

Margaret hesitated; she did not at all like the prospect of such a partner, but as she had no wish to sit still thenceforward, she accepted.

Mr. Gage set down her embarrassment to his own infinite attractions, and was satisfied. He then made a few ordinary remarks to her about the neighbourhood; but although he did not address a [Pg 169] word to Harriet Conway, Margaret who was very quick-sighted, observed that they bestowed upon each other, from time to time, glances which seemed to express dislike, almost defiance. At length, after one of these singular looks, Harriet said, with her peculiarly clear intonation, "I do not offer you a seat, Mr. Gage."

"I should be sorry to disturb you," he replied coldly; and removed to a little distance as he spoke.

Margaret made up a little romance in her mind directly; in which Harriet figured as an obdurate lady, and Mr. Gage as a desponding lover. She had leisure for these fancies, for Harriet became silent, and George Gage, though standing near, did not renew his conversation. Some of the older people were playing at cards; Lucy Conway was at the harp, Hubert almost held prisoner by Blanche Somerton, and Elizabeth was moving about among the guests with all the dignity and [Pg 170] grace of a young Queen.

"My dear Harriet," said Lady Conway coming up to her, "it is very late, and you are looking fagged. Do recollect what is before you to-morrow; and slip out of the room without the ceremony of a good night."

"I cannot very well," replied Harriet, "for I must ring for a shawl. I dare not leave this hot room without one."

Margaret offered to fetch Miss Conway a shawl of her own.

"No, not for worlds you kind little creature," said Harriet laying her hand on Margaret's arm, "it will do me no harm in the world to sit quietly here until the good people choose to separate."

While this was going on, Mr. Gage went up to Elizabeth, and said something to her; she fetched a shawl from one of the sofas, and he crossed over to Miss Harriet, and begged to have the honour of putting it on.

Harriet opened wide her large transparent eyes, with the crimson spot deepening on her cheek; [Pg 171] thanked him, regretted to have given him the trouble; and then wrapping the large Cachemere completely round her, walked out of the room. George Gage stood with folded arms looking after her for some moments, and then threw himself on the sofa by the side of Margaret. She was not disposed to be pleased with him; but she could not deny that his manner possessed a certain charm, when he chose to exert it. It was true that he said nothing either witty or profound, but

his language was easy and well chosen; and the softness of his tone, together with the exceeding interest he pretended to feel for the replies of his companion, could scarcely fail of making a favourable impression. The great drawback to his demeanour, was his remorseless and unceasing stare. Sometimes Margaret thought that something must be the matter with her sleeve, sometimes that her hair was coming unfastened at the back, sometimes she wondered what there [Pg 172] was peculiar in her shoe, and again she supposed that the fashion of her bracelet was unusual. With this exception, he rendered himself an amusing companion, and if Margaret had been more conversant with military men, she would have been willing to allow that in tact and information, he was very superior to the average of those gentlemen, who to serve Her Majesty, and their own convenience, are content to wear a certain disguise for a given period of time.

The evening passed quickly enough. Some young ladies sang, some played. George Gage remained lounging on the sofa by her side. Hubert was in great request at the piano, for he sang very well, and read music easily at sight. Mr. Gage asked Margaret if she exhibited, as he called it—thanked Heaven, with praiseworthy fervour, that he was not guilty of such a failing himself, and advised her to let him drive her to the course in his phaeton the next day. Margaret gave no [Pg 173] definite answer to this proposal. The party was dispersing, and when she reached her room, she was so heartily tired, that she could do no more than return Elizabeth's embrace, and consign herself to the care of Miss Mason, who with all her dispatch, could hardly get her to bed before she was asleep. [Pg 174]

CHAPTER X.

Faste to those looks are all my fancies tied,
Pleas'de with thy sweetness, angry with thy pride.

PEELE.

Ray.—Ay, 'tis an old saide saying, I have redde
In certaine bokes that love is like to smoke;
But I say rather it is liker fire,
Which kindleth after men have put it out;
Often upon a little breath of ayre.

ANON.

The morning was, as Elizabeth had predicted, bright as a poet's dream, or a poet's waking; but a north wind swept the half-clothed boughs of the trees, and warned all discreet persons to protect themselves from the cold air. Horses and carriages were assembling in front of the house, and the guests were collecting by slow degrees in the drawing-room previous to starting.

Harriet Conway appeared in her habit, which very much became her slender figure. She threw [Pg 175] her riding whip and gauntlets into her hat which stood in the window seat, looked round for Margaret, who had become quite a little pet of hers; drew her into the window, examined her dress and praised it; told her how she ought to wear her hair under a hat; looked at her rings and admired her hands, and asked her how it was arranged that she should go to the course. George Gage, who was standing near talking to Mr. Conway, turned round on hearing the question, and said that he hoped Miss Capel would not retract the permission she had almost given him to drive her thither; upon which Hubert announced his intention of calling out his brother, which made everybody laugh except Margaret who was sadly confused. She said in a low voice to Harriet that she heartily wished Bessy would take her, for of all things, she dreaded being driven by Mr. Gage.

"How's that?" asked Harriet suddenly, "are you afraid?" [Pg 176]

"No," returned Margaret, "but I—he is quite a stranger to me."

"Do you mind me, then?" asked Harriet.

"No," said Margaret laughing.

"Good," said Harriet, putting on her hat and gloves, "come, we are all ready, and I know Uncle Gage is impatient to be off. I'll manage it."

They stood on the steps while some of the elder persons of the party went off; and when George Gage's carriage drew up, Harriet came forward.

"I will drive Miss Capel, Mr. Gage;" she said, "for she has not a great deal of courage, and I shall be less likely than you to put it to the test."

"Surely not—surely you are not afraid of my driving;" said Mr. Gage, bending down to the level of Margaret's bonnet. "I had promised myself so great a pleasure, and you cannot doubt my caution on such an occasion."

"You are very good," said Margaret, "but really—those horses—" [Pg 177]

"Come, come!" said Harriet, "give me the reins, I shall not be trying to show off as you would. Do be good-natured George, and let me drive; you can easily find a horse."

While she spoke, Margaret was struck with the alteration in Mr. Gage's countenance. Her chance was quite over with him, poor little girl; though she was entirely ignorant of ever having had any. He looked delighted, handed in Harriet and Margaret with the greatest care, and stood on the step arranging everything for Harriet's convenience.

"Why, I thought," he said, "you had given up all these bad habits. Will you like another pair of horses? You had better drive a four-in-hand, now you are about it."

"No," said Harriet, "I wish to go quietly for the sake of my little friend here; so let every one get out of my way, and will you tell Charles to send my groom on with my horse?" [Pg 178]

As she spoke, she touched the horses, and swept out of the gates. She was silent for a short time, and then said as with a sigh, as if to herself, "Bless me, I called him George."

"I am so much obliged to you," said Margaret after a pause, "now I shall quite enjoy this day's pleasure."

Harriet laughed, and drove on as fast as she could.

"So shall I," she said; "my horse will be as fresh as a lark when we get to the course; and these horses are worth driving. George—Mr. Gage, I mean, knows how to buy a horse."

"Suppose," said Margaret, "they were to run away."

"Then we should get to S—— all the faster," said Harriet.

"But you have not strength to stop them," said Margaret.

"Granted," said Harriet. "Here, will you take the reins for a moment?"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Margaret looking up into her companion's face. [Pg 179]

"I know where George keeps his cigars. I am going to take one, that's all."

Margaret looked aghast.

"They are perfectly quiet, on my word," said Harriet. "Oh! about the smoking. Do you mind it then?"

"No," returned Margaret, who had never been in company with any one while smoking. "I'll take the reins; but pray be quick."

Harriet was quick; before Margaret had time to be frightened, she had lit a cigar, and resumed the reins with all the unconcern in the world.

"I learned this at Madrid," she said from between her teeth. "Some day, if you please me, I'll tell you my history."

"All of it?" asked Margaret, looking up into her companion's face.

"Oh, yes! no half measures," returned Harriet.

They went to S—— by a cross-country road, and therefore fell in with very few of those who were [Pg 180] likewise bound for the course. And by those few, Harriet, with her hat and habit, her short hair and cigar, was supposed as she whirled past them, to be a handsome boy.

Mr. Gage was already on the course with his party; he rode up with his brother and Mr. Haveloc to escort the ladies to the stand. Harriet had her horse brought up to the steps of the carriage, mounted at once, and rode off with Mr. Conway; and Hubert insisted on conducting Margaret to Elizabeth pleading his sister's commands to that effect.

And now they were seated in the very front of the stand, Elizabeth and Margaret together; the [Pg 181] gentlemen of their party were dispersed about the course, and Margaret could distinguish in the distance the slight figure of Harriet Conway, guiding her spirited horse among the company, followed by her father and brother. She soon, however, lost sight of her in the crowd, and began to feel impatient for the first race to begin.

Now, their places being very good, attracted the envy of a couple of insolent dragoon officers, who had just arrived, and who tried by pushing in a most unjustifiable manner, to edge themselves in. Elizabeth turned round in haughty surprise, Margaret in childish wonder, and presented to the eyes of the eager officers, two of the loveliest faces on the race course.

"Oh!" said one of these cavaliers to the other, drawing back with a very blank and crest-fallen face, "Oh! I didn't know they were young uns!"

Margaret could hardly restrain her laughter at this audible ejaculation. Miss Gage contented herself by thanking Heaven with a curved lip, that they were soldiers.

"No sailor," she said to Margaret, "would ever annoy a woman, young or old. I am glad they were rude, these dragoons!"

The contempt with which this last word was pronounced, all the keener for its calmness, can [Pg 182] scarcely be imagined.

"But I ought to apologise to you, dear," she continued; "though to suppose that your brave father

had the most distant affinity to these popinjays, would be indeed too insulting."

Presently the race began, and Margaret forgot all about the rudeness of the officers in the interest of the scene.

After the race, they were joined by some of the gentlemen of their party. George Gage came up to his sister and leaned against the railing by her side, in that frame of mind so common to English people, which is called an ill-humour.

"Have you lost, George?" asked Elizabeth.

"No. I have no inducement to bet here," said Mr. Gage; "a miserable counterfeit of a race like this. I keep my losses for Epsom."

"And whereabouts is Harriet?"

"On the other side of the course with Charles Conway, and Lord Raymond. I congratulate her very much upon her choice. The fellow seems to have been born and bred in a stable." [Pg 183]

"I hardly know him," said Elizabeth; "but I am afraid Harriet will be very tired, riding about so long, I wish she could be persuaded to sit quietly here until we go home."

"I will try if you wish it," said Mr. Gage, "but it can hardly be expected that she should leave so great an attraction as Lord Raymond."

"Go," said Elizabeth laughing, "I don't imagine his Lordship to be so irresistible."

As Mr. Gage was leaving the stand, he encountered the two officers before mentioned, who had crept to some distance from the ladies. One of these worthies had only lately exchanged from Mr. Gage's regiment into the one he now adorned, and he presented his companion to George.

There was some bowing, and lifting of hats and shaking of hands, and then George invited them to dine at his father's before the ball, and join their party thither, to which they readily agreed. [Pg 184]

His mission proved successful. In a few minutes Harriet came in followed by her brother and Lord Raymond.

Margaret was very curious to see this nobleman; and although she had thought Mr. Gage's remark very harsh, she was not much surprised at it when he made his appearance. He was ill-dressed, not very young, clumsy in his person, and heavy in the expression of his features. He stammered a good deal, and was not happy in his conversational powers. His ideas were rather slow of circulation. He had got it into his head that it was the duty of an Englishman to cultivate racing; and it would have taken more years than he was likely to live, to convince him that it was a pernicious and disgraceful occupation. He was very much on the turf, but he was just skilful and cautious enough neither to gain or lose much in a year by the vice. At the present moment, Harriet was the object of his attention, and he therefore talked of nothing else. [Pg 185]

One of the party congratulated him upon his horse, which had just won the race.

"Yes," he said, "he was glad of it; for Miss Conway had betted upon Rory O'More."

Miss Gage asked him "if he had any other horse running that day?"

"No," he replied, "as he should leave the course presently. How was Miss Conway going home?"

Lady Conway remarked to him, "that it was a cold day."

"It was, indeed," he said, "he did not think Miss Conway seemed to be sufficiently wrapped up."

Harriet replied to both his remarks at once. "She said, that she meant to drive herself home, and that she was quite warm enough."

And by this time, the races being over for the day, and the company beginning to disperse, [Pg 186] Harriet called to Margaret, and sent her brother to look for the carriage. Margaret was not sorry to be gone; she had a head-ache, which had been gradually growing worse, and she hoped that the fresh air would blow it away. Harriet lit another cigar as they went off the course; she asked Margaret again "if she objected to it?" and again Margaret said "No;" for though she thought it a very odd fancy in her companion, she did not find the smell disagreeable enough to oppose it. But her head became worse, and when she reached home, she was scarcely able to dress for dinner. She made an effort, however, and went down stairs. There were no candles in the drawing-room, which was dimly lighted by a very moderate fire.

Margaret felt chilly, and took a chair as close as she could to the fire-place, next to a person who seemed to be in a uniform, as far as she could tell by the glimmering light. He entered into general conversation with her, and among other desultory remarks, asked her "if she meant to [Pg 187] accompany her daughter to the ball that evening?"

Margaret ascribed the mistake to the darkness, and contented herself with replying in the negative.

The stranger was directed to take her into the dining-room, and as they came into a blaze of light on crossing the hall, he discovered that the lady he had the honour of escorting was young and beautiful; for he had mistaken her for Mrs. Somerton, who was about Margaret's height.

As soon as his ideas became enlightened on this subject, he began to stammer out a few of those incoherent sentences with which young men of no education are apt to try to express their meaning.

"Upon my word—I—it is very strange now—I have a thousand apologies to—the most singular—I actually thought you—"

"Yes," said Margaret quietly, in one moment recognizing her friend of the race course, "it is not the first time to-day you have thought I was not a 'young un.'"

It would have done any artist good to have seen the officer's face. His line was a bad one, but he was not first rate in his line—not a Lovelace, or a Pelham. He had not learned to be found out with a good grace. Like Fag, it hurt his conscience. He changed colour, and looked a good deal smaller than usual. Of course the first thing he did was to tell a lie. He hoped he had not pushed against her in the stand—some people behind, had been pressing upon him so scandalously, that he almost feared he had inconvenienced some ladies in the front of the stand; he hoped it had not been the case. [Pg 188]

Margaret, rather amused at the way in which he got through the difficulty, made some slight reply, and took her place at the table. By some accident she was separated from the hero of the race course, and found herself between Mr. Haveloc, and Hubert Gage. Harriet Conway, still in her riding habit, sat on the other side of the said hero. [Pg 189]

"Hubert, cannot you save Margaret the trouble of carving that dish, whatever it is?" said Harriet, seeing that Margaret looked embarrassed at the task.

"I could, but I do not wish it," said Hubert. "It is so very becoming," he added in a low voice to Margaret, "ladies with such beautiful arms should always carve."

"I wish you would help me, instead of talking nonsense," said Margaret, who was colouring very much under the impression that two or three persons had their eyes fixed on her, "you see how disagreeable it is to me."

Before she had done speaking, Mr. Haveloc had taken the knife and fork from her hands.

"That's right," said Harriet, speaking across to Mr. Haveloc.

"I do wish you would go to the ball, Harriet," said Hubert.

"Don't you really go the ball?" echoed Mr. Elliot, the hero before mentioned, "how can you be so cruel as to remain at home?" [Pg 190]

"Yes—you wish to dance with me, don't you?" said Harriet, turning suddenly round upon him. "I'll tell you why I don't go. I detest dancing; unless one could hire a partner as they do in Flanders, and the man felt his value to be one kreutzer, and no more." A good many men can get on very well with people who are exactly like every body they are in the habit of meeting, but any thing like a character puts them quite out. So Mr. Elliot got up a little laugh and was silent. At last, he enquired of Harriet what amusement she preferred to dancing.

"Pistol shooting," said Harriet. "There's the man with the champagne. Don't you take any?"

"You take no wine?" said Mr. Elliot.

"No—I never do," returned Harriet.

"And what can you hit with the pistol?"

"A wine-glass at sixteen paces."

"How often?" [Pg 191]

"Sometimes. What can you hit?"

"A—why—a—"

"A hay-stack, I suppose. Tell somebody to bring me the cream."

"Have you heard Fornasari?" asked Mr. Elliot.

"No. What is he like?"

"Oh, very fine really! You would be delighted!"

"What is fine?" asked Harriet impatiently. "I want to know the sort of singer; and you call him fine!"

Mr. Elliot never having heard of a definition, was naturally silent under this attack.

"Have you been to town lately?" asked Harriet.

"Yes. I am only just returned."

"Have you seen the new marbles then?"

"The—I beg your pardon."

"The marble from Xanthis in the British Museum?"

"I don't quite—I believe they took me once to the Museum when I was a boy in the Christmas holidays, along with the pantomimes." [Pg 192]

"Ah! it is not now in the same place with the pantomimes; we have changed all that," said Harriet. "I say, Hubert, my Skye terrier caught a rat yesterday out walking."

"No, did he? I wish I had been there," said Hubert, "Why did not you let me walk with you?"

"It was before you came home. Don't you know you were only just in time for dinner."

"So I was. What did you win of me, Miss Capel?"

"Nothing," said Margaret, "I would not bet at all."

"I was so sorry for your determination," said George Gage, across the table to Margaret, "it would have been such a pleasure to lose to you."

And upon this gallant speech, he and Harriet exchanged one of their singular glances.

"You did not care which horse won, did you?" asked Hubert. [Pg 193]

"Yes, I did," said Margaret, "but I knew that one would not win."

"Which was it?"

"Hyacinth. It was such a pretty name."

"And how did you contrive to form so correct an estimate of Hyacinth's merits?" asked George Gage.

"Oh! I knew nothing about it," said Margaret. "Harriet told me."

"Miss Conway has the advantage of a friend behind the scenes," said George coolly; and then another glance flashed across the table from Harriet's splendid eyes.

Mr. Elliot mentioned the name of the person to whom Hyacinth belonged—made some remark upon the fore-foot of the animal, and then was silent; naturally thinking that he had instructed the company enough for one while.

When Margaret returned to the drawing-room, she found her head so very much worse, that she was obliged to tell Elizabeth, in confidence, that she did not think she would be able to go to the ball. [Pg 194]

She said this with her eyes full of tears; partly on account of the delicate white crape dress, which was laid out in her room with its pretty garniture of lilac primroses.

Elizabeth was all kindness. She would not hear of her giving up the ball, but took her into her own sitting-room, and tried every remedy that her ingenuity could suggest. At last, while bathing her forehead with eau de Cologne, she exclaimed, "My dear child, I hope that foolish Harriet has not been persuading you to smoke."

"No, indeed!" said Margaret earnestly, "but it was the horrid scent of those cigars. I had no head-ache before."

"How vexatious!" exclaimed Miss Gage. "I must read her a lecture upon it. But if you keep very quiet until we set off, my dear Margaret, you may be able to go. I cannot endure that you should be disappointed. Indeed, two or three people," said she smiling, "will endure it as ill as myself." [Pg 195]

Margaret blushed, and wondered to herself who Elizabeth could mean; but she was suffering too much to make the attempt. She was too giddy to stand, too ill to think of undergoing another toilet, or to be able to sit up all night afterwards. She made the best of it, however; said the pleasure was only postponed; tried not to think of her lilac primroses, and laughed at Harriet who was really distressed, when she learned that she had caused her little friend's illness.

Hubert Gage was very much discomposed. He was quite certain that Margaret had not tried the proper remedies, and that if he could see her, he would set every thing to rights in a moment. She ought to have brandy—but ladies never knew what was good for them. His complaints were disregarded however; so he turned away and asked Blanche Somerton to dance with him.

Mr. Haveloc looked annoyed, "regretted exceedingly to hear that Miss Capel was suffering," and went to learn the particulars of Miss Gage. [Pg 196]

George seemed the most vexed of the party; for he naturally thought it was very wrong that every thing should not happen just as he liked, and he had wished to waltz with Margaret.

He therefore said, that for his part he did not think he should go to the ball that evening. He was not fond of dancing, and he really did think somebody ought to be at home, in case of Miss Capel becoming worse.

At this considerate announcement, Harriet drew up her handsome mouth as if she was going to whistle, and then coming forward, said, "I stay at home, Mr. Gage, and I imagine that I shall be very well able to take care of Miss Capel. Therefore you had better go and make yourself decent, and accompany your friends to the ball." [Pg 197]

This remark, which seemed to convey an opinion by no means flattering to Mr. Gage's costume, appeared rather to amuse him.

He said, that he did not know Miss Conway was such a judge of dress; and asked her if she could recommend him a model.

Captain Gage, hearing his son's declaration that he would stay at home, now came up in a great bustle. He had no idea of not taking with him both his handsome sons, as well as his daughter. He was very proud of his children, and pleased himself in the thought that they would excite great attention in the ball-room.

"No, my dear boy, you can't stay at home. Impossible!" he said. "We would all stay at home if we could do the poor thing any good. But here you would be only in the way. Would he not, Harriet?"

"Decidedly," said Harriet, with one of her flashing looks.

Mr. Gage bit his lip, and turned to leave the room. [Pg 198]

"There, go and make yourself decent," said Captain Gage, echoing Harriet's words. "Upon my honour, I am very sorry for the poor little girl. Her first ball too!" [Pg 199]

CHAPTER XI.

Aos homens todos
Lhes deu um livro so' a natureza,
O proprio coração.

CATÂO.

Nature hath given to all men one same book,
'Tis their own heart.

E se voi stanchi fossi d' ascoltare
Si vi potrete riposar in tanto.

ZINABI.

"I don't know when I have been so vexed," said Harriet, who was sitting with Margaret, while the ladies went up to dress. "I'm sure you will never be friends with me after this contretemps."

"Indeed I shall," said Margaret. "You could not help it, I know; and it is no such great misfortune after all."

Harriet drew the fire together, rang for coffee, and pushed over a footstool to Margaret. [Pg 200]

"We will try to make ourselves comfortable," said she. "I have told the women to come in and show you their dresses before they start. Then you shall have some strong coffee, and then to bed."

"I wish," said Margaret hesitating, "I wish you would tell me your history, as you promised."

"That is very sly," said Harriet laughing, "because I cannot refuse you anything under the circumstances. But I will do it, and the more readily, as I have not much to tell, so drink your coffee, and listen. Once upon a time—"

"Oh, but a real history if you please!" said Margaret.

"This is real," said Harriet, laughing.—"Must I not begin at the beginning? Well, if you like it, *tout court*. I am the youngest of the family. Mamma doats on me—Papa likes me very well. Charles, the one you have seen, is the eldest—he wears his glass in his eye—I do not think he has any other peculiarity. Then comes Lucy, she is a good girl, and I am very fond of her. I could tell you a secret that would a little surprise you; that is, if you have observed any of the bye-play of the last day or two." [Pg 201]

"Oh, do!" said Margaret. "I really will keep it."

"I believe you!" said Harriet. "It shall come in due course. My second brother, Evan, is just called to the bar. He has a good deal of character, and is therefore my favourite. I should rather like you to see Evan. Alfred, the youngest son, is in the army; and there is the outline of a Baronet's family."

"It is very amusing," said Margaret. "I like better to hear real stories than to read them."

"For me," said Harriet. "I was very sickly as a child, and I spent most of my time with an uncle, who is very fond of me, and who lives in a romantic part of the country, and keeps up an old manor-house in the old English style. My uncle and aunt Singleton are both characters—but I can't stay to describe all my relations." [Pg 202]

"Oh do! I like descriptions," said Margaret.

"Well. Aunt Singleton is the quietest little dormouse that ever was seen. She creeps about the

house in her black silk gown, is as deaf as a post, and speaks in a whisper. My uncle is a keen sportsman; he taught me to ride, and drive, and angle; and established my health, without improving my manners. He is very proud of me, because he has made me what I am. People think I am trying to imitate Die Vernon, when I am merely following the pursuits natural to such a course of education."

"And how did you learn your lessons all the while?" asked Margaret.

"Never learned any;" replied Harriet. "I picked up French from a lady's-maid; Italian, from a music master, who could not speak English; and Spanish, when my father was Envoy at Madrid. I [Pg 203] can speak and write these languages almost as well as my own; and this with a good deal of desultory reading, is the sum total of my education. I don't even know the multiplication table!"

Margaret laughed.

"You saw Lord Raymond on the course to-day."

"Yes," replied Margaret.

"He used often to pay my uncle a visit, and he always took the notice of me that men are apt to take of children. I used to ride with him and my uncle. I was very fond of horses and dogs, and enjoyed field sports as much as he did. Every visit he paid, Lord Raymond asked me if I would be his little wife; and I as regularly said, 'no, thank you.' I always thought he was unable to leave off any habit. He has just left off this one though."

"Has he?" said Margaret inquiringly.

"You shall hear. Well, when I was about seventeen, George Gage came to see my uncle. We took a [Pg 204] vast fancy to each other; that is, after our fashion:—we were neither of us in the Romeo and Juliet school. Fools—as you can imagine."

Margaret's interest became very deep at this crisis.

Harriet threw her curls off her forehead, and went on.

"He admired my riding and my eyes, and, in fact, every thing I said and did. My uncle was contented; Captain Gage was pleased; we were said to be too young, and the affair was put off for a year or two. Never do that, by the way, if you care about the man. I like to mix a little useful advice with my tale, you observe."

"Why, I think," said Margaret, "that if his love would not last any time, it had better go before than after marriage."

"I thought," said Harriet, "that he had enough love to last to all eternity; but I was mistaken. And if he thought the same of me, he was mistaken too."

At these words she drew herself up proudly, and again scattered her short curls. [Pg 205]

"He went off to his regiment; and the next thing I heard of him was that he was at the feet of a married woman—a lady famous for detaching men from their lawful allegiance, whether as husbands or lovers. This Mrs. Max—but we will not mention names."

"Mrs. Maxwell Dorset!" exclaimed Margaret starting up in her chair.

"What, you have heard of her?" said Harriet, "I believe she enjoys a pretty extensive reputation. Is your head worse? I have been talking too much for you, I am afraid."

"Not at all," said Margaret, leaning back again, "pray go on; and will you give me another cup of coffee?"

"You shall have it," said Harriet, "one need not forget to eat and drink; that is the last stage of that most deplorable folly—love. Well—I do not look like a person who would put up with such conduct, do I?"

"No," said Margaret smiling.

"I wrote immediately to George to signify that as he had made his choice, he might abide by it— [Pg 206] that he was welcome to be Mrs. such a one's slave, but that I resigned every sort of claim to the honour. I thought he deserved a little better than Lazarillo de Tormes, who played the part of lackey to seven mistresses—the rascal—and at last was almost demolished by two viragos who contended for his services in the open street."

She laughed scornfully, and went on.

"This made rather a cabal in the family, you may suppose. Papa, who thought one daughter was disposed of, looked very blank upon my proceedings. Captain Gage—just like him—took my part. He said that George had behaved shamefully, and though he hoped it would all come right again, he could not wonder at my determination. But these things never do come right again, Margaret."

Margaret sighed.

"The strangest part of the whole affair was George's conduct. He had been, before this [Pg 207] transaction, not at all better than his neighbours—and that is saying little enough for any man—

indeed, as my good aunt told me, I might reasonably have expected what happened. My aunt was right, though I own, I could have called her out at the time for saying so. Well, he suddenly turned over a new leaf; renounced his extravagances, cut Mrs. Maxwell Dorset, and became quite a moral character. In fact, behaved as people are supposed to do upon an engagement instead of a repulse. This was all his pride; just to show me what an exemplary character I had thrown away."

"And you," said Margaret, "how did you bear it?"

"Very coolly, I promise you;" said Harriet, "I grew thin, and irritable, and so yellow that I was afraid to look at my own face in the glass. Aunt Singleton plagued me with asses milk. Uncle Singleton gave me a capital hunter. I don't know which remedy it was, but I very soon forgot all about Master George." [Pg 208]

Margaret did not quite believe this, but she made no remark.

"Still," continued Harriet, "I was very glad when papa was appointed Envoy to Madrid. I insisted on going with him, and enjoyed our residence in Spain beyond all description. Just before we set out, Lord Raymond asked me again to be his little wife. I was not exactly in the frame of mind to feel pleased with his politeness; so I told him, that I was tired of having to answer the same idle question, and so took leave of him in a pet.

"We were two years at Madrid; when we came back, the first person I saw was Lord Raymond. I was afraid he was going to bore me again. Not at all. He took the first opportunity to tell me that Lucy had been more complaisant than I had; that they were engaged, but wished to keep it a profound secret for the present, while his pecuniary affairs are undergoing certain regulations. [Pg 209] But that dog in the manger, George, thinks that Lord Raymond's attentions are directed to me; and cannot contain his malice on the subject, although it is certainly no concern of his."

"I do not wonder he thinks so," said Margaret, "I am sure I did."

"Yes! because poor Lord Raymond cannot pay Lucy the attention he would wish to do," said Harriet, "and because from habit, he has always been used to consider me as somebody that he ought to follow about, and make a fuss with; and as he is really kind-hearted, he fidgets about me ten times more, now that I have been very ill."

"And about your illness," said Margaret.

"Nothing romantic, I can assure you," said Harriet. "I went to see my Uncle Singleton on my return, and one day, having paid a visit to the wife of one of his park-keepers, a young woman who had formerly been my maid, and who was then ill, I had the bad luck to catch her complaint, [Pg 210] which was typhus fever. You cannot imagine a greater bore; and I have lost all my hair you see, I have had both disorders, and I pronounce typhus fever to be considerably worse than the tender passion. I hope you may have neither. It is the best wish I can frame for you."

"Thank you for your wish and your story," said Margaret, "it is really a romance."

"That is the worst of it," said Harriet, "I am twenty, and I have already lived a whole life; there is no more excitement for me. I shall marry a country curate, and teach at Sunday schools, I think."

"What a great deal of romance there is in the world," said Margaret.

"True," said Harriet, "some writer says, 'that everybody's heart would be a romance if it were accurately delineated;' not everybody's, though!" she exclaimed with a peal of laughter, "that man who set next to me at dinner. What was his name?" [Pg 211]

"Mr. Elliot," said Margaret, beginning to laugh in her turn.

"Aye, Mr. Elliot—fancy his heart!" exclaimed Harriet, bursting into fresh peals of laughter, "the keenest pang he could feel would be hunger; his most exquisite enjoyment a pocket-full of money. No, cry you mercy—there must be some exceptions to the poet's rule."

"On my word, you two seem to be very merry," said Miss Gage, coming in, "I hope not more merry than wise. How is all this to agree with your head, my dear Margaret?"

"Oh, I have been so amused," said Margaret, taking Miss Gage's hand, "that I have forgotten the pain. How beautiful you look, Bessy."

"Yes," said Harriet looking attentively at her, "that white gauze with corn-flowers, has a very tolerable effect. How well they look on your light hair; commend me to such a high tiara of flowers. It gives you the aspect of an empress." [Pg 212]

Miss Gage laughed; and Harriet calling in the other ladies, commented upon them with as much indifference as if they had been a set of wax figures.

"There," said she, "what do you say to Lucy? Do you like pink crape, little one? It is very well made; but I prefer white for candlelight. Well, that is the most knowing little cap I have seen a long time, look Margaret; it is made of gold twist. Bravo! Miss Lawson Smith. That is an Indian fan, I suppose, Miss Selwyn. After all, I think Miss Somerton has the prettiest dress; those little bouquets are placed to a wish. Eh, Margaret!"

"They are all charmingly dressed," said Margaret, "pray, dear Bessy, remember to tell me all

about it."

"I will, indeed," said Elizabeth, "I will try and recollect everybody's partners; and the different ices at supper. Those are the two leading features of a ball."

"Shall you dance the Mazourka, Bessy?" asked Margaret.

"I—no; I dance very little," said Elizabeth, "a quadrille or two, just for form's sake." [Pg 213]

"She stands talking to her father," said Harriet, as soon as the ladies had withdrawn, "that is the way she spends the best part of the evening. I often wonder how Bessy can manage to keep single. She is so very much admired."

"How is it then?" asked Margaret.

"I suppose her father makes her fastidious," said Harriet, "indeed, I do not suppose she would easily find such a person as Captain Gage. I know two people now who would be very happy to die for her."

Margaret opened her eyes.

"Young Haveloc has been talked of for her; because they live in the same county," said Harriet; "but any child can see there is nothing in that quarter. By the way, he is very intimate with my brother Evan."

"Indeed," said Margaret.

"Well, good night, my poor little martyr," said Harriet; "I am heartily sorry for you, because, until you have tried, you cannot possibly know what a very stupid affair a ball is." [Pg 214]

Margaret returned her farewell, and went to bed, her head full of races, Mr. Gage, Mrs. Maxwell Dorset, her white crape gown, and Bessy's wreath of corn-flowers. [Pg 215]

CHAPTER XII.

Her whyles Sir Calidore there vowed well,
And markt her rare demeanure, which him seemed
So farre the meane of shepheards to excell,
As that he in his mind her worthy deemed
To be a prince's paragone esteemed.

SPENSER.

Margaret breakfasted with Miss Gage in her dressing-room the next morning, and heard all the particulars that she wished to know respecting the ball. She went down stairs about the middle of the day, and the first person she saw was Harriet Conway standing on the lawn outside the drawing-room windows, talking to Lord Raymond, while Hubert Gage and Mr. Conway were teazing her Skye terrier at a little distance. As soon as she caught sight of Margaret, she came to the window and greeted her. [Pg 216]

"Quite well, really? That is right! No remains whatever of that unlucky head-ache? I hope devoutly the dog will bite you both!" she exclaimed, turning round to the gentlemen.

Hubert left the dog to its fate, and came up to condole with Margaret upon her disappointment of the last evening—his disappointment he ought to say; for he was sure that he had been the greatest sufferer on the occasion.

Margaret, knowing very well that he had been dancing, and enjoying himself all the evening, laughed, and said she was sorry for him.

Lord Raymond, who was just going off, took Harriet on one side, and seemed to be talking very earnestly to her. Mr. Conway joined Margaret at the window with the dog, and conversed with her in a very condescending manner; tried to persuade her to think Donald a great beauty, and told her how much money the little beast was worth. [Pg 217]

While they were thus employed, Mr. Gage came into the drawing-room, and advanced leisurely to Margaret. He immediately caught sight of Harriet and Lord Raymond; but he was far too experienced to suffer any vexation to be traced in his manner. He made the most anxious inquiries after Miss Capel's health; regretted very much the loss their party had sustained on the previous night; abused the ball as intolerably stupid; and tried to persuade Margaret to allow him to drive her out after luncheon. He hoped now that she had seen how quiet his horses were, she would feel disposed to trust herself with him. He trusted that Miss Harriet Conway had inspired Miss Capel with a little of her courage.

Harriet, hearing her own name, turned round, and seeing George Gage, coloured, waved her hand to him by way of "good morning," and then renewed her conversation with Lord Raymond. His Lordship did not speak very fast; and like many people, the more he made up his mind to go, the farther he was from going. He had to say a great many things which he was very earnest in delivering, and which made Harriet laugh very much; and the bystanders would hardly have imagined that the substance of his narrative was the history of some tulip roots which his sister had paid a great deal of money for, and which, owing to some carelessness on her part, had never [Pg 218]

blossomed at all.

Meantime, while Mr. Gage talked to Margaret of the flower-show, he was watching every movement and look of Harriet's; and his patience was going by inches, while he appeared much interested in moss roses and Neapolitan violets. At last he said to Mr. Conway in a remarkably calm manner, that considering his sister was an invalid, it occurred to him that it was hardly prudent to stand out in a high wind without a shawl.

Mr. Conway laughed, said it was true enough; but that Harriet had a will of her own, and would not thank him if he interrupted her conversation for the minor consideration of a bonnet and cloak. [Pg 219]

"What is that you say of me?" asked Harriet, running up to the window, having just parted from Lord Raymond. "Here, Hubert, stand out of the way, you are such giants, you Gage's. Give me my dog, Charles. Now, Margaret, if you wish to see a beauty—but what were you saying of me?"

"Merely remarking that it would have been unpardonable to break in upon your tête-á-tête to save you from the chance of another illness. I ventured to think that you were slightly clad for so cold a wind," said Mr. Gage, drawing his chair to the fire, as if in proof of the inclement weather.

"People have no business to think at all upon my proceedings," said Harriet, carelessly, "Hubert! I wish you would go and get Donald a little bit of meat on a plate; he ought to have his dinner about this time of day. My dog is not a dog in the manger," she added; drawing close to Margaret with Donald in her arms. "How frightened you look. He does not hear me." [Pg 220]

"He will be worth nothing for sport if you nurse and pet him so," said her brother, "you had much better have a lap-dog."

"Now is not that quite a man's idea?" said Harriet laughing, "if you can make anything of use to you, well; but you have literally no notion of companionship. You judge everything by what it would fetch; and why you ever marry, I cannot think, unless you get some money by the bargain."

"Oh! that is too severe upon my word. Do not you think so?" said Hubert, turning to Margaret.

"I hope so," said Margaret, "but I have seen too little to judge."

"I cannot think that experience will ever make you judge hardly of others," said Mr. Gage in a soft voice to Margaret. [Pg 221]

"Experience will tell her that to judge truly, is to judge hardly in five cases out of ten," said Harriet disdainfully.

"Luncheon is ready," exclaimed Hubert, taking Margaret's hand and hurrying her out of the room, "and a good thing too, for our discussion was growing rather stormy; and I have no objection to interrupt my courtier of a brother in his pretty speeches."

Margaret laughed as she took her seat at the table, and said she thought that pretty speeches ran in the family. She felt now perfectly at her ease with both brothers; feeling convinced that George was still attached to Harriet Conway, and that Hubert did not know what it was to be attached to any body.

"Oh, by the way!" said Hubert, as he drew a chair beside Margaret, "Haveloc would go off after breakfast. He made many inquiries about you, and was very sorry, as everybody was, last night. Bread! to be sure, I beg you a thousand pardons. Now don't starve; it is dreadful to see women eat so little, it reminds me of that story,—did you ever read the Arabian Nights?" [Pg 222]

"Often," said Margaret, "you mean the story of the Ghoul. I do not mean to be a Ghoul to-day; you may give me some chicken."

"That's right," said Hubert. "Hallo! here is the Governor with that old wretch, Casement. How I wish Haveloc was here; he hates the old fellow so cordially. Don't you?"

"I am glad he is away," said Margaret, "for they always quarrel."

"You are an angel of peace," exclaimed Hubert, gazing at her with admiration.

"Pray don't be sentimental at luncheon," said Margaret, laughing, "it is so very inappropriate."

Captain Gage and Mr. Casement now came up to the table. Captain Gage took a vacant chair on the other side of Margaret; shook hands, and said a great many kind things to her on her loss of the ball; hoped it would not be long before there was another in the neighbourhood; wondered what people were about that they did not give as many dances as they used to do, and insisted on her drinking a glass of wine. Mr. Casement stopped short, and taking out his glasses, surveyed everybody at table with much deliberation; and odious as he was, there was something in his manner which showed that he had been used to a great deal of society, and that he held himself on a level with everybody he met. [Pg 223]

"Hallo!" said he, "you have got a party together. How do you manage to keep them out of mischief; eh, Captain? There is something going on at your elbow there, as I'm alive. Eh, little woman! Shall I go home and tell uncle?"

Margaret coloured deeply. Miss Gage shook her head at Mr. Casement.

"Miss Gage, your most devoted," said he, bowing to her. "No, I never touch anything at this time of day—well, for once, give me a bit of tongue, little woman. Thank you, Master Hubert." [Pg 224]

And not being able to express himself fully, under the kind but commanding eye of Miss Gage, he was obliged to content himself by making a face at Hubert and Margaret, which was intended to speak the contents of a whole valentine.

"And who is that curly-headed thing yonder?" said Mr. Casement pointing with his glasses to Harriet.

"My niece, Harriet," said Captain Gage, who was so used to hear Harriet call him uncle, that he forgot at the moment that their relationship was rather more distant.

"Niece—by Adam's side," said Mr. Casement. "Eh, Captain Gage! it looks rather suspicious when gentlemen call ladies their nieces—ha! ha!"

"Sir!" said George Gage, staring in his most arrogant manner at Mr. Casement.

"Eh! you there Master George?" said Mr. Casement. "I thought you could not get leave; really, when one considers what a farce the service is now-a-days, one is puzzled to know why you should not get leave, as you call it, every mother's son of you at once. What are you doing over in Ireland?" [Pg 225]

George Gage seemed very little disposed to give Mr. Casement an answer; but after staring at him haughtily for a moment, he replied "Nothing." And then turning to his sister, he asked her some questions about her plans for the afternoon.

"Do you know, Uncle Gage," said Harriet, "that I am going to stay here a whole week longer?"

"The longer the better," said Captain Gage. "I wish you were all going to stay. The house will seem deserted when you are gone."

Lady Conway made some polite reply to this speech, and thanked Miss Gage for taking charge of Harriet, for she knew they were to have a very gay week at Wardenscourt, and it was important that Harriet should be quiet. [Pg 226]

George Gage on hearing this announcement, directed his merciless stare to Harriet in some surprise; for Wardenscourt was Lord Raymond's place, and it seemed but natural that she should have made an effort to go there.

Harriet cared nothing for his gaze; she was used to be looked at, and she did not even seem to perceive that his eyes were upon her; she kept her eyes on her plate, and a suppressed smile played for an instant on her cheek, as she said, "Ah! Wardenscourt; they are sure to be really gay there. It is the only house almost—but I shall have the pleasure of being with you Bessy."

"Wardenscourt is not far off, fortunately," said George.

Harriet looked up, still smiling.

"No," she said. "I hope Lord Raymond will come over one morning to tell me about the pointers his keeper is training for Uncle Singleton. Take care that you remind him, Lucy." [Pg 227]

Lucy laughed and coloured. Margaret felt very much inclined to laugh too.

"It will be worth while for him to come over," said George, "if he occupies you as profitably as he did this morning."

"How was that, Mr. Gage?" asked Lady Conway.

"The fact is this, mamma," said Harriet hastily, "Mr. Gage having forgotten my out of door propensities, was astonished to see me standing on the lawn for a few minutes without my bonnet."

"Oh! pray be careful while we are away, my dear," said Lady Conway. "You must not take cold."

They were rising. Mr. Gage drew back Harriet's chair; and she, in passing out, fixed her splendid eyes upon him, and muttered in a distinct manner, 'Tu me lo pagherai.'

He bowed as if to say, he was willing to make payment at any time.

The ladies remained loitering among the beautiful plants in the hall, and Elizabeth coming up to Margaret, urged her, in a low voice, to stay with her as long as Harriet remained at Chirke Weston. [Pg 228]

"It will be more cheerful for both of you, and though I do not propose her as a model for your imitation; you are safe with her, she always speaks the truth. And your uncle can better spare you now Mr. Haveloc is with him."

Margaret accepted with much pleasure, and the visitors having now all dropped off, she began really to enjoy herself. They walked out, accompanied by George and Hubert over a beautiful country.

Hubert divided his attentions very much between Margaret and the Skye terrier.

Harriet took her own course, swinging in her hand a little riding-whip which had a whistle at the

end of it, with which she was used to summon her dog.

George walked with Elizabeth, being out of humour, and thinking very properly that his sister was created for the especial purpose of cheering him under the influence of that complaint. [Pg 229]

She succeeded in doing so, for her evenness of temper was remarkable. She agreed that it was a miserable day—that the wind was keen—that it was very likely to rain—that the ball had been a dull one, and that the post came in at Chirke Weston at an inconvenient time—and then, (for it does not answer to agree too much with people,) she qualified his censures of Lord Raymond, defended her father's black cravats, maintained there would be a great many people at the flower-show, and said she had not at all pitied him for being obliged to dance with Lady Farquhar, though she was fat, and five and forty.

George being a little restored by this time, began to grow confidential. He told Elizabeth that he was very thankful that things had turned out as they did between Harriet and him. That he was convinced she had no heart. That she was very well suited to Lord Raymond, and he had no doubt but that they would be extremely happy! [Pg 230]

He said this in rather an angry tone, and did not look as if he at all wished that their married life should prove an Elysium; so Elizabeth changed the subject.

"What do you think of my little friend?" she asked. "You must admire Margaret."

"Yes," he said. "She is a lovely little creature, but such a mere child, and so shy; and it is too much to expect that one can take the trouble to draw a woman out. I should not be surprised if she was to grow a little taller, which would be an advantage. She dresses well, and her hand and arm is really a model. I was struck with it immediately. And I am glad to perceive," he said, directing his glance to Margaret, as she walked on in front with Hubert and Harriet against a pretty strong breeze. "I am glad to see that her foot and ancle is equally perfect."

"Well," said Elizabeth smiling. "On the whole, your decision seems to be favourable." [Pg 231]

"Yes, decidedly," said Mr. Gage quite seriously. "I am very well pleased; for I have not been used to be ashamed of my sister, and I should care to be ashamed of my sister-in-law; for that I suppose will be the end of it, Bessy?"

"I shall be very glad if it is so," replied Elizabeth.

"He might do worse," said Mr. Gage. "Sailors are so *inconsèquent*. They often marry the most extraordinary persons—people that one never has heard of. Miss Capel, however, seems highly respectable. But," he added in a low tone, "to put that little doll in competition with such a woman as Harriet! Hubert need not fear me for a rival."

"Very fortunately," said Elizabeth smiling, "it would be dreadful if we were to have the Theban brothers over again."

"They fought for a crown, not a woman," said Mr. Gage, "being wise men."

"Is Mr. Gage very amusing to you, Bessy?" said Harriet, looking back, "that you don't come to join our party?" [Pg 232]

Elizabeth good-naturedly quickened her steps, and Harriet said aloud to Margaret, "It is a charity to break in upon their tête-á-tête, for Mr. Gage has grown so dull, I think he must have caught cold on the race ground."

Margaret looked frightened, and Mr. Gage pretended not to hear Harriet's speech.

Margaret was very happy during her stay at Chirke Weston. Hubert Gage was always paying her compliments which she laughed at, and contriving all sorts of schemes for her amusement, for which she was much obliged.

She became every day more attached to Elizabeth; she admired her character, and loved her sweetness; and it was delightful to see the terms upon which she lived with her father and brothers.

George Gage paid Margaret the most devoted attentions whenever he wished to pique Harriet, and at other times consigned her to the care of Hubert, as if he had too much delicacy to interfere with his brother's pretensions. Fortunately, she found amusement in the society of both brothers, without allowing their courtesies to penetrate her heart. [Pg 234]

CHAPTER XIII.

> And she will die ere she make her love known; and she will die if he woo her, rather than she will 'bate one breath of her accustomed coyness.
>
> MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

It was the last day of Margaret's stay. Harriet was also to leave Chirke Weston the next morning. She was standing with Margaret in one of the drawing-room windows after breakfast, making her promise over and over again that she would come and see her at her uncle Singleton's, when

Lord Raymond drove up to the house in his dog-cart. He produced out of this vehicle the two pointers which Harriet had been anxious to see; and, on a signal from her hand, he brought them up to the window where she was standing.

As soon as she had done admiring and commenting upon these pointers, Lord Raymond delivered them to his groom to pack up in their box again, and joined Harriet in the drawing-room. Elizabeth looked up from her carpet-work, and received Lord Raymond with her usual graceful calmness; and George Gage who was writing at the other end of the room, rising from his letters, took a chair by the side of that distinguished nobleman, and engaged him in conversation; and as he did this with an air of extreme politeness, Margaret did not guess that his sole motive was to expose his rival's deficiency in that useful art. [Pg 235]

But Lord Raymond never actually conversed, he only answered questions. So, when he had told Mr. Gage that John Baldwin was a connexion of his, but that it was Ferdinand Baldwin who married Miss Thoresby; that he believed her fortune had been greatly overrated; that Ferdinand was a first cousin of John's;—that certainly Miss Thoresby had been engaged to a Colonel Carpenter, who had thought himself very much ill-used when she broke off the engagement; that Henry Baldwin was a Roman Catholic, and that there were a great many of that name in Staffordshire, he had nothing more to say for himself; and rising to depart, he asked Harriet whether she had any message to send to her sister at Wardenscourt. [Pg 236]

"Tell Lucy," said Harriet looking archly at Lord Raymond, "that I should be disposed to envy her if I were any where but at Chirke Weston."

As soon as Lord Raymond was gone, Mr. Gage stalked back to his writing, and Harriet, calling Margaret to her side, began a panegyric on his Lordship; vaunting his good principles, his kindness of heart, and above all his even temper.

As all these qualities may exist under a very ordinary exterior, Margaret had nothing to do but to acquiesce; but when Harriet went on to say that she thought him unquestionably the most aristocratic man that she had ever seen, Margaret opened her eyes with a gesture of astonishment; and Mr. Gage, throwing down his pen, in something like a passion, said that Miss Conway was known to be original in her opinions; but that certainly, he imagined, she would find herself perfectly unique in this idea. That most people would find it difficult to credit from his appearance that Lord Raymond was a gentleman—and that, except the late Earl of D——, the peerage had seldom been disfigured by such a specimen of humanity. [Pg 237]

"Did I say he was handsome, Squire Sullen?" retorted Harriet. "I merely gave my opinion of his deportment, which I consider quite fascinating."

"Unquestionably," Mr. Gage said, resuming his pen with great dignity. "Miss Conway's opinion of Lord Raymond was of more consequence than any other person's. He merely regretted that he could not in this instance agree with it." [Pg 238]

Harriet merely replied by one of her most scornful looks. Mr. Gage took up the newspaper, and Hubert, coming in at the moment, persuaded Elizabeth and Margaret to go with him to one of the hot-houses to see some beautiful American plants.

Now on this very morning it chanced that Mrs. Somerton felt it her duty to call at Chirke Weston.

For, as she said, it was impossible to know what that artful little creature, Margaret Capel was about with those two brothers, unless she went to see it with her own eyes; and that it was Blanche's business to counteract her as much as possible: that if Margaret had really entangled Hubert, to flirt with him would be a mere waste of time; but that although George was not an impressible subject, yet by management, something might be done with him. Even a little attention from so fastidious a person might be of service to her; for there were several men in the neighbourhood who took for gospel all that George Gage chose to say. [Pg 239]

"Ah!" said the amiable Blanche, "it is very well that I know how to manage matters without your help! See what you have done for my sister. Thank you! I don't wish to follow her example. I shall find a match for myself!"

"You are looking very well to day," said Mrs. Somerton, putting up her glass, "if you would but wear your hair a little lower on your face."

"Much obliged," retorted Blanche. "I say, look at my sister, as complete an old maid as ever lived; all owing to your valuable hints. She has nothing for it now but to go to Missionary meetings, and pick up a stray Methodist preacher."

"There is one thing," said Mrs. Somerton, exasperated by this attack. "I don't believe anybody ever had such ill-disposed ungrateful children as mine!" [Pg 240]

"Chips of the old block, I suppose," returned Blanche laughing.

"Come, come;" said Mrs. Somerton, as they reached the entrance to Chirke Weston, "this is not to the purpose; recollect that George is your object to-day."

While this attack was preparing for the unconscious Mr. Gage, he was in the drawing-room pretending to read the paper, and employing himself in watching intently every movement of Harriet Conway.

As soon as Elizabeth was gone, Harriet took up a book, drew a footstool close to the fire, and sat down upon it. She wore a beautiful morning gown of purple Cashemere, worked in floss silk, and trimmed, and tied with cords and tassels. Her attitude was striking and graceful, and as she slowly turned the leaves of her book, the light of the fire sparkled on the costly rings that adorned her slender fingers.

Although Mr. Gage never removed his eyes from her, she feigned to be totally absorbed in her book, and unconscious of his presence. At last he approached her under pretence of mending the [Pg 241] fire.

She looked up and nodded to him.

"What is that you are reading?" said he. "A French novel? I thought ladies never did such things in public."

"I thought you knew, Squire—I mean Mr. Gage, that I am never ashamed of any thing I do," said Harriet. "Besides, this is a very readable one of Eugéne Sue's."

"Yes—a certain class of French novels are very harmless," said Mr. Gage.

"Look!" said Harriet, turning the book round, and holding it up so that he might read the title: 'Arthur.'

Now Mr. Gage had never read 'Arthur;' so he said directly, that it was a very clever work; indeed, in parts, really beautiful. There was something quite touching in one or two of the scenes.

As this might be safely said of any book written by Eugéne Sue, Mr. Gage was not out of his depth.

Harriet acquiesced, and asked him what he thought of the character of Hèléne. [Pg 242]

Mr. Gage replied without hesitation, that it was very ably depicted, but that his ideas of female perfection were not exactly formed upon that model.

"Too statuesque, perhaps, for your taste," said Harriet.

"Yes, that was the case," Mr. Gage said, catching at the hint. "He thought something a little less unbending more attractive in the female character."

"And do you not think Arthur very interesting, in spite of his faults?" said Harriet.

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Gage, "but whether he would find any favour with the fair sex, you can determine better than me."

"I don't know. I can't quite make out," said Harriet. "You see one would never be prepared for so strange a disposition. But how beautifully he describes scenery," she continued, turning the [Pg 243] leaves. "He makes quite a paradise of this cottage ornèe."

"Your taste," said Mr. Gage, in a very pointed manner. "Your taste would lead you to a much less simple style of architecture."

"Oh, yes!" said Harriet putting up her book to conceal her smiles. "I hate cottages. My idea of perfect felicity is to be found only in a nobleman's seat."

"I trust," said Mr. Gage, looking very grand and injured, "that you will never have reason to acknowledge yourself mistaken."

"Why, George," said Harriet, just trusting her laughing eyes over the top of her book, "how long have you been an advocate for living in cottages? I should think they must be just one degree worse than barracks."

"Heartless!" muttered Mr. Gage, turning away, and walking to the window.

Harriet buried her face in her handkerchief to stifle her laughter. She was not in the slightest [Pg 244] degree afraid that Mr. Gage would transfer his regard to another, in consequence of her provoking mystifications. She felt that she had regained her power over him, and that as long as she remained single, so would he. But she delighted in mischief, and would not for the world have let him discover that she cared anything about him. At this instant the bell rang.

"Now don't for Heaven's sake, George, leave me to entertain your guests," said Harriet, looking up with a very flushed face, "it is only fair to stay and support me."

"Pray don't call them my guests," said Mr. Gage, coming back, however, "I should have rather a different visiting list if this house were in my possession."

"Yes, your list would be very extensive if you lived in one of your favourite cottages," said Harriet, seating herself on the sofa; "all the neighbouring farmers and their wives. How I should like to [Pg 245] see you playing cribbage with Farmer Jenkins!"

Mr. Gage leaning against the mantelpiece, "regretted that he was unable to follow all Miss Conway's flights of fancy," and "was not aware that he had said anything that could lead her to suppose he intended forming an intimacy with Farmer Jenkins."

The door was opened and Mrs. Somerton and her daughter were announced. Harriet bowed

coldly; and Mr. Gage, after a still more frigid fashion.

Mrs. Somerton, who had seen the world, was not at all put out by this English reception; and Blanche with a manner full of *minauderie*, glanced sideways at Mr. Gage, and glided into a chair as near to him as she conveniently could. Now any person totally unacquainted with society, and forming their notions of good manners from abstract principles, would perhaps imagine that Mr. Gage and Harriet would instantly begin to talk to the visitors, and endeavour to amuse them until [Pg 246] Miss Gage should arrive. Not at all; they had seen enough of company, to know how much they might leave undone; a code much more extensively put in practice than that which might teach people how much to do.

Mr. Gage stared across at Mrs. Somerton. Harriet with her head drawn up, surveyed Blanche.

At last, Mr. Gage said to Harriet, "Have you any idea where Bessy is?"

"I suppose," said Harriet, "that she is somewhere among the hot-houses. Hubert said something about the American plants. I dare say she will be in to luncheon."

"It is not half past one yet," said Mr. Gage, pointing to the time-piece.

"That French piece of trumpery is always wrong," said Harriet.

"My watch is the same, all but two minutes," said Mr. Gage, taking it out.

"If they happened to meet your father, you know, he would carry them all over the country," [Pg 247] returned Harriet.

"Of course he would," said Mr. Gage, "whenever I see his straw hat, I make a point of getting out of the way. I have no idea of being handed round the farm yard, and introduced to every fresh litter of pigs."

"Have not you?" said Harriet mischievously. "I thought those humble pleasures belonged especially to the sphere of life you are so partial to. Most cottages, I believe in these days, can boast a pig-stye."

Mr. Gage hardly knew whether to laugh or be angry; at that moment Elizabeth and Margaret made their appearance together, followed by Hubert with a splendid bouquet of flowers.

Elizabeth seated herself beside Mrs. Somerton. Hubert delivered the flowers to Margaret, and drew his chair close to hers.

"But what am I to do with all these, Mr. Hubert?" said Margaret. [Pg 248]

"You are to wear all these heaths this evening, you know," he said selecting the heaths from the nosegay. "I will make a wreath for you."

"But how very smart I shall be," said Margaret, hesitatingly.

"Oh! you promised—you will not draw back; see this is the way I shall mix them. All the shades, from white to crimson—no, a cluster will be prettier than a wreath. You cannot refuse—your last day. Ah! how beautiful you will look—but that you always do. Come, you will promise to wear them?"

"Will you promise to talk something like sense then Mr. Hubert?" said Margaret archly. "These striped camellias are for you, Harriet."

"Thanks, little one," said Harriet. "Tell Hubert to keep them all in water for us till we go up to dress." [Pg 249]

Mr. Gage, by this time, having noticed Blanche's childish, sparkling face, and pretty figure, condescended to say to her in a haughty tone, "Did you walk here?"

"To be sure!" said Blanche, "such a beautiful morning. I would not have had the carriage out on any account."

There was one slight drawback to her using a carriage, if she wished it; namely, that she did not possess a vehicle of any description. But Mr. Gage who was very little at home, and who knew nothing of the concerns of his neighbours, was easily imposed upon.

"Yes," he said rather less haughtily, "It was hardly worth while for a short distance."

"And then I am such a walker!" said Blanche, her pretty face kindling and dimpling with smiles; "I am never tired of wandering about this lovely country. I told mamma positively that I never would pass a season in town. My sister is there now with our relation, Lady K——, in the midst of balls [Pg 250] and gaieties. But I should think them a very poor exchange for the Ashdale woods."

Had Mr. Gage possessed more than the usual amount of penetration, he could not have been expected to guess that Blanche was in a perpetual ill-humour, because her sister was in town this season instead of herself; he merely thought it was odd for so pretty a girl to be contented with retirement, and that there was something rather attractive in the novelty of it.

"I suppose your tastes are quite pastoral," said Mr. Gage, relaxing still more of his dignity. "I dare say, if the truth were told, you have a pet lamb, which you crown with flowers every morning before breakfast."

"Oh, Mr. Gage!" said Blanche shaking her head with a little air of reproach, "the days are gone by when country people were obliged to depend on such childish amusements. We can have new books and music now, almost as soon as they appear in town. Indeed, we can bring everything from London, but its smoky atmosphere." [Pg 251]

Harriet who had been watching Hubert arranging the flowers in a glass, now turned round and beheld Mr. Gage actually talking to Blanche Somerton,—bending down and smiling at her. She coloured with anger and contempt.

"Mr. Gage," said she, pointing to a work-box close to him, "shall I trouble you to give me that box?"

Mr. Gage brought it her; she took out of it what she wanted, and then returned him the box. He sat down beside her still holding it.

"I think you don't often work," he said. "I do not remember to have seen you."

"No. This is not work exactly; this is crochet," said Harriet, holding up a purse of blue and silver twist. "Don't you think it very handsome?"

"Yes. Only so stiff; you could not draw it through a ring." [Pg 252]

"Of course not; it is to have a clasp. See, this will match it very well; silver and turquoise. Now, wrap it up again in the silver paper. Put it neatly away. Now who do you think it is for?"

Mr. Gage's brow darkened.

"Uncle Singleton! When he plays at cards, he always likes to have a handsome purse. Would you believe it? I think it is only that he may have the pleasure of saying, 'My niece Harriet made this for me.!'"

"You are a great favourite there," said Mr. Gage, looking quite comfortable again.

"Can you wonder?" said Harriet, looking very like a coquette into his face.

"No indeed," replied Mr. Gage.

"It was there I first met Lord Raymond," said Harriet, heaving a deep sigh.

Mr. Gage put down her work-box, and rose from the sofa; but he did not return to Blanche, he went to his newspaper.

"Too bad!" said Blanche to herself, swelling with rage and spite. "She does not want him for herself, and yet she must needs interfere with me, when I was getting on so nicely. A malicious creature! I should like to drown her! I don't think anything in this world so mean as to interrupt another's flirtation when you have no good reason for doing it." [Pg 253]

And Blanche crossed the room and tried very hard to detach Hubert from Margaret.

George Gage did not at all recover this last attack before dinner-time; he was very grand and sullen. Harriet, on the contrary, was in the wildest spirits. In many respects Margaret thought these two very well suited to each other. Kind and cordial as Harriet was to her, nothing could exceed her pride; and she was as haughty and as distant to people, whom she did not consider on a level with herself, as Mr. Gage could be. Her manners that morning were merely a sample of her general style of behaviour. A cold stare, and a monosyllable were all she vouchsafed to any of the village people who happened to be on visiting terms at Chirke Weston, and the only subject on which she and George Gage were sure to sympathise, was disgust at the intrusion of such persons while they condescended to honour the house with their presence. At such times, their eyes would meet with an expression of endurance very different from the hostile looks they so frequently exchanged. [Pg 254]

Harriet came down to dinner looking like an old picture. She wore a high dress of black satin, ornamented with Spanish buttons of gold filigree. Her hair was frizzed out round her head like some of Van Dyck's early pictures, and the striped camellias put in just behind the ear—she seemed determined to look her best this last evening.

George Gage stared directly. He had a great fancy for seeing women in fine clothes; and clothes that looked as if they cost a great deal of money. He took her into dinner, and tried to command his temper, and keep up a conversation with her. [Pg 255]

"You drove out after luncheon, did you not?"

"Yes. Did not you hear Uncle Gage and me planning a secret expedition together?"

"No. Might I ask where you went?"

"We went all the way to S——. Are you not very anxious to learn our object?"

"If it is not a breach of confidence, certainly."

"You could not guess, Mr. Gage?"

"I fear not."

"It was to get pack-thread for garden-nets."

"A very important mission," said Mr. Gage.

"You will think it important when the season comes for fruit; but, perhaps, you will not be here." [Pg 256]

"I shall not. I go back to Ireland in about a fortnight."

"Still you know, though you will not be here to steal the plums, other people will be enjoying them; and you can leave word with the gardener to send your friend, little Blanche Somerton, the first basket of ripe cherries."

"I really do not know any person of that name," said Mr. Gage, indignantly.

"Well, after that!" said Harriet lifting up her hands. "Hubert, I hope you saw what was going on this morning."

"Oh, yes! I saw plainly enough," said Hubert. "She is a great flirt, that little thing; and rather pretty, I think."

"Very pretty!" said Harriet magnanimously. "I was not blaming Mr. Gage. I merely suggested a little offering—quite a cottage offering Mr. Gage."

"Oh! the little creature who was here this morning," said Mr. Gage; "rather a nice little creature! [Pg 257] Yes, I should not object taking her a basket of cherries."

"You could eat them with her like Napoleon, you know," said Harriet.

Here Hubert burst into a violent fit of laughter, at the idea of his brother doing anything like Napoleon.

"She is a very pretty girl," said Captain Gage, joining in the discussion. "Did not you dance with her a good deal at the ball, Hubert?"

"Yes, Sir, that is, I believe, once or twice. That miserable ball," he added in a low voice to Margaret.

"Oh, Mr. Hubert!" said Margaret laughing.

Elizabeth Gage did not say one word either for or against Blanche Somerton. She knew her to be almost devoid of good qualities; but she knew that people, men especially, will always form their own opinion.

"You shall sing, little one;" said Harriet to Margaret after tea. "I will not let you off any longer." [Pg 258]

"No. It distresses her, Harriet," said Elizabeth kindly, "I never press her."

"I dare say. Is she to have her own way always? I want to hear the quality of her voice," said Harriet positively.

"Indeed, Harriet, I am not a man; you might let me have my way," said Margaret, shrinking back from the piano.

"My dear Harriet, I hope you apply that remark; there is a little bit of unconscious satire in it," said Elizabeth.

"Bah! there is no truth in it. I never tyrannise," said Harriet, laughing. "But as I am not so timid, I will try and sing you something. Mr. Gage, you like Italian music. Have you ever heard this?"

She sang beautifully. Margaret was entranced.

Mr. Gage came round to the piano to look at the name of the song. It was 'Senza pace, senza speme;' and on the top was written, as if with a coarse lead pencil:— [Pg 259]

"Harriet Conway,
from Lord Raymond."

Now Margaret had seen Harriet busy writing something on the song with a pencil, a few minutes before she had sat down to sing, and she could not help wondering at the perseverance with which she contrived to teaze Mr. Gage. It need not be said that Lord Raymond had never given her the song, although from his long intimacy with her family there would have been no great crime if he had.

Mr. Gage, who had taken the song from the stand, dropped it again as if it had burnt his fingers.

"Is it not a beautiful thing?" said Harriet looking up at Mr. Gage. "He has such a taste for music!"

"Who has, my dear?" asked Captain Gage.

"Lord Raymond, uncle."

"Has he, indeed?—I never knew that before," said Captain Gage. "Why he has never any music at [Pg 260] his house, unless there is a very large party."

"He has no wife, you know, Uncle Gage, and he cannot play the piano himself."

"He must marry a good musician, then," said Captain Gage. "I don't know anything that more

contributes to the cheerfulness of a family circle than a little good music."

"So Lord Raymond seems to think," said Mr. Gage, in a low voice to Harriet.

"Yes. Nothing so very first-rate though," said Harriet, thinking of Lucy, who played in a pleasing style, but nothing more, on the harp and piano.

"Oh! you are too modest," said Mr. Gage.

"Thank you," said Harriet laughing. "Do you think me then such a very good player?"

"Can you never be serious?" said Mr. Gage, turning away reproachfully.

Harriet laughed more merrily than before at the tone of this last remark. Margaret watched them [Pg 261] earnestly. Surely, she thought, this last evening something will be said, something will occur, to bring about an understanding. Harriet will surely not be able to keep up this appearance of indifference to the last.

But the tapers were brought in, people wished each other good night, and Harriet touched Mr. [Pg 262] Gage's fingers, and bade him good bye, as if she should see him to-morrow. And the next day, before he had left his room, she was on her way to join her friends at Wardenscourt.

CHAPTER XIV.

Her words were like a stream of honey fleeting,
The which doth softly trickle from the hive,
Able to melt the hearer's heart unweeting
And eke to make the dead again alive.

Much like an angel in all form and fashion.
SPENSER.

Margaret was welcomed to Ashdale with such sincere pleasure by Mr. Grey and her Italian greyhound, that she could not find it in her heart to regret the social circle she left behind. Seated in a low chair by her uncle's side, with Gessina on her lap, she spent the evening alternately in playing with her beautiful pet, and of giving him a history of her week's visit.

Mr. Grey, like many people who live very retired, delighted in this species of gossip. He was [Pg 263] pleased to hear the names of the people who dined at Captain Gage's during her stay, and the dresses which Margaret had worn on each day. And if, during her narrative, she happened to mention a name that was familiar to him, he would interrupt her to remark that he had known a person of that name many years ago, who was of such a county; and to wonder whether the one Margaret had met, was related or not, to his old acquaintance.

These episodes were sometimes interrupted by the perverseness of Gessina, who would creep under the sofas, or the heavy chairs, and had to be fished out from these hiding places by the united industry of Mr. Haveloc and Margaret.

These little pursuits seemed to bring them still more acquainted, so that sometimes she ventured to appeal to him during her recollections to confirm her statements.

"And so she lost the ball at last, poor child," said Mr. Grey drawing her towards him. "What a pity [Pg 264] that was!"

"Oh, yes uncle! I was very sorry at first. But I had such a head-ache. Do you ever smoke cigars, Mr. Haveloc?"

"I have done such a thing," said he smiling. "But it is not a practice of mine."

"And how did you spend that evening, my love?" said Mr. Grey, who had not perceived the connexion between the ball and the cigars.

"I sat talking with Harriet Conway until I went to bed. Do you know Harriet, Sir?"

"I have not seen her, my dear, since she was a child," said Mr. Grey.

"Oh! She is so handsome, Sir. Is she not, Mr. Haveloc? I think she was the handsomest girl in the party, except Bessy, I hardly know which to say."

"Which do you decide for, Claude?" asked Mr. Grey.

Mr. Haveloc paused a little, glanced at Margaret with a smile, and said that he should not have [Pg 265] considered either of those ladies the beauty of the party. He had hardly noticed Miss Harriet Conway, but if he recollected her, she had fine eyes.

Margaret felt embarrassed for a moment, but feeling sure that his remark could not have referred to her in any way, she let the subject pass, and continued her account.

"The flower-show was very delightful, Sir. There was a band of music, and such a beautiful display of plants. Captain Gage's gardener had a prize for hyacinths. Do you know, Sir, that four of my hyacinths are blown in my dressing-room? I think I shall bring them down into the drawing-

room."

"Do, my love," said Mr. Grey.

"Bessy knew a great many people there, Sir; but Mr. Gage said he was bored. I wished he had not come with us. And Mr. Hubert frightened me, for he declared he was going to steal a cluster of [Pg 266] the flowers for Harriet and I; and there would have been such a scene!"

"And what did Miss Harriet say to that?" asked Mr. Grey.

"Oh! she laughed, and encouraged him," said Margaret. "But I think it was only to put me in a fright; and just then, Bessy came up, and asked if we would go, because Mr. Gage was so tired of it all."

"And did you have any more visitors afterwards?" asked Mr. Grey.

"Yes. Two foreigners, the Marquis de——, (a very long name that I cannot remember), and his son. They talked Spanish with Harriet, and French with the others. Mr. Hubert used always to contrive that I should sit next one of them, that I might be obliged to speak French."

"Hubert is rather mischievous, is he not?" said Mr. Grey.

"Oh! yes, Sir; but very good-natured; and so is Captain Gage. We went every day to see [Pg 267] something or other. Once we went to hear service in the Cathedral. I was so glad that Mr. Gage was not of the party that morning. I wish, Mr. Haveloc, you would go on reading."

"I will, indeed," said he, taking up his book. "Only I have some curiosity to know first, why you do not like George Gage?"

"You should not listen, Mr. Haveloc. One cannot like every body in the world—though I did not say I disliked him."

"The Gages are all handsome," said Mr. Grey, musing. "George called on me one day last week. I think it must have been the day you went to the Cathedral. He said the ladies were out sight-seeing. I was very glad to see him; and I took it kind, his coming to a dull house like this, to pay a visit to a poor invalid."

"Kind, indeed!" exclaimed Margaret, her beautiful face all in a glow. "I think he ought to feel much pleasure in seeing an old friend again. I recollect Mr. Hubert came directly to see you, and [Pg 268] he often talks of your kindness to him when a boy."

Mr. Grey laughed, and patted her on the head. "Well, you like Hubert the best it seems," he said. "But now tell me how you passed your evenings when you were alone."

"That was the pleasantest time, Sir. After dinner we went into Bessy's sitting-room; and one day, Harriet showed me how to make wreaths and trimmings of natural flowers. Bessy had a large basket gathered for us, and I wore them that evening; and then, Harriet is so clever, she used to give us descriptions of the people who live near Singleton Manor, and make us die of laughing. She can talk like the poor people in Somersetshire. And then Mr. Hubert used to come in before tea-time, and sometimes he would roast chestnuts on the bars of the grate—and we ate them, Harriet and I. Bessy could never persuade him to have them done by the housekeeper. And after [Pg 269] tea, we had always plenty of music, for Captain Gage likes music so much. And one evening Mr. Hubert would have a twelfth cake, because he had not been at home for so many Twelfth Nights; and Bessy was obliged to get one made on purpose at S——. And I was the Queen, uncle! Captain Gage drew the King, and would not give it up to Mr. Hubert. You should have seen Mr. Gage, uncle. He was obliged to join in it all, half against his will; and Harriet laughed at him so much for being grand."

"And so you passed a merry time of it;" said Mr. Grey.

"Very, Sir. But I was very glad to drive up the old avenue again, and see you and Gessina. Do you know, Sir, Mason said that as soon as Gessina heard the carriage she was wild to get down stairs."

"Was she, my love?" said Mr. Grey. There was a pause.

Mr. Grey fell asleep, Margaret caressed her dog, and Mr. Haveloc made a sketch of her attitude [Pg 270] in the fly-leaf of his book.

At last Margaret looked up.

"Oh! Mr. Haveloc, you have been to Italy. Do you not allow Gessina to be a beauty? Blanche Somerton said I ought to have had a white greyhound."

"She is a very pretty creature," said Mr. Haveloc, coming over to her side of the fire. "I believe the white ones are more expensive, which is quite sufficient to account for some people's preference."

"Oh! I do not care about that. I like this fawn colour. I declare I never saw such a beautiful head. Bessy says that the next time I go to Chirke Weston, I am to be sure and take her with me."

"Miss Gage is always considerate," said Mr. Haveloc.

"I know you think very highly of her," said Margaret colouring, "because you once advised me to consult her; and I think, in that affair, her opinion was very like yours." [Pg 271]

Mr. Haveloc smiled, and remained silent, watching Margaret, whose attitudes rivalled those of her greyhound in beauty.

"Mr. Haveloc," said Margaret, looking up again, and blushing, "what were you drawing just now?"

"So, you have some curiosity," he said, smiling.

"Because," she said timidly, "I should not wonder if you were drawing Gessina—and—I wish you would show it to me—if you were."

"With pleasure. I will just put a few more touches. You will not be satisfied if it is not a very flattering likeness."

"Have you done, Mr. Haveloc?"

"Not quite."

"Will you show it me presently, Mr. Haveloc? Will you show it me now?"

"You do not give me time to do my best," said he, as he handed her a sheet of note paper, on which he had just made a pretty little sketch of the greyhound.

"Oh, how exactly like! How very pretty! May I keep it, Mr. Haveloc?" [Pg 272]

"If you please—I shall be too happy."

"I wish my uncle was awake," said Margaret looking towards him. "I should like to show it to him. I wonder if he would know it directly. I dare say he would!"

"Not a doubt of it," said Mr. Haveloc, "all Italian greyhounds are alike. Any picture of an Italian greyhound would do for your dog. Do you wish me to wake Mr. Grey, that he may decide the question?"

"Oh, no! what are you thinking of? People should never be wakened."

"Will you tell me now, why you do not like George Gage?"

"What, have you not forgotten that yet? Well I will tell you one reason. Because he stares so much."

Mr. Haveloc laughed. "I really did not think," he said, "that ladies resented that offence, so strongly. Fortunately I cannot offend in that way, since I am half blind." [Pg 273]

"I wish Mr. Gage was near-sighted," said Margaret laughing, "he is quite mistaken if he thinks ladies like to be stared at; even Harriet, who does not care for many things, told him one evening that it made her quite nervous to have him opposite when she was singing, looking into her mouth like a dentist."

"And when do you mean to ride out?" said Mr. Haveloc.

"Oh! do you know I had quite forgotten my horse," exclaimed Margaret, "Uncle Grey!—There I have waked him at last."

"What is it, my love?" said Mr. Grey looking up.

"Miss Capel is so dismayed at having waked you," said Mr. Haveloc laughing.

"Oh! I was not asleep," said Mr. Grey rubbing his eyes, "I have been listening to all you have been saying."

Mr. Haveloc and Margaret exchanged smiles.

"Will you let me ride out to-morrow, dear uncle?" [Pg 274]

"Yes, my love; you are quite sure of the horse, Claude. If somebody would go out first, just to try him; or if you have no engagement to-morrow, Claude, perhaps you would go with Margaret and Evans, just to see that all is right for the first time. Evans is a very steady man; afterwards I could trust him with comfort."

No one could mistake the delight that was visible on Mr. Haveloc's countenance at this proposition. He could not have asked to ride out with her, but here was a reason—a sufficient cause. "Nothing could give him more pleasure," he said, "he begged to know what time would suit Miss Capel, that he might be in the way."

Anybody but Mr. Grey would have noticed the impatience with which Mr. Haveloc looked forward to this ride: any one else would have been aware that it was some strong feeling that could make so ordinary an occurrence a matter of so much importance to him. [Pg 275]

Margaret never spent the morning in the library with them; and Mr. Haveloc settled to nothing; he neither read nor wrote, but wandered about the room, sometimes watching the weather, and sometimes glancing over the newspaper. But Mr. Grey having provided for Margaret's safety,

forgot the subject altogether, and spent his time in puzzling over his steward's accounts, and cutting the leaves of a new review without taking any note of his companion's idleness. And when Margaret did make her appearance, looking beautiful with excitement, and he hastened to meet her, Mr. Grey followed him to the hall door giving him a string of cautions, which any third person could have told him was quite unnecessary in the present instance. He was quite eager enough to examine the girths and the curb, and to prevent her horse from going too fast.

It was a beautiful day; the trees were just out and the young leaves trembled in the bright sunshine. There was that peculiar fragrance in the air, which results from the opening buds in shrubs and hedges; and in some places, the sweet breath of violets seemed to linger on the soft wind, mingled with the fresh scent of dewy tufts of moss. [Pg 276]

Margaret had no fear, and the paces of her horse were so easy, that she felt no fatigue. Mr. Haveloc took the greatest care of her, and exerted himself to amuse her so effectually, that she was really sorry when her ride was concluded. Whether she would have enjoyed it quite as much with the groom, for her sole attendant, is a question that she had no present opportunity of solving; for Mr. Haveloc told Mr. Grey that he thought her horse went best in company, and that while he remained at Ashdale, he was entirely at the service of Miss Capel whenever she chose to ride out. [Pg 277]

CHAPTER XV.

But who can tell what cause had that fair maid
To use him so that loved her so well?
Or who with blame can justly her upbraid
For loving not? For who can love compel?

SPENSER.

It was customary with Mr. Grey to pass his mornings in the library unless some very particular business caused him to take refuge in his study. He was fond of desultory reading, and was accomplished in the knowledge of several modern languages. Mr. Haveloc usually employed himself at the other end of the room, without any reference to Mr. Grey's occupations; reading with as much eagerness upon any subject that happened to engage his attention, as if he were still a candidate for academic honours. [Pg 278]

They seldom exchanged a remark during these hours, unless Mr. Grey suddenly became alarmed at the steadfastness of his young friend's application, when he would favour him with some of those cautions, which he was in the habit of addressing to Margaret, regarding the injurious effect of too much study.

One morning a letter was brought to Mr. Grey, which he opened and looked at with some surprise, glanced at the signature, and exclaimed, "From Hubert Gage! How extraordinary! Why could not the silly fellow come and say what he wanted, instead of writing it?"

Mr. Haveloc looked up at the unwonted interruption, and seeing Mr. Grey reading his letter with many sounds of impatience and vexation, he could not avoid "hoping that there was no bad news from Chirke Weston."

"No; not bad news," said Mr. Grey laying down his letter and his reading glasses upon it, and leaning back in his chair, as if quite tired out: "not exactly bad news." [Pg 279]

This remark was, perhaps, rather calculated to excite than to gratify his curiosity; but Mr. Haveloc resumed his reading without farther inquiry, and Mr. Grey remained for some time in deep thought.

At last Mr. Grey looked up, and turned round to his companion.

"A very strange thing, Claude," said he. "I am sure, as far as I am concerned, the most unlooked-for occurrence. Here is Hubert Gage proposing for my little niece, Margaret—a mere baby!"

Mr. Haveloc started from his chair, made a step or two towards Mr. Grey, and then returned quietly to his seat, and made a great show of finding the place in his book again.

"Yes, it is very remarkable," said Mr. Grey, who had interpreted Mr. Haveloc's sudden movement into an expression of surprise; "I could never have foreseen it. And really, Hubert Gage, a mere boy! Of course the connexion is highly honourable, impossible to be better; but at their age. Not that anything can be more fair and manly than his letter; but if he has Captain Gage's consent to fetter himself by an engagement of this kind before he is one and twenty years old—why his father has not half the sense I gave him credit for." [Pg 280]

Mr. Haveloc was silent.

"Yet poor young fellow," said Mr. Grey, taking up his letter, "if he is in love as he says he is, perhaps all this impatience is more natural in him than in an older man. And although this love is very often a source of great inconvenience, yet we all look back to that period, whether successful or not, as to the most spiritual, and the happiest portion of our lives. Faith, I will do all I can for him in the business."

"And Miss Capel," said Mr. Haveloc, speaking with effort.

"Oh! for her, poor little girl, I dare say she fancies herself attached to him. For I have often remarked, Claude, that when a handsome and agreeable young man pays a great deal of attention to an inexperienced girl, it generally ends in this way; first impressions are everything. And you heard her telling me the other night that Hubert used to roast chestnuts for her, and all that sort of thing. I dare say it is all for the best." [Pg 281]

Mr. Haveloc made no reply. A dark frown settled on his face, and he leaned his head on his hands, seeming to be immersed in the folio volume that stood on a desk before him.

"If," he thought, "the love of a creature like Margaret can hinge upon such wretched trifles, why let it go. If she can love him, why should I regret her?"

Yet he felt that all he was worth would be too little to purchase such affection as hers would be, where it was freely given.

Both parties were silent for some time. Mr. Grey forgot the presence of Mr. Haveloc, so entirely was he engrossed with the subject on his mind; and he was employing himself in making a mental estimate of the amount of Margaret's and Hubert's property, and the sum he meant to add to it, when he heard her voice and step in the drawing-room, half-dancing, half-singing, as she came near the library. The sounds ceased as she turned the handle of the door, and she entered with the most demure expression in the world. [Pg 282]

"Uncle Grey, may I have the carriage after luncheon, if you please, to go to S—," said she advancing to him, "for I have broken my guitar string—this silver one, and I cannot play till I have got another."

"Yes, my love, certainly," said Mr. Grey, drawing her towards him, "are you busy now?"

"No; this is the last piece of business I have done," said Margaret laughing, and showing him the string, which she was twining round her fingers, "a very bad business; you cannot think how it startled me when it snapped." [Pg 283]

"Have you learned that song which Hubert Gage gave you?" asked Mr. Grey.

"The Neapolitan one? Oh, yes! it is very easy;" said Margaret, singing one or two bars in a low tone, "Mr. Hubert thinks himself so fine because he can play that air on the guitar. It is the only tune he can play."

"Well, my love," said her uncle, "I have had a letter from Hubert Gage this morning. You may read it, if you will."

As he spoke, he put the letter into her hands. He entirely forgot that Mr. Haveloc was in the room; and even had he recollected it, he would have taken it for granted, that sitting at such a distance, and engaged in reading so closely, his presence would have been no drawback to the conversation he wished to hold with his niece. Margaret, standing with her back to him, never perceived him at all; and for Mr. Haveloc, he never imagined that Mr. Grey would have done more than give Margaret the letter, and recommend her to read it at her leisure. He could not leave the room, except by passing Margaret; and he thought the sight of him would embarrass her while conversing on such a subject, therefore he remained where he was. And an intense curiosity to learn how she would receive such tidings, held him, breathless and motionless, until she left the room. [Pg 284]

Margaret read the letter through attentively, and steadily, the crimson deepening every moment all over her face, and then looking up straight to her uncle as she returned it, she said:

"I am glad you will have to answer this letter, uncle, instead of me, since I have no practice in these matters; and it is unpleasant to be obliged to say—no."

"But, my dear child," said Mr. Grey, quite puzzled at receiving a reply so totally different to what he had expected, "what objection have you in the world to such a fine fellow as Hubert Gage?"

"He does not love me, uncle, that is one objection," said Margaret with a slight smile; "and I am sure I do not love him." [Pg 285]

"Why, my child," said Mr. Grey, "what, do you suppose can induce a man to make you an offer, if he is not in love with you?"

"A great many reasons, uncle. I will not suppose that all the married people in the world who are so indifferent, or unhappy, have once loved each other. In my case, I can acquit Mr. Hubert of any interested motives. It is a passing fancy of his."

"But, my dear—time—you do not know how attached you might become to him. You would not like to give pain to the poor young man."

"Uncle," said Margaret, looking steadily into his face. "I must love a person a little, before I would suffer pain myself, rather than occasion it to him. I would do so for you, or Elizabeth, but not for Mr. Hubert Gage, I tell you frankly. If I thought he really loved me, I should be grieved and pained at the necessity of wounding his feelings; but, as it is, I am only ashamed, that he should have singled me out as the object of so trifling, so fleeting a regard." [Pg 286]

"But, my dear little girl," persisted Mr. Grey, "what on earth can have put it into your head, that he does not love you?"

"Little things, uncle, that it would not be easy to put into words. It may seem vain, Sir, but at one time I was afraid he meant to pay me particular attention. A very little observation set me at rest on that point. I am young, and do not know much; but this is a matter of feeling, and not of knowledge. I am old enough to feel that he has made a mistake."

"Well, my love," said Mr. Grey, "I do not understand it:" he folded and unfolded the letter in his hand for some moments, and at last went on.

"You must reflect a little, my dear. This young man is of good family; highly connected, and, in the event of your marrying him, you would find yourself in as good a circle of connexions and acquaintances as you could possibly desire. He has something, and so have you. I would come forward, and I have no doubt his father would come forward; and you could be able to keep a carriage, and have every comfort about you." [Pg 287]

"I am afraid, uncle," said Margaret, smiling, "that I am not old enough to appreciate these advantages."

Her uncle paused again. "He will not be satisfied, my dear, with my reply. What do you say to seeing him yourself?"

"I had rather not, uncle," said Margaret blushing still more deeply. "It is rather embarrassing—it is not agreeable to discuss this subject, even with you, Sir."

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Grey, "we will see about it; but I can tell you the young man will not give it up so quietly, if you have not another attachment."

"I can understand that such a question concerns him," said Margaret, with a faltering in her voice; "and, therefore, if you please, you can tell him I am free in that respect; but if I am free, uncle, I need not choose a person whom I do not like." [Pg 288]

"The idea of not liking Hubert Gage!" said Mr. Grey.

"I do like him, uncle, as an acquaintance, and shall do so, if he does not teaze me; but, as a suitor —why, Uncle Grey," said Margaret brightening up, "he will forget all about me now, before I forget him, though he does profess a regard for me that I cannot return."

"Well, my love," said Mr. Grey, "you shall act exactly as your feelings dictate; but it is an awkward business I can tell you, all this proposing and rejecting."

"Thank you, dear uncle," said Margaret leaning forward, and kissing him on the forehead. "But—I may have the carriage all the same, Sir, may I not, to go for my guitar string?"

"Oh! poor Hubert Gage," said Mr. Grey leaning back, as Margaret left the room, and looking very much exhausted. "If she can think of her guitar string at such a time, I am afraid there is a remarkably small chance for the young gentleman." [Pg 289]

CHAPTER XVI.

But woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart,
My will to her consent is but a part;
An she agree, within her scope of choice
Lies my consent and fair according voice.

SHAKESPEARE.

Which when he heard, he inly touched was
With tender ruth for her unworthy griefe;
And having cheered her, thus said; Faire Dame
In evils, counsell is the comfort chiefe,
Which though I be not wise enough to frame,
Yet as I well it meane, vouchsafe it without blame.

SPENSER.

As soon as Margaret had closed the door after her, Mr. Haveloc drew a long breath, like one relieved from an oppressive state of suspense; and remained for a short time in hesitation as to what his next step should be. His admiration of Margaret had risen with every word that she had spoken; and had he followed the impulse of the moment, he would, more than once, have interrupted the even progress of the dialogue by rushing forward and throwing himself at her feet. He was delighted, and penetrated with the clear judgment, and the beautiful simplicity of character which she evinced. He resolved, with all the determination of a sufficiently wilful character, that he would spare no exertion to obtain her affection; and as a preliminary, which her youth rendered a matter of honour and propriety, he determined to demand the sanction of her uncle to his addresses, before he could attempt to engage the regard of Margaret. But just at this moment, that Mr. Grey had been so annoyed by the application of Hubert Gage, he felt a reluctance to enter upon the subject. Still there was no time to be lost. Margaret might receive [Pg 290]

another offer any day—it was as well to be early in the field. While he was making up his mind to this effect, Mr. Grey turned to the table, and searched among the papers heaped in confusion around him, for his writing-case, that he might dispatch an answer to Hubert Gage; saying, as he took a sheet of paper for that purpose, "I do not know what to think—I cannot understand it all. I don't believe the child knows her own mind." [Pg 291]

"I am sorry to interrupt you, Sir," said Mr. Haveloc, coming hastily forward, "still more sorry to demand your attention on my behalf at a time when you are engrossed by a disagreeable subject."

"Why it is disagreeable, Claude," said Mr. Grey, looking up and laying down his pen, "I never anticipated any objection on her side. Did you, now?"

"I never anticipated such a proposal," said Mr. Haveloc, "I imagined that every one would have considered, as I did, that Miss Capel was too young to receive such addresses."

"So she is," returned Mr. Grey, "but if I say so to Hubert, his answer will naturally be that he will wait until she is older; now that is an answer that I think would not exactly meet her wishes." [Pg 292]

Mr. Haveloc bowed his head.

"And," pursued Mr. Grey, "when there is not a single objection that can be urged against a man; it is rather difficult to give him a reason that shall dissuade him from continuing his suit."

"There is one reason that should content any man," said Mr. Haveloc, "indifference."

"It is the last that does content them, though," said Mr. Grey, taking up his pen and looking earnestly at it, "they think it is so easy to overcome it. They are a very singular race," said he—speaking of lovers as he would of Albinoes, or Cingalese, or other strange beings—"they have a great many troublesome peculiarities; sometimes so pertinacious; at other times so easily discouraged. And here is a match which, a few years hence, would be all I could desire for my niece; and the little romantic creature absolutely throws the chance away. Not that I would influence her decision one way or other; Heaven forbid. But you were going to say something or other, Claude. Have you heard any thing farther from your tenant at Tynebrook?" [Pg 293]

"I was about to trouble you upon a subject far more interesting to myself," said Mr. Haveloc, hesitating.

He had never felt so embarrassed in his life. It seemed to him that in everything but the mere accident of fortune, Hubert Gage was his superior. That he had the advantage in person, in manner, in that gaiety of disposition which is so generally attractive and endearing; that his character was unimpeached, and that he belonged to a profession which of itself would render him an object of interest to an Englishwoman. If Margaret had rejected this suitor, how could he expect to make a deeper impression on her heart?

It need not be said that this condition of feeling is very rare in the nobler sex, and may be accounted for by the want of confidence which is said ever to accompany an earnest and engrossing passion. [Pg 294]

Mr. Grey looked anxiously at his young friend; awaiting his disclosure with much curiosity.

"I feel at this moment," said Mr. Haveloc, endeavouring to speak with great composure, and failing signally in the attempt, "so very unworthy of the favour I am about to ask you, that it is with a painful sense of reluctance I proceed."

"I am sure, Claude, anything in the world that I can do for you," said Mr. Grey, growing still more puzzled as he marked Mr. Haveloc's evident embarrassment; "only," he added with a smile, "I hope you are not in love, because, as you see, in such a case I have no power at all."

"I think, Sir," said Mr. Haveloc quietly, "it would be difficult for any one to avoid that weakness, who had the happiness of being long in Miss Capel's society. I must confess myself entirely engrossed by the hope of one day obtaining her affection; and my present anxiety is to gain your sanction to my pursuit." [Pg 295]

Mr. Grey's blank, uplifted look of amazement can hardly be expressed. It was in vain to expect an immediate answer, for at first he could not really comprehend that a second application had been made to him for the hand of his niece: but Mr. Haveloc interpreted his silence into a reluctance to entrust Margaret to his care. His thoughts reverted immediately to his conduct at Florence, and he remained silent, and pale with anger and confusion.

After a pause of a few moments, Mr. Grey reached out his hand to him. "This gives me great pleasure, Claude," he said. "How it will turn out, is another matter. But you have my free consent, if that is of any use. But," he continued, interrupting the thanks which his companion was beginning to pour out, "I consider this quite a subject for the future. There is no hurry." [Pg 296]

"Good Heaven, Sir, no hurry!" said Mr. Haveloc, "when every one that sees Miss Capel—"

"My dear Claude," said Mr. Grey smiling, "I am likely to be a little partial to my own niece; but I see plainly how it is. With Hubert Gage—poor fellow, I am very sorry for him—she was the first pretty girl he saw on his return; and sailors are proverbial for falling in love, and out of it, fortunately. There is no danger that she should be more sought in general society than other girls of her age and fortune. In a year's time you will find her just where you left her, depend upon it."

"And am I to leave her now, Sir, in all this uncertainty," exclaimed Mr. Haveloc, "and for a year. Good Heaven! Was there ever such a probation demanded of any one? A year, Sir! In half that time, I may learn she is married to some one else."

"My good friend, your imagination is now rather active," said Mr. Grey. "No. I do not bid you [Pg 297] leave her until, whether soon or late, you have ascertained that she returns your regard, or that you become convinced that you cannot obtain it. Then it is my wish that you separate for a year; and if before that time has expired," he continued with a smile, "she is married to some one else, you will be willing to confess, Claude, that your loss has not been very great."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Haveloc again, gazing vacantly forward, as if a year was a period without any known termination.

"Such is my wish, Claude," said Mr. Grey, "you are neither of you common characters; if you were, I might hasten the matter for fear either of you should change your minds, and so ensure to my niece a large property without the least apprehension for her future peace. But although the world rubs off all that is true and beautiful from most characters, it would take a great deal of such collision to destroy the simplicity of her disposition; therefore, I wish that she should have [Pg 298] the opportunity which a frequent intercourse with society gives, to make a selection, as freely as if you had not a hundred pounds in the world. Let her acceptance of you be a choice in the true acceptation of the word, a distinction of you from other people. And I have the same feeling with regard to yourself. You may not be altogether satisfied that you have obtained a beautiful child; you may feel, after a time, that you require the companionship of a more mature mind. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary that you should try if the impression will stand the test of absence."

"Impossible, Sir!" exclaimed Mr. Haveloc; "of all torments in the world, to put off—to forego—the uncertainty—you do not consider."

"I think, Claude," said Mr. Grey, looking at his breathless companion with a quiet smile, "that I consider this subject a little more leisurely than you do at this moment." [Pg 299]

"I endeavour to regard the subject with all calmness," said Mr. Haveloc, trembling with impatience; "but I cannot make out the necessity for my undergoing so long an interval of misery as you would assign to me. Pardon me, but I cannot think you a competent judge of Miss Capel's perfections."

"Much obliged," said Mr. Grey, quietly.

"You are under no suspense," continued Mr. Haveloc. "No one can break the tie which subsists between you and your niece; and therefore you do not view her with the trembling admiration of one who fears to risk everything in the parting from her."

"She is a very nice little girl," said Mr. Grey, "I see that plainly enough."

"I feel myself very inadequate to pronounce an eulogy upon her exquisite beauty, either of person or mind," said Mr. Haveloc, colouring deeply with indignation at the phrase, 'A nice little girl.' "But no one living rates these perfections higher than I do. And I must confess my extreme reluctance to leave them unguarded to any man who chooses to enter for the prize: any common [Pg 300] fellow, who without sincerity and without tenderness, desires to possess what all must covet."

"Ought you not," said Mr. Grey who seemed quietly to enjoy the discussion, "ought you not to ascribe to your mistress a little discrimination among all her perfections?"

"By no means," said Mr. Haveloc, "it is no merit in a woman."

And here he spoke perfect truth; for of all qualities, it is the one which men dislike most bitterly in the fair sex. It is just possible that the greater number of them imagine that they should fare but badly in the opinion of women if they were not able to deceive them readily.

"Just put the fire together a little, Claude," said Mr. Grey, "I do not find that this talking is warm work."

Mr. Haveloc did as he was desired.

"Well now, I suppose you are contented," said Mr. Grey. "If you will ring for a taper, I will write [Pg 301] this letter; it is growing very dark. I wonder what o'clock it is in the name of goodness?"

"I am not contented, Sir, by any means," said Mr. Haveloc ringing the bell; "but it is nearly seven, and you will not be able to write till after dinner."

"Bless me, and I am not dressed," said Mr. Grey, who in all his solitude never omitted that ceremony.

"Nor I, Sir," said Mr. Haveloc.

"You a lover," said Mr. Grey laughing. "Why, even Benedict brushed his hat o' mornings."

"If you would spare me another minute," said Mr. Haveloc.

"I am sure, Claude," said Mr. Grey, "I have given you reasons enough. It is not my fault if you will not apply them."

"They are very excellent," said Mr. Haveloc; "but certainly an absence of six months would answer every purpose." [Pg 302]

"Or three months," said Mr. Grey.

"Undoubtedly, Sir."

"Six weeks, perhaps."

"Any separation whatever, Sir. I need no trial. I can undergo no change; and you may imagine it is not a very agreeable prospect to me that Miss Capel is to be taken into society during my absence, and invited to select some one whom she may like better than myself."

"Well—well," said Mr. Grey, "you will see the advantage of it one day or other. And now I have no more time to spare; my man will think me dead as it is. Seven o'clock, I declare. Well, thank Heaven, these things do not happen every day!"

"Hello! a cabinet council!" exclaimed the well known voice of Mr. Casement; "let's make it a Council of Three. What is it all about? What not dressed, old gentleman? Then there's something in the wind, as sure as my name is Roger Casement. You had better tell me, for I shall be sure to find it out. Has this young fellow been proposing for Miss Peggy?" [Pg 303]

Mr. Haveloc flung himself out of the room in great disdain; and Mr. Grey taking up his candlestick, said "that he was really in a hurry, and that Mr. Casement would no doubt find his niece in the drawing-room."

Margaret was there, ready dressed, and in some wonder that her very punctual uncle had not yet appeared.

Mr. Casement entered, took his usual place on the hearth-rug, and nodded to Margaret, who returned his salutation in silence.

"What's the matter, little woman—been crying?" asked Mr. Casement.

"No, Sir," returned Margaret in some surprise.

"What have they been doing all the afternoon, in there—uncle and the young fellow. Eh?"

"I dare say they have been reading, Sir," said Margaret, "my uncle was alone when I last saw him." [Pg 304]

"Reading—bah!" said Mr. Casement; "I say, it is my belief that the young fellow is going to be married; eh?" And Mr. Casement stirred the fire, and watched her countenance by the blaze.

"It may be, Sir," said Margaret, with a quiet smile. "I am not in the secret."

"My old woman has got the rheumatism, so I am come to dine here," said Mr. Casement.

Margaret said she was sorry Mrs. Casement was suffering, and then there was a pause. Margaret played with her greyhound, and Mr. Casement whistled softly, and very much out of tune.

Mr. Haveloc was the first to make his appearance, he came up in a quiet serious manner to Margaret; apologized for being late, and said, that he had also to answer for Mr. Grey's delay, since he had detained him in the library talking of his affairs.

"I should not wonder if he had been gambling," said Mr. Casement in a soliloquy. [Pg 305]

Mr. Haveloc never vouchsafed an answer to Mr. Casement's flattering remarks. He drew a chair near Margaret, and began to converse with her.

"What is he talking about, little woman?" asked Mr. Casement, after they had exchanged a few sentences in rather a low tone.

"Nothing, Sir," returned Margaret hastily.

"Faith! you are about right there," said Mr. Casement; "*nothing* is pretty much the amount of all the young fellows' speeches now a'days."

Mr. Haveloc started from his chair, and began to walk up and down the room. Mr. Casement followed his movements with a look of quiet satisfaction. He was never more entirely happy than when he had exasperated any one. As soon as tea was over, Mr. Grey said that he had a letter to write, which he could not put off, and that Mr. Casement must excuse him for half an hour. [Pg 306]

"Some of your business, I suppose, Master Claude;" said that amiable gentleman nodding his head in the direction of the library.

"I write my own letters of business," said Mr. Haveloc shortly.

"What is come to you all I can't think," pursued Mr. Casement. "But I'll worm it out of Master Grey, that's my comfort. And what are you about little woman? Why don't you give us some music?"

"I am working a bag, Sir," said Margaret rising and laying it down "but I will play if you wish it."

"Do," said Mr. Casement, taking up the bag and examining it. "Mercy, how smart! Who is this for

—eh?"

"For Miss Gage," said Margaret with a faultering voice; and as she spoke, she pressed her hand on her side, and sat down suddenly.

Mr. Haveloc, who was standing at the piano arranging her books, now hurried up to her. [Pg 307]

"I am afraid you are ill," he said, "do not think of playing. You are quite unequal to the exertion. Do you find the room too hot?"

"It is hot," said Margaret, who seemed on the verge of bursting into tears. "I think, I will go to my uncle, or, perhaps, I shall interrupt him. I—"

"Poor little soul, she has no mother!" said Mr. Casement, whose sagacity had discerned that something unusual occupied the minds of the party; and whose coarse nature was not so destitute of feeling, but that he saw how distressing must be the situation of a young girl, at any important crisis of her life, without the guidance of an experienced female friend.

This remark which Mr. Haveloc feared would entirely destroy her composure, had a contrary effect. After a struggle of a few moments, she forced back her tears, and rose quietly up. [Pg 308]

"I cannot play to you to-night," said she to Mr. Casement with a smile, "for I have a head-ache, and I am afraid my hand would not be very steady. Perhaps, Mr. Haveloc, you will be so kind as to wish my uncle good night for me."

She bowed her head, and was about to leave the room, but Mr. Haveloc hastened after her.

"Let me beg you not to leave us," he said, "if you take a few turns in the conservatory where the air is cooler you will find yourself better."

He led her as he spoke into the conservatory, which opened from the drawing-room; and Margaret finding it easier to say nothing, than to trust her voice with a reply, suffered him to do as he pleased. He drew her hand through his arm, and led her slowly up and down.

"You must permit me to prescribe for you," said he gently, "for I think if there is anything that vexes you, you will feel less depressed in company than if you were to go up stairs and sit alone in your own room. For you have no companion—no—" [Pg 309]

"No mother;" said Margaret, looking up into his face, with an expression of quiet sorrow that nearly upset all his plans; for had he then said all that he felt and hoped, he might have set out upon his travels the next morning.

"Are these your azalias?" said he, stopping before one of the stands, "they look very gay. Do you remember when you asked Mr. Grey for them; the first evening I came."

"Oh! do you recollect that, Mr. Haveloc!" said Margaret.

"I remember every particular of those few minutes you chose not to speak to me."

"Oh, Mr. Haveloc, you did not speak to *me*!" said Margaret, smiling, "and, of course, strangers could not have any thing to say to each other." [Pg 310]

"Have you read the book upon Etruria?" said Mr. Haveloc.

"Yes—long ago."

"And you were interested by it?"

"Oh! very much. It seems to me so strange that people should almost have forgotten the existence of such a nation, until lately; when these discoveries were made."

"Have you seen any account of the ruined cities in Central America?"

"No; what cities? Who built them?"

"There seems to be some doubt on that subject; but it is generally believed that these are the cities of the Mexicans which were actually depopulated by the Spaniards; and which now lie, temples, altars, and palaces, overrun with vegetation, and buried in forests."

"And are they in any state of preservation?"

"Almost as they were left by their owners; buildings of vast extent and elaborate workmanship. The work which has lately come out on this subject, is crowded with drawings, which give a perfect idea of these remains." [Pg 311]

"I should like to see that book;" said Margaret.

"I shall have great pleasure in showing it to you. I have just been reading it," said Mr. Haveloc.

"And these Mexicans were then as civilized a people as the Etruscans?"

"More luxurious; but perhaps less artistical. There is a great deal of elegance in the Etruscan decorations."

"That is true. What a number of new things I have to learn. I did not know that any traces of those cities remained; and I believed there was a great deal of fiction in the accounts of the

Spaniards."

"So did Robertson. He had been assured that there were no ruins in that part of the world; and the accounts of the Spanish invaders were too magnificent to be believed without some confirmation." [Pg 312]

"And who wrote this work?"

"An American named Stevens, who had displayed a great deal of enterprise and research. A singular occupation for one of that nation, for it was not a very likely means of earning dollars."

"Oh! there is a little prejudice in that remark, Mr. Haveloc," said Margaret. "Perhaps *all* Americans do not love money better than anything in the world."

"I will attend to all the good advice you give me;" said Mr. Haveloc, smiling, "you warn me, in the present instance, not to indulge in national prejudices."

"Ah! you may well stare at finding me alone," said Mr. Casement; "the young ones—philandering in the green-house yonder."

"Oh! I forgot Mr. Casement," said Margaret, blushing.

"So did I, utterly," returned Mr. Haveloc, as he led Margaret back to the drawing-room. [Pg 313]

Now Margaret's emotion had arisen from the idea which suddenly occurred to her, that Miss Gage might withdraw her friendship from her, on account of her rejection of Hubert Gage. But she found that she had greatly undervalued the calm and judicious mind of Elizabeth in attributing to her an injustice, which, however natural, no dispassionate person could consider reasonable.

She called on Margaret the next day, and the first words she spoke were, to assure her that she was not come to plead her brother's cause; but to insist that what had passed, should prove no interruption to their friendship. Most gladly did Margaret, with many tears, give her this promise.

Elizabeth was too considerate to question her upon the cause of her rejection; but Margaret was glad to talk the matter over with her—to hope, and to be assured that she had done nothing wrong throughout the business. [Pg 314]

Elizabeth could not charge Margaret with having ever given Hubert any more encouragement than circumstances had almost demanded: but to Margaret's repeated declarations, that Hubert felt no real attachment to her—though she smiled—she shook her head. She knew, that occasionally, a great deal of strong feeling exists beneath a gay and careless temperament. But she said, that her father was exerting himself to get Hubert a ship, and as soon as he was afloat again, she hoped that Margaret would be as much at Chirke Weston as before.

This conversation, which Margaret, full of joy and gratitude, repeated to Mr. Grey, was by him very speedily retailed to Mr. Haveloc; which relieved him of some apprehensions, that Margaret's agitation on the preceding evening had caused him, namely, that she had begun to repent the decision she had given her uncle on the subject of Hubert Gage. [Pg 315]

This interview removed from Margaret, the only source of regret, which remained to her on that subject. Her uncle was all kindness, and never referred to her decision; and to crown her content, Mr. Casement, about this time followed the example of his "old woman," and was laid up for several weeks with an attack of rheumatism.

END OF VOL. I.

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Transcriber's Note: A few printer's errors have been amended. Countetenance is now countenance, Magaret is now Margaret, converstion is now conversation, Harrier is now Harriet and regreted is now regretted. The punctuation is as printed in the original publication.

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