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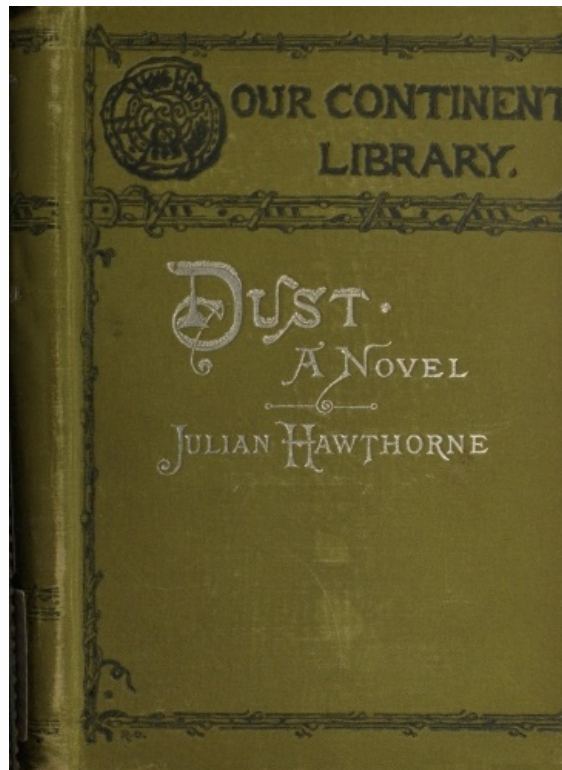
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(etext transcriber's note)





JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

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D U S T:

A NOVEL

**BY
JULIAN HAWTHORNE,**

*Author of "Bressant," "Sebastian Strome," "Idolatry,"
"Garth," etc.*



**NEW YORK:
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DUST.

CHAPTER I.

THE time at which this story begins was a time of many beginnings and many endings. The Eighteenth Century had expired the better part of a score of years before, and everything was in confusion. Youth—tumultuous, hearty, reckless, showy, slangy, insolent, kindly, savage—was the genius of the hour. The Iron Duke had thrashed the Corsican Ogre, England was the Queen of nations, and Englishmen thought so much of themselves and of one another that society, for all its caste, became well-nigh republican. Gentlemen were bruisers and bruisers were gentlemen. At Ranelagh and Vauxhall fine ladies rubbed shoulders with actresses, magistrates foregathered with jockeys and sharpers, and the guardians of public order had more to fear from young bloods and sprigs of nobility than from professional thieves and blacklegs. Costumes were grotesque and irrational, but were worn with a dash and effrontery that made them becoming. There were cocked hats and steeple-crowned hats; yards of neck-cloth and mountains of coat-collar; green coats and blue coats, claret coats and white coats; four or five great coats, one on top of another; small clothes and tight breeches, corduroys, hessians and pumps. Beards were shaved smooth, and hair grew long. Young ladies wore drab josephs and flat-crowned beaver bonnets, and rode to balls on pillions with their ball clothes in handboxes. The lowest of necks were compensated by the shortest of waists; and the gleam of garter-buckles showed through the filmy skirts that scarcely reached to the ankle. Coral necklaces were the fashion, and silvery twilled silks and lace tuckers; and these fine things were laid up in lavender and rose leaves. Hair was cropped short behind and dressed with flat curls in front. Mob-caps and top-knotted caps, skull-caps and fronts, turbans and muslin kerchiefs, and puffed yellow satins—these things were a trifle antiquated, and belonged to the elder generation. Gentlemen said “Dammy, sir!” “Doosid,” “Egad,” “Stifle me!” “Monstrous fine,” “Faith!” and “S’blood!” The ladies said, “Thank God!” “God A’mighty!” and “Law!” and everybody said “Genteel.” Stage-coaches and post-horses occupied the place of railways and telegraphs, and driving was a fine art, and five hours from Brighton to London was monstrous slow going. Stage-coachmen were among the potentates of the day; they could do but one thing, but that they did perfectly; they were clannish among themselves, bullies to the poor, comrades to gentlemen, lickspittles to lords, and the high-priests of horse-flesh, which was at that epoch one of the most influential religions in England; pugilism being another, caste a third, and drunkenness the fourth. A snuff-box was still the universal wear, blue-pill was the specific for liver complaint, shopping was done in Cheape and Cornhill; fashionable bloods lodged in High Holborn, lounged at Bennet’s and the Piazza Coffee-House, made calls in Grosvenor Square, looked in at a dog-fight, or to see Kemble, Siddons or Kean in the evening, and finished the night over rack-punch and cards at the club. Literature was not much in vogue, though most people had read “Birron” and the “Monk,” and many were familiar with the “Dialogues of Devils,” the “Arabian Nights,” and “Zadkiel’s Prophetic Almanac;” while the “Dairyman’s Daughter” either had been written or soon was to be. Royalty and nobility showed themselves much more freely than they do now. George the Third was still King of England, and George, his son, was still the first gentleman and foremost blackguard of Europe; and everything, in short, was outwardly very different from what it is at the present day. Nevertheless, underneath all appearances, flowed then, as now, the mighty current of human nature. Then, as now, mothers groaned that infants might be born; poverty and wealth were married in every human soul, so that beggars were rich in some things and princes poor in others; young men and women fell in love, and either fell out again, or wedded, or took the law into their own hands, or jilted one another, just as they do now. Men in power were tyrannous or just, pompous or simple, wise or foolish, and men in subjection were faithful or dishonest, servile or self-respectful, scheming or contented, then as now. Then, no less than now, some men broke one Commandment, some another, and some broke all; and the young looked forward to a good time coming and the old prophesied misfortune. At that epoch, as in this, Death plied his trade after his well-known fashion, which seems so cruel and arbitrary, and is so merciful and wise. And finally—to make an end of this summary—the human race was predestined to good, and the individual human being was free to choose either good or evil, the same then as now and always. And—to leave generalities and begin upon particulars—it was at this time that Mrs. Lockhart (who, seven-and-forty years ago, as lovely Fanny Pell, had cherished a passing ideal passion for Handsome Tom Grantley, and had got over it and married honest young Lieutenant Lockhart)—that Mrs. Lockhart, we say, having lost her beloved Major at Waterloo, and finding herself in somewhat narrow circumstances, had made up her mind to a new departure in life, and had, in accordance with this determination, caused her daughter Marion to write “Lodgings to Let” on a card, and to hang the same up in the window of the front drawing-room. This event occurred on the morning of the third of May, Eighteen hundred and sixteen.

CHAPTER II.

THAT same day the Brighton coach was bowling along the road to London at the rate of something over five minutes to the mile, a burly, much be-caped Jehu on the box and a couple of passengers on the seat on either side of him. The four horses, on whose glistening coats the sunshine shifted pleasantly, seemed dwarfed by the blundering structure which trundled at their heels, and which occasionally swayed top-heavily from side to side like a vessel riding the seas. Jehu had for the time being surrendered the reins to the young gentleman who sat beside him. The youth in question was fashionably dressed, so far as could be judged from the glimpses of his attire that showed beneath the layers of benjamins in which his rather diminutive person was enveloped. His narrow face wore a rakish but supercilious expression, which was enhanced by his manner of wearing a hat shaped like a truncated cone with a curled brim. He sat erect and square, with an exaggerated dignity, as if the importance of the whole coach-and-four were concentrated in himself.

"You can do it, Mr. Bendibow—you can do it, sir," remarked Jehu, in a tone half-way between subservience and patronage. "You've got it in you, sir, and do you know why?"

"Well, to be sure, I've had some practice," said Mr. Bendibow, conscious of his worth and pleased to have it commended, but with the modesty of true genius, forbearing to admit himself miraculous.

Jehu shook his head solemnly. "Practice be damned, sir! What's practice, I ask, to a man what hadn't got it in him beforehand? It was in your blood, Mr. Bendibow, afore ever you was out of your cradle, sir. Because why? Because your father, Sir Francis, as fine a gen'lman and as open-handed as ever sat on a box, was as good a whip as might be this side o' London, and I makes no doubt but what he is so to this day. That's what I say, and if any says different why I'm ready to back it." In uttering this challenge Jehu stared about him with a hectoring air, but without meeting any one's eye, as if defying things in general but no one in particular.

"Is Sir Francis Bendibow living still? Pardon me the question; I formerly had some slight acquaintance with the gentleman, but for a good many years past I have lived out of the country."

These were the first words that the speaker of them had uttered. He was a meagre, elderly man, rather shabbily dressed, and sat second from the coachman on the left. While speaking he leaned forward, allowing his visage to emerge from the bulwark of coat collar that rose on either side of it. It was a remarkable face, though at first sight not altogether a winning one. The nose was an abrupt aquiline, thin at the bridge, but with distended nostrils; the mouth was straight, the lips seeming thin, rather from a constant habit of pressing them together than from natural conformation. The bony chin slanted forward aggressively, increasing the uncompromising aspect of the entire countenance. The eyebrows, of a pale auburn hue, were sharply arched, and the eyes beneath were so widely opened that the whole circle of the iris was visible. The complexion of this person, judging from the color of the hair, should have been blonde; but either owing to exposure to the air or from some other cause it was of a deep reddish-brown tint. His voice was his most attractive feature, being well modulated and of an agreeable though penetrating quality, and to some ears it might have been a guarantee of the speaker's gentility strong enough to outweigh the indications of his somewhat threadbare costume.

"My father is in good health, to the best of my knowledge," said young Mr. Bendibow, glancing at the other and speaking curtly. Then he added: "You have the advantage of me, sir."

"I call myself Grant," returned the elderly man.

"Never heard my father mention the name," said Mr. Bendibow loftily.

"I dare say not," replied Mr. Grant, relapsing into his coat collar.

"Some folks," observed Jehu in a meditative tone, yet loud enough to be heard by all—"some folks thinks to gain credit by speaking the names of those superior to them in station. Other folks thinks that fine names don't mend ragged breeches. I speaks my opinion, because why? Because I backs it."

"You'd better mind your horses," said the gentleman who sat between the coachman and Mr. Grant. "There!—catch hold of my arm, sir!"

The last words were spoken to Mr. Grant just as the coach lurched heavily to one side and toppled over. The off leader had shied at a tall white mile-stone that stood conspicuous at a corner of the road, and before Mr. Bendibow could gather up his reins the right wheels of the vehicle had entered the ditch and the whole machine was hurled off its balance into the hedge-row. The outside passengers, with the exception of one or two who clung to their seats, were projected into the field beyond, together with a number of boxes and portmanteaux. The wheelers lost their footing and floundered in the ditch, while the leaders, struggling furiously, snapped their harness and careered down the road. From within the coach meanwhile proceeded the sound of feminine screams and lamentation.

The first thing clearly perceptible amidst the confusion was the tremendous oath of which the coachman delivered himself, as he upreared his ponderous bulk from the half-inanimate figure of young Mr. Bendibow, upon whom he had fallen, having himself received at the same time a smart blow on the ear from a flying carpet-bag. The next person to arise was Mr. Grant, who appeared to have escaped unhurt, and after a moment the gentleman who, by interposing himself between the other and danger, had broken his fall, also got to his feet, looking a trifle pale about the lips.

"I much fear, sir," said the elder man, with an accent of grave concern in his voice, "that I have been the occasion of your doing yourself an injury. You have saved my bones at the cost of your own. I am a bit of a surgeon; let me look at your arm."

"Not much harm done, I fancy," returned the other, forcing a smile. "There's something awkward here, though," he added the next moment. "A joint out of kilter, perhaps."

"I apprehend as much," said Mr. Grant. He passed his hand underneath the young man's coat. "Ay, there's a dislocation here," he continued; "but if you can bear a minute's pain I can put it right again. We must get your coat off, and then—"

"Better get the ladies out of their cage first; that's not so much courtesy on my part as that I wish to put off the painful minute you speak of as long as may be. I'm a damnable coward—should sit down and cry if I were alone. Ladies first, for my sake!"

"You laugh, sir; but if that shoulder is not in place immediately it may prove no laughing matter. The ladies are

doing very well—they have found a rescuer already. Your coat off, if you please. What fools



“I AM A BIT OF A SURGEON; LET ME LOOK AT YOUR ARM.”

fashion makes of men! Where I come from none wear coats save Englishmen, and even they are satisfied with one. Ah! that was a twinge; it were best to cut the sleeve perhaps?”

“In the name of decency, no! To avoid trouble, I have long carried my wardrobe on my back, and ’twould never do to enter London with a shirt only. Better a broken bone than a wounded coat sleeve—ha! well, this is for my sins, I suppose. I wish Providence would keep the punishment till all the sins are done—this piecemeal retribution is the devil. Well, now for it! Sir, I wish you were less humane—my flesh and bones cry out against your humanity. Dryden was wrong, confound him! Pity is akin to—to—whew!—to the Inquisition. God Apollo! shall I ever write poetry after this? And ’tis only a left arm, after all!—not to be left alone, however—ah!... A thousand thanks, sir; but you leave me ten years older than you found me. Our acquaintance has been a long and (candor compels me to say) a confoundedly painful one. To be serious, I am heartily indebted to you.”

“Take a pull at this flask, young gentleman; ’tis good cognac that I got as I came through France. I recollect to have read, when I was a boy in school, that Nero fiddled whilst Rome was burning: you seem to have a measure of his humor, since you can jest while the framework of your mortal dwelling-place is in jeopardy. As for your indebtedness—my neck may be worth much or little, but, such as it is, you saved it. The balance is still against me.”

“Leave balances to bankers: otherwise we might have to express our obligations to Mr. Bendibow, there, for introducing us to each other. Does no one here, besides myself, need your skill?”

“It appears not, to judge by the noise they make,” replied the old gentleman dryly. “That blackguard of a coachman should lose his place for this. The manners of these fellows have changed for the worse since I saw England last. How do you find yourself, Mr.— I beg your pardon?”

“Lancaster is my name; and I feel very much like myself again,” returned the other, getting up from the bank against which he had been reclining while the shoulder-setting operation had been going on, and stretching out his arms tentatively.

As he stood there, Mr. Grant looked at him with the eye of a man accustomed to judge of men. With his costume reduced to shirt, small-clothes and hessians, young Lancaster showed to advantage. He was above the medium height, and strongly made, deep in the chest and elastic in the loins. A tall and massive white throat supported a head that seemed small, but was of remarkably fine proportions and character. The contours of the face were, in some places, so refined as to appear feminine, yet the expression of the principal features was eminently masculine and almost bold. Large black eyes answered to the movements of a sensitive and rather sensuous mouth; the chin was round and resolute. The young man’s hair was black and wavy, and of a length that, in our day, would be called effeminate; it fell apart at the temple in a way to show the unusual height and fineness of the forehead. The different parts of the face were fitted together compactly and smoothly, without creases, as if all had been moulded from one motive and idea—not as if composed of a number of inharmonious ancestral prototypes: yet the range of expression was large and vivid. The general aspect in repose indicated gravity and reticence; but as soon as a smile began, then appeared gleams and curves of a humorous gayety. And there was a brilliance and concentration in the whole presence of the man which was within and distinct from his physical conformation, and which rendered him conspicuous and memorable.

“Lancaster—the name is not unknown to me,” remarked Mr. Grant, but in an indrawn tone, characteristic of a man accustomed to communing with himself.

During this episode, the other travelers had been noisily and confusedly engaged in pulling themselves together and discussing the magnitude of their disaster. Some laborers, whom the accident had attracted from a neighboring

field, were pressed into service to help in setting matters to rights. One was sent after the escaped horses; others lent their hands and shoulders to the task of getting the coach out of the ditch and replacing the luggage upon it. Mr. Bendibow, seated upon his portmanteau, his fashionable attire much outraged by the clayey soil into which he had fallen, maintained a demeanor of sullen indignation; being apparently of the opinion that the whole catastrophe was the result of a conspiracy between the rest of the passengers against his own person. The coachman, in a semi-apoplectic condition from the combined effects of dismay, suppressed profanity, and a bloody jaw, was striving with hasty and shaking fingers to mend the broken harness; the ladies were grouped together in the roadway in a shrill-complaining and hysteric cluster, protesting by turns that nothing should induce them ever to enter the vehicle again, and that unless it started at once their prospects of reaching London before dark would be at an end. Lancaster glanced at his companion with an arch smile.

"My human sympathies can't keep abreast of so much distress," said he. "I shall take myself off. Hammersmith cannot be more than three or four miles distant, and my legs will be all the better for a little stretching. If you put up at the 'Plough and Harrow' to-night, we may meet again in an hour or two; meantime I will bid you good-day; and, once more, many thanks for your surgery."

He held out his hand, into which Mr. Grant put his own. "A brisk walk will perhaps be the best thing for you," he remarked. "Guard against a sudden check of perspiration when you arrive; and bathe the shoulder with a lotion ... by-the-by, would you object to a fellow-pedestrian? I was held to be a fair walker in my younger days, and I have not altogether lost the habit of it."

"It will give me much pleasure," returned the other, cordially.

"Then I am with you," rejoined the elder man.

They gave directions that their luggage should be put down at the "Plough and Harrow," and set off together along the road without more ado.

CHAPTER III.

THEY had not made more than a quarter of a mile, when the tramp of hoofs and trundle of wheels caused them to turn round with an exclamation of surprise that the coach should so speedily have recovered itself. A first glance showed them, however, that the vehicle advancing toward them was a private carriage. Two of the horses carried postilions; the carriage was painted red and black; and as it drew near a coat of arms was seen emblazoned on the door-panel. The turn-out evidently belonged to a person of quality, and there was something in its aspect which suggested a foreign nationality. The two gentlemen stood on one side to let it pass. As it did so, Mr. Grant said, "The lady looked at you as if she knew you."

"Me! a lady?" returned Lancaster, who had been so occupied in watching the fine action of one of the leaders, as to have had no eyes for the occupants of the carriage.

As he spoke the carriage stopped a few rods beyond them, and a lady, who was neither young nor beautiful, put her head out of the window and motioned to Lancaster with her lifted finger. Muttering an apology to his companion, the young man strode forward, wondering what new adventure might be in store for him. But on reaching the carriage-door his wonder came to an end. There were two ladies inside, and only one of them was unbeautiful. The other was young and in every way attractive. Her appearance and manner were those of a personage of distinction, but her fair visage was alive with a subtle luminousness and mobility of expression which made formality in her seem a playful grace rather than an artificial habit. The margin of her face was swathed in the soft folds of a silken hood, but a strand of reddish hair curled across her white forehead, and a pair of dark, swift-moving and very penetrating eyes met with a laughing sparkle the eyes of Lancaster. He doffed his hat.

"Madame la Marquise! In England! Where is Monsieur?"

"Hush! You are the same as ever—you meet me after six months, and instead of saying you are glad to see me, you ask where is the Marquis! *Ma foi!* don't know where he is."

"Surely Madame la Marquise does not need to be told how glad I am—"

"Pshaw! Don't 'Madame la Marquise' me, Philip Lancaster! Are we not old friends—old enough, eh? Tell me what you were doing walking along this road with that shabby old man?"

"Old gentleman, Madame la Marquise. The coach was upset—"

"What! You were on that coach that we passed just now in the ditch? You were not hurt?"

"If it had not been for this shabby old gentleman I might have been a cripple for life."

"Oh! I beg his pardon. Where do you go, then? To London?"

"Not so far. I shall look for lodgings in Hammersmith."

"Nonsense! Hammersmith? I never heard of such a place. What should you do there? You will live in London—near me—*n'est-ce pas?*"

"I have work to do. I must keep out of society for the present. You—"

"Listen! For the present, I keep out of society also. I am incognito. No one knows I am here; no one will know till the time comes. We shall keep each other's secrets. But we cannot converse here. Get in here beside me, and on the way I will tell you ... something! Come."

"You are very kind, but I have made my arrangements; and, besides, I am engaged to walk with this gentleman. If you will tell me where I may pay my respects to you and Monsieur le Marquis—"

"You are very stupid! I shall tell you nothing unless you come into the carriage. Monsieur le Marquis is not here—he never will be here. I am ... well you need not stare so. What do you suppose I am, then?"

"You are very mysterious."

"I am nothing of the sort. I am ... a widow. There!"

Philip Lancaster lifted his eyebrows and bowed.

"What does that mean?" demanded the Marquise sharply; "that you congratulate me?"

"By no means, Madame."

She drew herself up haughtily, and eyed him for a moment. "It appears that your coach has upset you in more ways than one. I apologize for interrupting you in your walk. Beyond doubt, your friend there is very charming. You are impatient to say farewell to me."

"Nothing more than '*au revoir*;' I hope."

She let her haughtiness slip from her like a garment, and, leaning forward, she touched with her soft fingers his hand which rested upon the carriage door.

"You will come here and sit beside me, Philip? Yes?" Her eyes dwelt upon his with an expectation that was almost a command.

"You force me to seem discourteous," he said, biting his lips, "but—"

"There! do not distress yourself," she exclaimed with a laugh, and leaning back in her seat. "Adieu! I do not recognize you in England: in Paris you were not so much an Englishman. If we meet in Paris perhaps we shall know each other again. Madame Cabot, have the goodness to tell the coachman to drive on." These words were spoken in French.

Madame Cabot, the elderly and unbeautiful lady already alluded to, who had sat during this colloquy with a face as unmoved as if English were to her the same as Choctaw, gave the order desired, the horses started, and Philip Lancaster, left alone by the roadside, put on his hat, with a curve of his lip that was not either a smile or a sneer.

Mr. Grant, meanwhile, had strolled onward, and was now some distance down the road. He waited for Lancaster to rejoin him, holding his open snuff-box in his hand; and when the young man came up, he offered him a pinch, which the latter declined. The two walked on together for several minutes in silence, Lancaster only having said, "I am sorry to have kept you waiting—an acquaintance whom I met abroad;" to which Mr. Grant had replied by a mere nod of the head. By-and-by, however, he said, in resumption of the conversation which had been going on previous to the Marquise's interruption:

"Is it many years then since you left England?"

"Seven or eight—long enough for a man of my age. But you have been absent even longer?"

"Yes; much has been changed since my time. It has been a period of changes. Now that Bonaparte is gone, we may hope for repose. England needs repose: so do I—though my vicissitudes have not been involved in hers. I have lived apart from the political imbroglio. But you must have been in the midst of it. Did you see Waterloo?"

"Only the remains of it: I was a non-combatant. Major Lockhart—a gentleman I met in Paris about three years ago, a fine fellow and a good soldier—we ran across each other again in Brussels, a few days before the battle. Lockhart was killed. He was a man of over sixty; was married, and had a grown-up daughter, I believe. He had been living at home with his family since '13, and had hoped to see no more fighting. When he did not come back with his regiment, I rode out to look for him, and found his body. That's all I know of Waterloo."

"You never bore arms yourself?"

"No. My father was a clergyman; not that that would make much difference; besides, he was not of the bookworm sort, and didn't object to a little fox-hunting and sparring. But I have never believed in anything enough to fight for it. I am like the Duke in 'Measure for Measure'—a looker-on at life."

"Ah! I can conceive that such an occupation may be not less arduous than any. But do you confine yourself to that? Do you never record your impressions?—cultivate literature, for example?"

Lancaster's face flushed a little, and he turned his head toward his companion with a quick, inquiring look. "How came you to think of that?" he asked.

The old gentleman passed his hand down over his mouth and chin, as if to correct an impulse to smile. "It was but a chance word of your own, while I was at work upon your shoulder-joint," he replied. "You let fall some word implying that you had written poetry. I am very slightly acquainted with modern English literature, and could not speak from personal knowledge of your works were you the most renowned poet of the day. Pardon me the liberty."

Lancaster looked annoyed for a moment; but the next moment he laughed. "You cannot do me a better service than to show me that I'm a fool," he said. "I'm apt to forget it. In theory, I care not a penny whether what I write is read or not; but I do care all the same. I pretend to be a looker-on at life from philosophical motives; but, in fact, it's nothing but laziness. I try to justify myself by scribbling poetry, and am pleased when I find that any one has discovered my justification. But if I were really satisfied with myself, I should leave justification to whom it might concern."

"My existence has been passed in what are called practical affairs," Mr. Grant returned; "but I am not ready to say that, considered in themselves, they have as much real life in them as a single verse of true poetry. Poetry and music are things beyond my power to achieve, but not to enjoy. The experience of life which cannot be translated into poetry or music is a lifeless and profitless experience." He checked himself, and added in his usual tone: "I mean to say that, man of business though I am, I am not unacquainted with the writings of poets, and I take great delight in them. The wisest thing a man can do is, I apprehend, to augment the enjoyment of other men. Commerce and politics aim to develop our own wealth and power at the cost of others; but poetry, like love, gives to all, and asks for nothing except to be received."

"Have a care, or you will undo the service I have just thanked you for. Besides, as a matter of fact, poetry in our days not only asks to be received, but to be received by publishers, and paid for!"

Something in the young man's manner of saying this, rather than the saying itself, seemed to strike Mr. Grant, for he glanced at the other with a momentary keenness of scrutiny, and presently said:

"Your father, I think you mentioned, was a clergyman?"

"He was Herbert Lancaster."

Mr. Grant halted for a moment in his walk to extract his snuff-box from his pocket. After having taken a pinch, he again gave a sharp look at his companion, and observed as he walked on:

"My prolonged absence from my native land has made my recollection of such matters a little rusty, but am I mistaken in supposing there is a title in the family?"

"My uncle is Lord Croftus—the fifth baron."

"Ah! precisely; yes, yes. Then was it not your father who married a daughter of the Earl of Seabridge? or am I confounding him with another?"

"You are quite right. He married the youngest daughter, Alice; and I am their only child, for lack of a better."

"Ah! Very singular," returned Mr. Grant; but he did not explain in what the singularity consisted.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. LOCKHART'S house at Hammersmith had been considered a good house in its day, and was still decent and comfortable. It stood on a small side street which branched off from the main road in the direction of the river, and was built of dark red brick, with plain white-sashed windows. It occupied the centre of an oblong plot of ground about half an acre in extent, with a high brick wall all round it, except in front, where space was left for a wrought-iron gate, hung between two posts, with an heraldic animal of ambiguous species sitting upright on each of them. The straight path which led from this gate to the front door of the house was paved with broad square flagstones, kept very clean. In the midst of the grass-plot on the left, as you entered, was a dark-hued cedar of Lebanon, whose flattened layers of foliage looked out of keeping with the English climate and the character of English trees. At the back of the house was an orchard, comprising three ancient apple-trees and the lifeless stump of the fourth; some sunflowers and hollyhocks, alternating with gooseberry bushes, were planted along the walls, which, for the most part, were draped in ivy. The interior of the building showed a wide hall, giving access to a staircase, which, after attaining a broad landing, used as a sort of an open sitting-room, and looking out through a window upon the back garden, mounted to the region of bed-rooms. The ground floor was divided into three rooms and a kitchen, all of comfortable dimensions, and containing sober and presentable furniture. In the drawing-room, moreover, hung a portrait, taken in 1805, of the deceased master of the establishment; and a miniature of the same gentleman, in a gold-rimmed oval frame, reposed upon Mrs. Lockhart's work-table. The sideboard in the dining-room supported a salver and some other articles of plate which had belonged to Mrs. Lockhart's family, and which, when she surrendered her maiden name of Fanny Pell, had been included in her modest dowry. For the rest, there was a small collection of books, ranged on some shelves sunk into the wall on either side of the drawing-room mantel-piece; and fastened against the walls were sundry spoils of war, such as swords, helmets and flint-lock muskets, which the Major had brought home from his campaigns. Their stern and battle-worn aspect contrasted markedly with the gentle and quiet demeanor of the dignified old lady who sat at the little table by the window, with her sewing in her hands.

Mrs. Lockhart, as has been already intimated, had been a very lovely girl, and, allowing for the modifications wrought by age, she had not, at sixty-six, lost the essential charm which had distinguished her at sixteen. Her social success had, during four London seasons, been especially brilliant; and, although her fortune was at no time great, she had received many highly eligible offers of marriage; and his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales had declared her to be "a doosid sweet little creature." She had kept the citadel of her heart through many sieges, and, save on one occasion, it had never known the throb of passion up to the period of her marriage with Lieutenant Lockhart. But, two years previous to that event, being then in her eighteenth year, she had crossed the path of the famous Tom Grantley, who, at four-and-thirty years of age, had not yet passed the meridian of his renown. He was of Irish family and birth, daring, fascinating, generous and dangerous with both men and women; accounted one of the handsomest men in Europe, a fatal duelist, a reckless yet fortunate gambler, a well-nigh irresistible wooer in love, and in political debate an orator of impetuous and captivating eloquence. His presence and bearing were lofty and superb; and he was one of those whose fiat in manners of fashion was law. When only twenty-one years old, he had astonished society by eloping with Edith, the eldest daughter of the Earl of Seabridge, a girl not less remarkable for beauty than for a spirit and courage which were a match for Tom Grantley's own. The Earl had never forgiven this wild marriage, and Tom having already seriously diminished his patrimony by extravagance, the young couple were fain to make a more than passing acquaintance with the seamy side of life. But loss of fortune did not, for them, mean loss either of heart or of mutual love, and during five years of their wedded existence there was nowhere to be found a more devoted husband than Tom Grantley, or a wife more affectionate and loyal than Lady Edith. And when she died, leaving him an only child, it was for some time a question whether Tom would not actually break his heart.

He survived his loss, however, and, having inherited a fresh fortune from a relative, he entered the world again and dazzled it once more. But he was never quite the same man as previously; there was a sternness and bitterness underlying his character which had not formerly been perceptible. During the ensuing ten years he was engaged in no fewer than thirteen duels, in which it was generally understood that the honor of some unlucky lady or other was at stake, and in most of these encounters he either wounded or killed his man. In his thirteenth affair he was himself severely wounded, the rapier of his antagonist penetrating the right lung; the wound healed badly, and probably shortened his life by many years, though he did not die until after reaching the age of forty. At the time of his meeting with Fanny Pell he was moving about London, a magnificent wreck of a man, with great melancholy blue eyes, a voice sonorously musical, a manner and address of grave and exquisite courtesy. Gazing upon that face, whose noble beauty was only deepened by the traces it bore of passion and pain, Fanny Pell needed not the stimulus of his ominous reputation to yield him first her awed homage, and afterwards her heart. But Tom, on this occasion, acted in a manner which, we may suppose, did something toward wiping away the stains of his many sins. He had been attracted by the gentle charm of the girl, and for a while he made no scruple about attracting her in turn. There was a maidenly dignity and straightforwardness about Fanny Pell, however, which, while it won upon Grantley far more than did the deliberate and self-conscious fascinations of other women, inspired at the same time an unwonted relenting in his heart. Feeling that here was one who might afford him something vastly deeper and more valuable than the idle pride of conquest and possession with which he was only too familiar, he bethought himself to show his recognition of the worth of that gift in the only way that was open to him—by rejecting it. So, one day, looking down from his majestic height into her lovely girlish face, he said with great gentleness, "My dear Miss Fanny, it has been very kind of you to show so much goodness to a broken-down old scamp like myself, who's old enough to be your father; and faith! I feel like a father to ye, too! Why, if I'd had a little girl instead of a boy, she might have had just such a sweet face as yours, my dear. So you'll not take it ill of me—will ye now!—if I just give you a kiss on the forehead before I go away. Many a woman have I seen and forgotten, who'll maybe not forget me in a hurry; but your fair eyes and tender voice I never will forget, for they've done more for me than ever a father confessor of 'em all! Good-by, dear child; and if ever any man would do ye wrong—though, sure, no man that has as much heart as a fish would do that—tell him to 'ware Tom Grantley! and as true as there's a God in heaven, and a Tom Grantley on earth, I'll put my bullet through the false skull of him. That's all, my child: only, when ye come to marry some fine honest chap, as soon ye will, don't forget to send for your old friend Tom to come and dance at your wedding."

Poor Fanny felt as if her heart were being taken out of her innocent bosom; but she was by nature so quiet in all her ways that all she did was to stand with her glistening eyes uplifted toward the splendid gentleman, her lips

tremulous, and her little hands hanging folded before her. And Tom, who was but human after all, and had begun to fear that he had undertaken at least as much as he was capable of performing, kissed her, not on her forehead, but on her mouth, and therewith took his leave hurriedly, and without much ceremony. And Fanny never saw him again; but she never forgot him, nor he her; though two years afterwards she married Lieutenant Lockhart, and was a faithful and loving wife to him for five-and-forty years. The honest soldier never thought of asking why she named their first child Tom; and when the child died, and Mrs. Lockhart put on mourning, it never occurred to him that Tom Grantley's having died in the same month of the same year had deepened the folds of his wife's crape. But so it is that the best of us have our secrets, and those who are nearest to us suspect it not.

For the rest, Mrs. Lockhart's life was a sufficiently adventurous and diversified one. War was a busy and a glorious profession in those days; and the sweet-faced lady accompanied her husband on several of his campaigns, cheerfully enduring any hardships; or awaited his return at home, amidst the more trying hardships of suspense and fear. During that time when the nations paused for a moment to watch France cut off her own head as a preliminary to entering upon a new life, Captain Lockhart (as he was then) and his wife happened to be on that side of the Channel, and saw many terrible historical sights; and the Captain, who was no friend to revolution in any shape, improved an opportunity for doing a vital service for a distinguished French nobleman, bringing the latter safely to England at some risk to his own life. A year or two later Mrs. Lockhart's second child was born, this time a daughter; and then followed a few summers and winters of comparative calm, the monotony of which was only partially relieved by such domestic events as the trial of Warren Hastings, the acting of Kemble and the classic buffoonery of Grimaldi. Then the star of Nelson began to kindle, and Captain Lockhart, reading the news, kindled also, and secretly glanced at his honorable sword hanging upon the wall; yet not so secretly but that his wife detected and interpreted the glance, and kissed her little daughter with a sigh. And it was not long before Arthur Wellesley went to Spain, and Captain Lockhart, along with many thousand other loyal Englishmen, followed him thither; and Mrs. Lockhart and little Marion stayed behind and waited for news. The news that chiefly interested her was that her husband was promoted to be Major for gallant conduct on the field of battle; then that he was wounded; and, finally, that he was coming home. Home he came, accordingly, a glorious invalid; but even this was not to be the end of trouble and glory. England still had need of her best men, and Major Lockhart was among those who were responsible for the imprisonment of the Corsican Ogre in St. Helena. It was between this period and the sudden storm that culminated at Waterloo, that the happiest time of all the married life of the Lockharts was passed. He had saved a fair sum of money, with part of which he bought the house in Hammersmith; and upon the interest of the remainder, in addition to his half-pay, he was able to carry on existence with comfort and respectability. Marion was no longer the odd little creature in short skirts that she had been when the Major kissed her good-by on his departure for the Peninsular War, but a well-grown and high-spirited young lady, with the features of her father, and a character of her own. She was passionately devoted to the gray-haired veteran, and was never tired of listening to his famous histories; of cooking his favorite dishes; of cutting tobacco for his pipe; of sitting on the arm of his chair, with her arm about his neck, and her cheek against his. "Marion has the stuff of a soldier in her," the Major used to declare; whereupon the mother would silently thank Providence that Marion was not a boy. It had only been within the last five or six years that Marion had really believed that she was not, or might not become, a boy after all; a not uncommon hallucination with those who are destined to become more than ordinarily womanly.

When the event occurred which widowed France of her Emperor and Mrs. Lockhart of her husband (much the worst catastrophe of the two, in that lady's opinion), the prospects of the household in Hammersmith seemed in no respect bright. The Major's half-pay ceased with the Major, and the widow's pension was easier to get in theory than in practice. The interest of the small capital was not sufficient by itself to meet the current expenses, though these were conducted upon the most economical scale; and Marion, upon whose shoulders all domestic cares devolved, was presently at her wit's end how to get on. She did all the cooking herself, and much of the washing, though Mrs. Lockhart strongly protested against the latter, because Marion's hands were of remarkably fine shape and texture, being, in fact, her chief beauty from the conventional point of view, and washing would make them red and ugly. Marion affirmed, with more sincerity than is commonly predicable of such sayings, that her hands were made to use, and that she did not care about them except as they were useful; and she went on with her washing in spite of protestations. But even this did not cover deficiencies; and then there was the wardrobe question. Marion, however, pointed out that, in the first place, she had enough clothes on hand to last her for a long time, especially as she had done growing; and, secondly, that she could easily manage all necessary repairs and additions herself. To this Mrs. Lockhart replied that young ladies must be dressed like young ladies; that good clothes were a necessary tribute to good society; and that in order to be happily and genteelly married, a girl must make the most of her good points, and subdue her bad ones, by the adornments of costume. This was, no doubt, very true; but marriage was a thing which Marion never could hear proposed, even by her own mother, with any patience; and, as a consequence, to use marriage as an argument in support of dress, was to insure the rejection of the argument. Marriage, said Marion, was, to begin with, a thing to which her whole character and temperament were utterly opposed. She was herself too much like a man ever to care for a man, or not to despise him. In the next place, if a girl had not enough in her to win an honest man's love, in spite of any external disadvantages, then the best thing for her would be not to be loved at all. Love, this young dissenter would go on to observe, is something sacred, if it is anything; and so pure and sensitive, that it were infinitely better to forego it altogether than to run the least risk of getting it mixed up with any temporal or expedient considerations. And since, she would add, it seems to be impossible nowadays ever to get love in that unsullied and virginal condition, she for her part intended to give it a wide berth if ever it came in her way—which she was quite sure it never would; because it takes two to make a bargain, and not only would she never be one of the two, but, if she were to be so, she thanked God that she had so ugly a face and so unconciliating a temper that no man would venture to put up with her; unless, perhaps, she were possessed of five or ten thousand a year; from which misfortune it was manifestly the beneficent purpose of Providence to secure her. The upshot of this diatribe was that she did not care how shabby and ungentle her clothes were, so long as they were clean and covered her; and that even if she could afford to hire a dressmaker, she would still prefer to do her making and mending herself; because no one so well as herself could comprehend what she wanted.

"You should not call yourself ugly, Marion," her mother would reply: "at any rate, you should not think yourself ugly. A girl generally appears to others like what she is in the habit of thinking herself to be. Half the women who are called beauties are not really beautiful; but they have persuaded themselves that they are so, and then other people believe it. People in this world so seldom take the pains to think or to judge for themselves; they take what is

given to them. Besides, to think a thing, really does a great deal toward making it come true. If you think you are pretty, you will grow prettier every day. And if you keep on talking about being ugly.... You have a very striking, intelligent face, my dear, and your smile is very charming indeed."

Marion laughed scornfully. "Believing a lie is not the way to invent truth," she said. "All the imagination in England won't make me different from what I am. Whether I am ugly or not, I'm not a fool, and I shan't give anybody the right to call me one by behaving as if I fancied I were somebody else. I am very well as I am," she continued, wringing out a towel and spreading it out on the clothes-horse to dry. "I should be too jealous and suspicious to make a man happy, and I don't mean to try it. You don't understand that; but you were made to be married, and I wasn't, and that's the reason."

Nevertheless, the income continued to be insufficient, and inroads continued to be made on the capital, much to the friendly distress of Sir Francis Bendibow, the head of the great banking-house of Bendibow Brothers, to whose care the funds of the late Major Lockhart had been intrusted "The first guinea you withdraw from your capital, my dear madam," he had assured Mrs. Lockhart, with his usual manner of impressive courtesy, "represents your first step on the road that leads to bankruptcy." The widow admitted the truth of the maxim; but misfortunes are not always curable in proportion as they are undeniable; though that seemed to be Sir Francis' assumption. Mrs. Lockhart began to suffer from her anxieties. Marion saw this, and was in despair. "What a good-for-nothing thing a woman is!" she exclaimed bitterly. "If I were a man I would earn our living." She understood something of music, and sang and played with great refinement and expression: but her talent in this direction was natural, not acquired, and she was not sufficiently grounded in the science of the accomplishment to have any chance of succeeding as a teacher. What was to be done?

"What do you say to selling the house and grounds, and going into lodgings?" she said one day.

"It would help us for a time, but not for always," the mother replied. "Lodgings are so expensive."

"The house is a great deal bigger than we need," said Marion.

"We should be no better off if it were smaller," said Mrs. Lockhart.

There was a long pause. Suddenly Marion jumped to her feet, while the light of inspiration brightened over her face. "Why, mother, what is to prevent us letting our spare rooms to lodgers?" she cried out.

"Oh, that would be impossible!" returned the mother in dismay. "The rooms that your dear father used to live in!"

"That is what we must do," answered Marion firmly; and in the end, as we have seen, that was what they did.

CHAPTER V.

THE third of May passed away, and, beyond the hanging up in the window of the card with "Lodgings to Let" written on it, nothing new had happened in the house at Hammersmith. But the exhibition of that card had been to Mrs. Lockhart an event of such momentous and tragic importance, that she did not know whether she were most astonished, relieved, or disappointed that it had produced no perceptible effect upon the outer universe.

"It seems to be of no use," she said to her daughter, while the latter was assisting her in her morning toilet. "Had we not better take down the card, and try to think of something else. Couldn't we keep half-a-dozen fowls, and sell the eggs?"

"How faint-hearted you are, mother!"

"Besides, even if somebody were to pass here who wanted lodgings, they could never think of looking through the gate; and if they did, I doubt whether they could see the card."

"I have thought of that; and when I got up this morning I tied the card to the gate itself. Nobody can fail to see it there."

"Oh, Marion! It is almost as if we were setting up a shop."

"Everybody is more or less a shopkeeper," replied Marion philosophically. "Some people sell rank, others beauty, others cleverness, others their souls to the devil: we might do worse than sell house-room to those who want it."

"Oh, my dear!"

"Bless your dear heart! you'll think nothing of it, once the lodgers are in the house," rejoined the girl, kissing her mother's cheek.

They went down to breakfast: it was a pleasant morning; the sky was a tender blue, and the eastern sunshine shot through the dark limbs of the cedar of Lebanon, and fell in cheerful patches on the floor of the dining-room, and sent a golden shaft across the white breakfast cloth, and sparkled on the silver teapot—the same teapot in which Fanny Pell had once made tea for handsome Tom Grantley in the year 1768. Marion was in high spirits: at all events, she adopted a lightsome tone, in contrast to her usual somewhat grave preoccupation. She was determined to make her mother smile.

"This is our last solitary breakfast," she declared. "To-morrow morning we shall sit down four to table. There will be a fine old gentleman for me, and a handsome young man for you; for anybody would take you to be the younger of us two. The old gentleman will be impressed with my masculine understanding and knowledge of the world; we shall talk philosophy, and history, and politics; he will finally confess to a more than friendly interest in me; but I shall stop him there, and remind him that, for persons of our age, it is most prudent not to marry. He will allow himself to be persuaded on that point; but he has a vast fortune, and he will secretly make his will in my favor. Your young gentleman will be of gentle blood, a sentimentalist and an artist; his father will have been in love with you; the son will have the good taste to inherit the passion; he will entreat you to let him paint your portrait; but, if he becomes too pressing in his attentions, I shall feel it my duty to take him aside, and admonish him like a mother. He will be so mortally afraid of me, that I shall have no difficulty in managing him. In the course of a year or two—"

"Is not that somebody? I'm sure I heard—"

"La, mother, don't look so scared!" cried Marion, laughing, but coloring vividly: "it can't be anything worse than an executioner with a warrant for our arrest." She turned in her chair, and looked through the window and across the grass-plot to the gate.

"There is somebody—two gentlemen—just as I said: one old and the other young."

"Are you serious, Marion?" said the widow, interlacing her fingers across her breast, while her lips trembled.

"They are reading the card: the old one is holding a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses across his nose. Now they are looking through the gate at the house: the young one is saying something, and the other is smiling and taking snuff. The young one has a small head, but his eyes are big, and he has broad shoulders: he looks like an artist, just as I said. The old one stoops a little and is ugly; but I like his face—it's honest. He doesn't seem to be very rich, though; his coat is very old-fashioned. Oh, they are going away!"

"Oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed Mrs. Lockhart fervently.

"No, they are coming back—they are coming in: the young one is opening the gate. Here they come: that young fellow is certainly very handsome. There!"

A double knock sounded through the house.

"Say we are not at home—oh, they must not come in! Tell them to call another day. Perhaps they may not have called about the lodgings," faltered the widow, in agitation.

Marion said nothing; being, to tell the truth, engaged in screwing her own courage to the sticking-point. After a pause of a few moments she marched to the door, with a step so measured and deliberate as to suggest stern desperation rather than easy indifference. Passing into the hall, and closing the door behind her, she threw open the outer door and faced the two intruders.

The elder gentleman stood forward as spokesman. "Good morning to you," he said, glancing observantly at the young woman's erect figure. "You have lodgings to let, I believe?"

"Yes."

"This gentleman and I are in search of lodgings. Is the accommodation sufficient for two? We should require separate apartments."

"You can come in and see." She made way for them to enter, and conducted them into the sitting-room on the left.

"You had better speak to your mistress, my dear, or to your master, if he is at home, and say we would like to speak to him." This was said by the younger man.

Marion looked at him with a certain glow of fierceness. "My father is not living," she said. "There is no need to disturb my mother. I can show you over the house myself."

"I ask your pardon sincerely. It has always been my foible to speak before I look. I took it for granted—"

"I don't suppose you intended any harm, sir," said Marion coldly. "If we could have afforded a servant to attend the door, we should not have been forced to take lodgers." She turned to the elder man and added: "We have three vacant rooms on the floor above, and a smaller room on the top story. You might divide the accommodation to suit yourselves. You can come up stairs, if you like, and see whether they would suit you."

The gentlemen assented, and followed Marion over the upper part of the house. The elder man examined the rooms and the furniture with care; but the younger kept his regards fixed rather upon the guide than upon what she showed them. Her gait, the movement of her arms, the carriage of her head, her tone and manner of speaking, all were subjected to his scrutiny. He said little, but took care that what he did say should be of a courteous and conciliatory nature. The elder man asked questions pleasantly, and seemed pleased with the answers Marion gave him. Within a short time the crudity and harshness of the first part of the interview began to vanish, and the relations of the three became more genial and humane. There was here and there a smile, and once, at least, a laugh. Marion, who was always quick to recognize the humorous aspect of a situation, already foresaw herself making her mother merry with an account of this adventure, when the heroes of it should have gone away. The party returned to the sitting-room in a very good humor with one another, therefore.

"For my part, I am more than satisfied," remarked the elder gentleman, taking out his snuff-box. "Do you agree with me, Mr. Lancaster?"

Lancaster did not reply. He was gazing with great interest at the oil portrait that hung on the wall. At length he turned to Marion and said: "Is that—may I ask who that is?"

"My father."

"Was he a major in the 97th regiment?"

"Did you know him?"

"I knew Major Lockhart; He—of course you know—fell at Waterloo."

"We know that he was killed there, but we have no particulars," said Marion, her voice faltering, and her eyes full of painful eagerness.

"And you are Miss Lockhart—the Marion he spoke of?"

"Wait a moment," she said, in a thick voice, and turning pale. She walked to the window, and pressed her forehead against the glass. Presently she turned round and said, "I will call my mother, sir. She must hear what you have to tell us," and left the room.

"A strange chance this!" remarked the elder man thoughtfully.

"She's a fine girl, and looks like her father," said Lancaster.

In a few moments Marion re-entered with her mother. Mrs. Lockhart looked from one to the other of the two men with wide-open eyes and flushed cheeks: a slight tremor pervaded the hand with which she mechanically smoothed the thick braids of gray hair that covered her graceful head. She moved with an uncertain step to a chair, and said in a voice scarcely audible, "Will you be seated, gentlemen? My daughter tells me that you—one of you—"

"The honor belongs to me, madam," said Lancaster, with deep respect and with some evidence of emotion, "of having seen your husband the day before his death. He mentioned both of you; he said no man in the army had had so happy a life as he—such a wife and such a daughter. I shall remember other things that he said, by-and-by; but this meeting has come upon me by surprise, and.... The day after the battle I rode out to the field and found him. He had fallen most gallantly—I need not tell you that—at a moment such as all brave soldiers would wish to meet death in. He was wounded through the heart, and must have died instantly. I assumed the privilege of bringing his body to Brussels, and of seeing it buried there." Here he paused, for both the women were crying, and, in sympathy with them, his own voice was getting husky. The elder man sat with his face downcast, and his hands folded between his knees.

"Is the grave marked?" he suddenly asked, looking up at Lancaster.

"Yes; the name, and the regiment, and the date. I brought something from him," he went on, addressing Marion, as being the stronger of the two women; "it was fastened by a gold chain round his neck, and he wore it underneath his coat. You would have received it long ago if I had known where to find you." He held out to her, as he spoke, a small locket with its chain. Marion took it, and held it pressed between her hands, not saying anything. After a moment, the two gentlemen exchanged a glance, and got up. The elder gentleman approached Marion with great gentleness of manner; and, when she arose and attempted to speak, he put his hand kindly on her shoulder.

"I had a little girl once, who loved me," he said. "You must let me go without ceremony now; to-morrow I shall ask leave to come back and complete our arrangements. God bless you, my child! Are you going with me, Mr. Lancaster?"

"Shall you come back to-morrow, too?" said Marion to the latter.

"Indeed I will."

"Then I won't try to thank you now," she replied. But their eyes met for a moment, and Lancaster did not feel that the recognition of his service had been postponed.

They were going out without attempting to take leave of Mrs. Lockhart; but she rose up from her chair and courtseyed to them with a grace and dignity worthy of Fanny Pell. And then, yielding to an impulse that was better than the best high breeding, the gentle widow stepped quickly up to Lancaster, and put her arms about his neck, and kissed him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE great banking-house of Bendibow Brothers, like many other great things, had a modest beginning. At the beginning of the eighteenth century there was a certain Mr. Abraham Bendibow in London, who kept a goldsmith's shop in the neighborhood of Whitechapel, and supplemented the profits of that business by lending money at remunerative interest, on the security of certain kinds of personal property. To his customers and casual acquaintances he was merely a commonplace, keen, cautious, hard-headed and hard-hearted man of business; and, perhaps, till as lately as the second decade of the century, this might have fairly represented his own opinion of himself. Nevertheless, there lurked in his character, in addition to the qualities above mentioned, two others which are by no means commonplace, namely, imagination and enterprise. They might have lurked there unsuspected till the day of his death, but for the intervention of circumstances—to make use of a convenient word of which nobody has ever explained the real meaning. But, in 1711, that ingenious nobleman, the Earl of Oxford, being animated by a praiseworthy desire to relieve a nightmare of a half-score million sterling or so of indebtedness which was then oppressing the government, hit upon that famous scheme which has since entered into history under the name of the South Sea Bubble. The scheme attracted Bendibow's attention, and he studied it for some time in his usual undemonstrative but thoroughgoing manner. Whenever occasion offered he discussed it, in an accidental and indifferent way, with all kinds of people. At the end of two or three years he probably understood more about the affair than any other man in London. Whether he believed that it was a substance or a bubble will never be known to any one except himself. All that can be affirmed is that he minded his own business, and imparted his opinion to no one. The opinion gradually gained ground that he shared the views of Sir Robert Walpole, who, in the House of Commons, was almost the only opposer of the South Sea scheme. So matters went on until the year 1720.

It was at this period that the excitement and convulsion began. The stock had risen to 330. Abraham Bendibow sat in his shop, and preserved an unruffled demeanor. The stock fell to below 300; but Abraham kept his strong box locked, and went about his business as usual. Stock mounted again to 340; but nobody perceived any change in Mr. Bendibow. For all any one could see, he might never have heard of the South Sea scheme in his life. And yet a great fortune was even then in his grasp, had he chosen to stretch out his hand to take it.

Weeks and months passed away, and the stock kept on rising. Often it would tremble and fall, but after each descent it climbed higher than before. It became the one absorbing topic of conversation with everybody except Abraham Bendibow, who composedly preferred to have no concern in the matter: it was not for small tradesmen like him to meddle with such large enterprises. And, meanwhile, the stock rose and rose, and rose higher still, until men lost their heads, and other men made colossal fortunes, and everybody expected to secure at least ten thousand a year. One day the stock touched 890, and then people held their breath and turned pale, and the most sanguine said in their hearts that this was supernatural and could not last.

On that day Abraham Bendibow went into his private room, and locked the door; and taking pen and paper he made a calculation. After having made it he sat for a long time gazing at the little array of figures in seeming abstraction. Then he leaned back in his chair, with one hand in the pocket of his small-clothes, while with the other he slowly rubbed his chin at intervals. By degrees he began to breathe more quickly, and his eyes became restless. He arose from his chair and paced up and down the room. "Eight hundred and ninety," he kept muttering to himself, over and over again. The strong box stood in the corner of the room, and toward this Mr. Bendibow often looked. Once he approached it, and laid his hand upon the lid; then he turned away from it with an abrupt movement, compressing his lips and shaking his head. He resumed his pacing up and down the room, his head bent down in deep and troubled thought. At last an idea seemed to strike him. He unlocked and opened the door of the room, and called in a harsh, peremptory tone:

"Jacob!"

A young man appeared, about twenty years of age. In features he resembled the other, but his face was not so broad, nor was his air so commanding. Mr. Bendibow motioned to him with his head to enter. He then seated himself in his chair, and eyed Jacob for a while in silence. Jacob stood with his head stretched forward, and slowly chafing the back of one hand with the palm of the other, while his countenance wore an expression of deferential inquiry.

"Jacob," said the elder, "what is doing out-doors to-day—eh?"

"The same as usual, father," answered Jacob, tentatively, as being in some doubt what the question might portend. "There is plenty of excitement: same as usual."

"Excitement; on what account?"

"Well, sir, the stocks: terrible speculation: madness—nothing less. There was a fellow, sir, this very morning, got out a prospectus of a company for prosecuting a certain undertaking not at present to be revealed: capital one million, in ten thousand shares of one hundred each: deposit two pounds, entitling to one hundred per annum, per share: particulars next week, and balance of subscription week after next. Frightful, upon my soul, sir!"

"Has anybody bitten?"

"A good many have been bitten," returned Jacob, with a dry giggle. "Three thousand pounds were subscribed in three hours; and then the fellow decamped. Madness, upon my life!"

"You would not advise having anything to do with such speculations, eh, Jacob?"

"Me? Bless my soul, not I indeed!" exclaimed Jacob with energy.

"Why not?"

"In the first place, because you have expressed disapproval of it, father," replied the virtuous Jacob. "And I may flatter myself I have inherited something of your sound judgment."

"So you have never speculated at all—eh, Jacob? Never at all, eh? Never bought a shilling's worth of stock of any kind in your life—eh? The truth, Jacob!"

The last words were pronounced in so stern a tone that Jacob changed color, turning his eyes first to one side of his father's point-blank gaze, and then to the other. At last, however, their glances met, and then Jacob said:

"I might not be able to swear to a shilling or so, neither—"

"Nor to a guinea: nor to ten, nor to fifty—eh, Jacob?"

"Not more than fifty; upon my soul, sir," said Jacob, laying his hands upon his heart in earnest deprecation. "Not

a penny, sir, upon my word of honor!"

"What of the fifty then—eh?"

"It was in South Sea: I bought at 400," said Jacob.

"At 400? And what is it to-day?"

"Eight hundred and ninety it was this morning," said Jacob.

"Was this morning? Do you mean it has fallen since?"

"It has indeed, sir. They've all been selling like demons; and it's below eight hundred at this moment."

"What have you done—eh?"

"Sold out the first thing, sir, at four hundred and ninety per cent, clear profit," replied Jacob, something of complacency mingling with the anxious deference of his tone.

"Therefore, instead of fifty pounds, you now have three hundred or so?"

"Two hundred, ninety and five, sir," said the youth modestly.

"Jacob, you are a fool!"

"Sir?"

"You have thrown your money away. You are a fool! You are timid! You have neither the genius, the steadiness, nor the daring to manage and to multiply a great fortune. Were you like myself, Jacob, you or your children might have a hand in controlling the destinies of England, and thus of the world. You have behaved like a pettifogger and a coward, Jacob. I do not ask you to be honest. No man is honest when he is sure that dishonesty will enrich him. But, whatever you are, I ask you to be that thing with all your soul. Be great, or be nothing! Only fools and cowards patter about morality! I tell you that success is the only morality." Here Mr. Bendibow, who had spoken with calmness, though by no means without emphasis, checked himself, and putting his hand in his pocket drew forth a key which he handed to his son. "Open the strong box," he said, "and take out the papers you will find in it."

Jacob did as he was bid. But his first glance at the papers made him start and stare in a bewildered manner at the unmoved countenance of his father. He then reverted to the papers; but, after a close inspection of them, he seemed only more bewildered than before.

"This is South Sea stock, sir," he said at length.

"Well, Jacob?" said Mr. Bendibow, composedly.

"Nigh on fifteen thousand pounds' worth at par, sir."

"Yes, Jacob."

"I see how it is; you have been buying for some one!" broke out Jacob, energetically.

"Evidently, Jacob."

There was a pause. "On commission, of course?" hazarded Jacob.

"No commission at all, Jacob."

Jacob's jaws relaxed. "No commission? Whom did you buy for, sir?"

"For myself, Jacob."

Jacob dropped the papers on the table, and leaned against it dizzily; his breath forsook him. Finally, Mr. Bendibow said: "Jacob, you are even more a fool than I took you for."

"But how.... When did you buy, sir?" faltered Jacob.

"Eight or nine years ago," Mr. Bendibow replied.

"Then ... why, then you must have got it at under two hundred?"

"Eighty to a hundred and twenty," said Mr. Bendibow, curtly.

There was another pause. Jacob moistened his lips and passed his hand over his forehead. Suddenly he screamed out, "But you haven't sold, sir!"

"Well, Jacob?"

"If you'd sold this morning you'd have been worth a hundred and thirty-five thousand sterling—one hundred and thirty-five thousand!"

"Very nearly, Jacob."

"And stock is falling: you've lost fifteen thousand since ten o'clock!" shouted Jacob, now quite beside himself. He seized the papers again, and made for the door. There he was stopped by an iron grasp on his arm, and Mr. Bendibow said, in a voice as uncompromising as his grasp, "Stay where you are!"

"But it's not too late, sir; we'll clear a hundred thousand yet," pleaded Jacob, in agony.

"Be silent, and hear what I say to you. When I bought this stock, and paid fifteen thousand pounds for it, I made up my mind either to lose all or to win ten times my stake. I made up my mind that my fortune should be either one hundred and fifty thousand sterling, or nothing. Through nine years I have held to my purpose. Until this hour no one has known that I have risked a penny. Men have made fortunes—I have seen it, and held to my purpose, and held my tongue. Men have gone mad with success or failure; I am the same to-day that I was ten years ago. This morning stock reached eight hundred and ninety; a thousand fools like you sold, and now it is falling, and will fall yet more. But it is my belief that it will rise again. It will rise to one thousand. When it touches one thousand, I sell; not before, and not afterward. I shall win one hundred and fifty thousand pounds. With that money I shall found a banking-house. It will be known as the banking-house of Bendibow and Son. If you and your children were men like myself, the house of Bendibow and Son would become one of the great Powers of Europe. Where now we have ten thousand, in a century we should have a million. But you are not such a man as I am. Your children and your great-grandchildren will not be such men as I am. But I have done what I could. I have written down in a book the rules which you are to obey—you, and all your descendants. If you disobey them, my curse will be upon you, and you will fail. I am not young; and no man knows the day when he shall die: therefore I have called you, Jacob, and made this known to you now; because a day or a month hence might be too late. You are not such a man as I am; but any man can obey; and if you obey the rules that I have written you will not fail. Let those rules be written upon your heart, and upon the hearts of your children's children, even unto the latest generation. There is no power in this world so great as a great fortune, greatly used; but a fool may lose that power in a day."

Mr. Bendibow had spoken these words standing erect, and with his eyes fixed steadfastly upon his son; and his tone was stern, solemn and impressive. He now said, in another tone: "Put the papers back in the strong box, Jacob, and do not speak of them again, either to me or to any other person, until stock is at one thousand. Come to me then, and not before. Now go."

"But, father, what if stock never reaches one thousand?" suggested Jacob, timidly.

"Then I shall have lost fifteen thousand pounds," returned Mr. Bendibow, composedly resuming his seat in his chair.

Jacob said no more, but replaced the papers in the strong box, handed the key to his father, and left the room, a different man from when he entered it. He could not be an original great man, but he could appreciate and reverence original greatness; and, being instructed, could faithfully carry out the behests of that greatness. Doubtless his father, who had the insight into human nature which generally characterizes men of his sort, had perceived this, and had shaped his conduct accordingly. Nor is it impossible—the greatest of men being but men after all—that Mr. Bendibow may have taken his son into his confidence as much to guard against his own human weakness as to provide against the contingency of his death or incapacity. Proudly though he asserted the staunchness of his purpose, he had that day felt the tug of temptation, and may have been unwilling to risk the strain unaided again. Be that as it may, it is certain that the confidence came none too soon. When the evening meal was ready Mr. Bendibow did not appear; his customary punctuality made the delay seem extraordinary; so, after waiting half an hour, Jacob went to summon him. He knocked at the door, but no response came. At last he made bold to open the door; and there sat Abraham Bendibow in his chair, with the key of the strong box in his hand, looking, in the dusk, very much as he had looked when Jacob left him three hours before. But Abraham Bendibow was dead.

All his affairs were found to be in order; and, among the other contents of the strong box, was the book of rules of which he had spoken to Jacob. As to the South Sea stock, it sank and sank, and Jacob's heart sank with it; and when the stock had reached six hundred and forty, Jacob's heart was in his boots. Nevertheless he was faithful to his trust, and held on. Soon afterward the agents of the Company bought largely, and stock rose once more, and practically for the last time. The hour came at last when it was quoted at one thousand, and then, with a trembling delight, and with a conviction of his father's prescience and wisdom, that amounted to religious veneration, Jacob went forth and sold; and that night he deposited in the strong box bank-notes and bullion to the amount of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds. Such was the beginning of the famous house of Bendibow.

CHAPTER VII.

THE history of the house of Bendibow & Son—or of Bendibow Brothers, as it came to be called—was broadly the history of the eighteenth century in England. Persons who deal in money are apt to come into relation with most of the prominent characters and events of their time, and Bendibow Brothers dealt in that commodity very extensively. The thirty years covered by the reign of George the Second was a picturesque and brilliant period. Famous personages were to be met everywhere—in London, Epsom, Bath, Tunbridge and Scarborough: York, too, was a fashionable place in those days; Shrewsbury was full of merry-making, and Newmarket attracted other people beside professed lovers of the turf. Congreve was living out the last years of his life, and Mrs. Bracegirdle was still acting his plays, when the second representative of the Brunswick line came to the throne. Addison had died a few years previously, Steele a year or two afterward; Pope, Swift, Fielding and Defoe were all in full cry and condition. Lord Bathurst was in mid-career as patron of literary celebrities, and the fascinating and romantic Earl of Peterborough was losing his heart to the sweet voice and face of Anastasia Robinson. Hogarth and Kneller were in existence, and Arbuthnot was witty and wise. Handsome Tom Grantley, destined to become one of the foremost men of fashion and intrigue of his time, was in 1732 a little squalling baby in the south of Ireland. George the First had created the earldom of Seabridge upward of fifteen years before, in consequence of assistance rendered to him by the then head of the family during the Rebellion; and it was at about the same date that Mary Lancaster, niece of Lord Croftus, first saw the light—she who was afterward to unite the two families by her marriage with the second Earl of Seabridge. Meanwhile Mary Bellenden was esteemed the loveliest, and Mary Wortley Montague the cleverest of living women. As time went on, and the century approached its middle age, Garrick began to act in London; Beau Nash, superb, autocratic and imperturbable, ruled the roast at Bath; Horace Walpole embroidered society with the brilliance of his affected and sentimental persiflage; Smollet hobnobbed with Quin, and the Great Commoner stalked about, glaring out appallingly from the jungle of his shaggy wig. Amusement was the religion of the age, and recklessness was its morality. It was the apotheosis of card playing; literature was not good form; cards and men formed the library of the Duchess of Marlborough. What are now termed the mental resources of civilization, being as yet unknown, life was so conducted as to become a constant variety and succession of condiments. Criminals were made to minister to the general entertainment by being drawn and quartered, as well as beheaded and hanged; gentlemen pistoled and skewered one another instead of being contented with calling each other names, and suing for damages and defamation. Tempers were hot, hearts were bold, and conversation was loose on all sides. Wine was cheap, tea was dear, gluttony and drunkenness were anything but improper. The country folks were no less energetic on their own scale. They romped and shouted at village fairs and wakes; they belabored one another scientifically with cudgels; half-naked women ran races and jumped hurdles; Maypoles were hoisted on every green; and the disaffected rode out on the king's highway with masks and pistols. Love-making, with persons of condition at least, was a matter less of hearts than of fortunes and phases: it was etiquette for everybody in small clothes to languish at the feet of everybody in petticoats. The externals of life were sumptuous and splendid, because no time and trouble were wasted upon internals. An element of savagery and brutality pervaded all classes, high and low, without which the game could not have been kept up with such unflinching plausibility and zeal.

But all this fun had to be fed with money, or at all events with credit; and Bendibow Brothers were always prepared, on proper security, to furnish either; wherefore a great portion of this gorgeous procession passed through their dingy office in the city, on its way to or from its debaucheries. And since the brethren (following the injunctions of their long-headed founder) aimed no less at social distinction than at the wealth which should render that distinction profitable, they frequently saw their way to accept, from certain of their customers, interest payable otherwise than in hard cash. An introduction to Lord Croftus's drawing-room, for example, might be cheaply purchased for an advance of a thousand pounds; a sinecure post in the army for a junior member of the firm, or a foreign order for the senior, would be worth three or four times as much; while, for the hand of a daughter of the junior branch of a titled family, twenty or thirty thousand pounds down would be considered a profitable transaction. Worldly wisdom and foresight, in short, formed as important a part of the Bendibow policy as direct and literal pecuniary returns. Indeed, it was upon the profit of their innumerable small transactions that they relied for the bulk of their material wealth: with the great and haughty their dealings were uniformly liberal and dignified. The consequence was, that when the Jacobite rebellion broke out, the Government accepted a substantial loan from Bendibow Brothers, as being not only the richest but the most loyal and respectable firm of bankers in England. Mr. Joseph Bendibow, one of the partners, was, for some unexplained reason, "promoted" to the rank of colonel in the regular army; and five years later the head of the family was raised to the baronetage. Hereupon a constituency was purchased at a not too exorbitant rate, and—the Bendibows having long since abandoned their Jewish proclivities, and presented themselves to the world as immaculate Protestant Christians—for the remainder of their career the descendants of the obscure Hebrew goldsmith and money-lender were numbered among the law-givers of their country and trusty advisers of the Crown.

It was an honorable position, patiently tried for and cleverly won. None of the Bendibows, since the time of Abraham, their progenitor, had been in any sense men of genius; but, on the other hand, none of them had been destitute of common sense, prudence, steadiness, suppleness, and persistency; and they had also possessed—what perhaps was of more value to them than any of their native virtues—a private family bible, in the shape of the book of rules, written and bequeathed to them by the patriarch above mentioned. It would be interesting, and possibly edifying, to review the contents of this work. No doubt it was brimming over with human astuteness; and might be described as a translation into eighteenth-century ideas and language of the mystic injunctions of the old alchemists in reference to the Philosopher's Stone. Be that as it may, the book went far toward achieving the end for which it was composed; and if the Bendibows were as yet not quite a hundredfold millionaires and peers of the realm, they seemed fairly on their way to be so. To that consummation the brethren themselves looked forward with justifiable confidence. Nevertheless, looking at their whole history from the vantage-ground of our own century, we can see that the accession of George the Third was the period of their actual apogee.

It was about that time that Francis Bendibow was born—he whose genius almost equaled that of Abraham, and who, indeed, carried the reputation of the bank to a point higher than any which it had before attained. But reputation does not always, nor in the long run, mean prosperity; and Sir Francis Bendibow, along with his genius, perhaps possessed some qualities which, under pressure of circumstances, were capable of doing mischief. But that shall be enlarged upon in its proper place.

Society was now becoming more intellectual, more civilized, and more depraved. That abstruse idea, which is covered by the phrase "Fine Gentleman," now received its most complete embodiment. It was a patrician era, but also an era in which genius, of whatever kind, could force men and women from obscurity to the light. The youthful Sheridan was making a good impression at Bath by his fine figure, hearty face, and manly and unaffected bearing, even before the "Rivals" and the "School for Scandal" had been written; and he and his fellow-countryman, Tom Grantley—though the latter was more than fifteen years his senior—were on the most cordial terms; and it was said at the time that Grantley was of assistance to Sheridan in that gentleman's elopement with the beautiful Miss Linley. Fox, with others of his kidney, were setting the fashion of colossal gambling as a means of working off their superfluous nervous vitality and the estates of their ancestors; Whattier's and White's, Brookes's and Raffett's saw such sights as will never come again; statesmen and macaronis, parsons and opera-dancers, soldiers and playwrights, fine ladies and fine females, all, according to their several natures and capacities, took the most serious interest in cock-fighting, rat-hunting, singing and dancing, betting, dicing, antique statues and old pictures, divorce and atheism. But, as the century culminated, war, and the armies which fought it, overtopped all other interests; political opinions, or professions of opinion, were at the acme of vehemence; furious pamphlets fluttered on all sides; Dibdin wrote songs to encourage Nelson's sailors; Wilkes was synonymous with liberty; and King George, believing himself the father of his people, spent his long life in doing them all the harm in his power. And all this, too, required money, and more money than ever; and Bendibow Brothers were more than ever mixed up in it—more, indeed, than was at that time suspected; for Francis Bendibow had begun to show what was in him; and his suggestions and enterprises had begun first to astound, then to dazzle and fascinate his more methodical and humdrum partners, until it seemed likely that he might take upon himself to edit a new and improved edition of the private family bible. In truth, he was a very brilliant and popular gentleman, whom everybody knew, and whom nobody who was anybody disliked. He was the confidant of as many social secrets as a fashionable physician or lawyer, and knew more about political intrigues than any other man out of the Cabinet. It was a marvel how well, considering the weight of his multifarious responsibilities, he managed to preserve his aspect of gayety and good nature. But it often happens that precisely those persons who have most to conceal, and who deal most in mysteries, appear, in the careless eyes of their contemporaries, more frank and undisguised than anybody else. Sir Francis Bendibow, be it repeated, was a general favorite of society, as well as a special favorite of fortune; and somewhere about 1790 he confirmed his successes by allying himself with the Barons Croftus by marriage with a daughter of the then lord.

From that time forward the affairs of Bendibow Brothers went on with much ostensible smoothness and good fortune, though whether anything less serene and comfortable lay hidden beneath this fair surface, is a question the answer to which must for the moment be reserved. One or two events only need to be mentioned, in order to bring us down to the epoch at which this story properly begins. Tom Grantley, who throughout his career had always been an ample customer of the Bendibows, and who, like so many others, had insensibly allowed his business relations with them to develop into social intercourse, had, in 1771, placed his son Charles, then a boy of fifteen, in the bank in the capacity of clerk, with the understanding that he was afterward to be admitted to partnership, should he turn out to be qualified for that position. This was a good thing for Charles, in a pecuniary point of view, and his abilities, which were always remarkable, made it likely that his career would be a successful one. As for the social aspects of the affair, the Bendibows were perhaps greater gainers than Grantley, since Charles had the noble Seabridge blood in his veins. But Charles' father, though aristocratic and imperious enough in his own practice, was theoretically liberal and even republican in his views; and possibly he was not sorry to requite the neglect which his wife's family had shown him by embarking the grandson of the earl in a mercantile life. Charles, for his own part, was actually what his father was only in idea; that is to say, he sympathized with the enlightened and revolutionary spirit that was abroad, and which was taking palpable form in the American colonies and in France. He rebelled against the claims of caste, and, before he was twenty-one, was pretty well known as a social reformer and radical. This, of itself, would not have impaired the social popularity of one who could call an earl his kinsman; not only because extreme opinions were in those days considered rather interesting and amusing than otherwise, but because then, as at all times, a man may be or say anything he pleases, provided he will be or say it in a sufficiently graceful or skillful manner. But Charles, unfortunately, was as abrupt, unconciliating and dogmatic in his manner as he was startling and unconventional in his views. He was not only able to utter disagreeable and embarrassing truths at inconvenient moments, but he seemed actually fond of doing so; and, since he was not more prepossessing in person than adroit in behavior, society for the most part ended by giving him up as a bad job. "Charles would be very well, if he wasn't so damned sincere," was one of the least uncharitable judgments that those who were willing to be his friends pronounced upon him. Charles meanwhile seemed to take the situation very composedly. The social intercourse which was not to be had in fashionable drawing-rooms and coffee-houses he sought and found elsewhere—among literary men, perhaps, or others still lower in the social scale. In his chosen circle—whatever it was—he was eminent and influential. Every one respected him; many feared him a little; a few liked him heartily, or even loved him. He was of a fiery, warlike temperament, and nothing could daunt him or dishearten him. He was proud and sensitive beyond what seemed reasonable; but those who knew him well said he was full of tenderness and generosity, and that a more affectionate and self-sacrificing man never lived. Perhaps neither his friends nor his foes entirely understood him. One thing about him, at all events, no one understood, and that was how he and Francis Bendibow came to be such friends. The two young men were, it is true, nearly of the same age; their business interests were identical; and much of their time must of necessity be passed in each other's neighborhood. But no amount of external association together will of itself suffice to make new friends: it is quite as apt to have an opposite effect. It was plain to the most careless glance that Charles and Francis were in disposition and temperament as wide asunder as the poles: and—the affairs of the bank aside—Francis was devoted to all those objects and interests for which Charles cared nothing, or less. Nevertheless, there was the fact, account for it how you will. Charles was devoted to Francis; resented any disparagement of him; and did, upon occasion, even go so far as to espouse the side of his friend in argument against the side of which he himself was the representative—for Francis' logic was sometimes faulty, and his faculty of seeing all the best points in his own cause was not always infallible. Whether Francis' friendship for Charles was quite so ardent and thorough as Charles' for him may be doubted. Men who are universally friendly and popular seldom rise to the height of a vehement individual preference. But there is little doubt that he was impressed by Charles' affection, that he reciprocated it as far as in him lay, and that, although he was wont to affect a good-humored air of patronizing his friend, chaffing him, and laughing at the intensity and seriousness of his convictions, he in reality deferred to Charles' judgment and recognized his personal force and

capacity. "We could never get on without old Charles," was a saying often in his mouth. And when Charles fell in love with Francis' sister, Ruth Bendibow, Francis was a hearty supporter of the match. The marriage took place when Charles was in his thirty-first year—Tom Grantley having died upward of ten years before. The following year a daughter was born, and her name was called Perdita.

When Perdita was about six years old, a mysterious calamity occurred. Society wondered, guessed, and speculated, but never found out the whole truth of the affair. All that was certain was, that Charles Grantley suddenly disappeared from London, leaving his wife and daughter behind him. There was a rumor that he had also left behind him a letter, addressed to Sir Francis Bendibow, begging him to look after the welfare of his family, whom he could not ask to share with him his exile and disgrace. What, then, was this disgrace? Sir Francis, when interrogated on the subject, preserved a melancholy and dignified silence. It was surmised that he would not accuse his friend, and he could not defend him. But had Charles Grantley, whom all the world had taken to be at least the soul of honesty and honor—could he have been guilty of a dishonest or dishonorable action? Well, human nature is weak, and the best and strongest of men have their unaccountable moments of frailty. Grantley, no doubt, had been exposed to temptation. He had for some time past been admitted a full partner in the firm; and it was known that he had latterly been building and furnishing an expensive house. Moreover, he was believed to be a member of more than one secret society; and he had perhaps been induced or compelled to advance large contributions toward their support. The coffers of the bank were open to him.... Why rehearse again a story so often told? Enough that Charles Grantley vanished from the world that knew him, and that no news ever came to tell whither he had gone. It was only charitable to suppose that he did not long survive the disgrace into which he had plunged himself.

His wife died some years after his disappearance; not of a broken heart—for she had never cherished any very vital affection for her husband, and always seemed angry rather than grieved at the calamity—but from an acute attack of bilious fever. She was a beautiful and talented woman, but probably was not without certain blemishes of head or heart. Perdita was thus left—so far as could be known—an orphan. Sir Francis Bendibow, amidst general applause, formally adopted her. Certainly, to accept as your own the daughter of the man who has defrauded you, especially when that man happens to be your brother-in-law, shows a rare magnanimity. Perdita was brought up as befitted a young lady liable to hold a good position in society. For obvious reasons she was allowed to forget her unhappy father, and encouraged to regard herself as the actual offspring of her benevolent guardian. The girl thrived passing well—more than fulfilling her early promise of beauty and grace. She, moreover, gave signs of possessing a strongly-marked character, hard, subtle and persistent; but, as the crudity of girlhood passed away, those harsher lineaments ceased to obtrude themselves—the young lady's own sense of harmony doubtless prompting her to disguise them beneath a soft and seductive exterior; and she was by nature luxurious, and had the instinct of equipping herself cap-a-pie from the mystic arsenal of voluptuous artifice to which only such women have the key. Her debut in society was very effective, and she took all the other women's admirers away from them. But her own heart seemed to remain unimpaired; and, on the other hand, there was a lack of really desirable offers of marriage; for it was thought, not unreasonably, that Perdita ought to make a great match—say an earl at the least. But the earls hung back; perhaps it was the still lingering shadow of her unfortunate parent that disqualified her. Here, however, fortune who, save for that one ill turn, was in love with Perdita almost to the end of her career, brought into the field an elderly and extremely wealthy foreign personage, who succumbed to the young lady's fascinations at their first interview, made her an offer of his cordial and worldly effects on the following week, and was made the happiest of men in making her his wife by the end of the month. Perdita, for some unexplained reason, received little more than a bare outfit from her affectionate uncle and foster-father; but there were unexceptionable settlements on the part of her husband; and she accompanied the latter to the continent with *éclat* and a brilliant future before her—being still in her nineteenth year, while her husband was at least sixty, with an impaired constitution. Whether the issue of the affair was as prosperous as it bade fair to be Sir Francis Bendibow was not informed; for his adopted daughter had never since her departure troubled him with any letters or messages. For all he knew, she might be in the New World, or even in the next. The worthy baronet consoled himself for this neglect as best he might by lavishing attention upon the rearing and education of his only bona-fide child, a sickly and rather unpromising son. The result of the education was, that the young gentleman was allowed pretty much his own way; and, like other men before him who have steered in the same direction, he arrived at nothing particularly edifying. Sir Francis spoilt him, in short; and the youth was not one of those who can stand much spoiling. He could fight a cock, throw a main, hunt a rat, drive a horse, and upon occasion—as we have seen—could upset a coach. Perhaps, when the time came, he would be able to carry on the business of the great house of Bendibow Brothers; but it must be confessed that just at present probabilities looked the other way. It was not merely that young Mr. Thomas Bendibow had no practical knowledge of business; but that he had no brothers, nor even any cousins; that he was in fact the last of his family; and looked, at twenty, as if he hardly had pith in him to outlive his father, who was sixty-two; so that good Sir Francis, sitting day after day in his little private room at the rear of the banking premises, may be supposed to have found some elements of concern and anxiety mingling with the general complacency of his reflections. Surely he did not deserve to be the prey of such solicitude. He had long since forgotten the follies and vanities of his golden youth, and had settled down to be one of the handsomest, kindest, courtliest, most immaculate elderly baronets imaginable.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE first week of May had passed by, and Sir Francis Bendibow was sitting in his private room at the bank, with one elegant leg crossed over the other, and his hands folded over his embroidered waistcoat. He appeared to be meditating, with the placid gravity that characterized him, over the results of a well-spent and profitable life. At length, with a gentle sigh, he uncrossed his legs, took his watch from his fob, and consulted its enameled face. It wanted five minutes to three. Sir Francis might, with propriety, abandon business for the day, and betake himself to his residence in Great George Street. He was just on the point of touching a bell, and ordering his carriage to be called, when the servant came to the door and said that some one was without who desired to see Sir Francis.

"Some one?" said Sir Francis, mildly and interrogatively.

"A lady, Sir Francis," explained the servant; and something in the way he pronounced the word induced the baronet to imagine that the lady was neither old nor ugly.

"What is the lady's name?" he inquired, sitting more erect in his chair and settling his stock.

"She gave no name, Sir Francis; she said Sir Francis would receive her."

"Hum! I was about to ask you to order the carriage, Catnip: you may order the carriage to be ready in ten minutes; meanwhile you may admit the lady—ahem!"

"Yes, Sir Francis."

A minute afterward the lady was admitted.

Sir Francis' intuition had not been at fault. The lady was young and lovely. She was five feet five inches in height—as the baronet had judged, and he was an adept in women—perfectly, and rather fully formed, with a foot and ankle worthy of Titania. Her right hand was ungloved, showing a small soft wrist, taper fingers with dimpled knuckles, and a long thumb. Her movement and bearing were those of a finished woman of the world, supplemented by just physical proportions and native grace. She was dressed richly, and in the fashion, yet with such subtle art, that one remarked that her attire suited her before remarking what it was. When she came in, her face was veiled; but the silken web was not so dense as to conceal the sparkle of a pair of dark eyes, while over her small ears and at the back of her neck were discernible some short locks of bright curling hair.

She advanced into the middle of the room, and there paused, while Sir Francis presented her with a grand obeisance.

"Your humble servant, madam," said he. "May I entreat you to be seated?"

"Thank you, sir," she answered, placing herself in the chair he handed to her. "I shall not detain you very long. I came to you on a matter of business."

She betrayed a slight foreign accent in speaking; but there was something in the tone of her voice that attracted the baronet's attention. It was a full, clear, and yet lightsome voice, varying easily through changing intonations, always harmonious and perfectly under control; it evinced self-possession and a musical ear. Sir Francis was already charmed, and summoned all his graces to confront the occasion. It was not every day that destiny brought to him such customers as this.

"I shall esteem myself fortunate in being able to be of any service to you," he said, with a manner at once impressive and deferential.

"You are extremely good, sir."

"I protest, madam—not in the least. May I inquire, madam, whether you are familiar with London?"

"I was in London a number of years ago, sir—I think it must now be ten years—"

"In that case, madam, you must have been very young—quite a child, in fact. The town may therefore have some novelty for you. Fortunately the season is just commencing, and—"

"Alas, sir, I am not in a position to avail myself of gayeties."

"Indeed? Egad, madam, I protest you distress me."

"It is because I have recently met with a sad misfortune."

"You are too young, and—if I might be permitted to say it—too fair to be the prey of misfortune, madam. The misfortune is not, I trust, irremediable?"

"I fear it is, sir. I speak of the loss of my husband."

Sir Francis was a little puzzled. Was this lady more or less of a woman of the world than he had imagined? Was there not after all something of the ingenue about her? To be sure, a widow cannot, as a general thing, be accurately described as an ingenue; but, practically, this widow might be so. For all her polished self-possession of voice and bearing—which might as well be the result of early education as of the training of worldly experience—for all this her mind and heart might be fresh and unsophisticated. There was a flavor of artlessness, almost of innocent appeal, in what she said. The baronet felt his benevolent heart expand. The prospect of relations—business relations of course—with a young lady at once so attractive and so unprotected, enchanted him. But it was necessary to be sure of his ground—to inquire further.

"Widowhood for the young and beautiful is indeed the most pathetic of all predicaments!" he exclaimed with feeling. "I should judge, madam, that you can't have enjoyed the married state long?"

"Not very long; though it seemed long in one way."

"Aye, and all too short in another, no doubt. Ah, my dear madam, I can sympathize with you; I have had my bereavements, egad! and my sorrows. These are terrible times, madam; though, thank God, that Corsican monster is safe at last: but he has made many widows, in this country and elsewhere. Your husband, perhaps, fell upon the field of battle?"

"No, sir. Perhaps I should have told you that my husband was a Frenchman."

This reply embarrassed Sir Francis. It was his intention to be agreeable to the lady, and he had unwittingly disturbed her sensibilities. But a few moments sufficed him to recover his self-possession. Not for a trifle of consistency would he forfeit the good opinion of so charming a client.

"The French," he said, "are a brave and noble people. Now that there is no longer war between us and them we

can acknowledge it. Bonaparte, after all, was a great general, and a man of genius. No one can regret more than myself, madam, the necessity which has removed him to Elba."

"Is that your opinion, sir?" returned the lady, coldly. "My husband was a monarchist. To him Bonaparte was an usurper and a tyrant."

Sir Francis struggled not to appear put out of countenance. "Damn these French!" he said internally; "you never know where you are with 'em." Aloud he said: "Your husband was right, madam, from his point of view. He was loyal to his convictions and to his traditions. Every one must respect them and him—no one certainly more than I myself, who am the loyal supporter of my own king. That such a man as your husband should be cut off in the prime of his youth is a calamity to his country," concluded Sir Francis, feeling that at all events he was safe there.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" said the lady ingenuously.

"Your husband, I say, dying in the first flush of youth—"

"Oh, my husband was not a very young man," interposed the lady gravely. "In fact, it may be said that he died of old age. He was only a little over seventy, it is true; but he had for several years past been in very infirm health."

"Zounds, madam, you—you surprise me!" exclaimed Sir Francis, almost losing patience. Reflecting, however, that it was unlikely a wife so youthful should have felt any passionate attachment to a husband so ancient, he plucked up courage; the task of consoling the lady would be by so much the less difficult. She sat there very quietly, with her hands resting one within another in her lap, and her dark eyes sparkling through her veil. Sir Francis conceived a strong desire to see that veil lifted. But he would proceed cautiously.

"You are, then, alone in the world," he remarked, compassionately. "Probably, however, you may have kinsfolk in England or France who—"

"Indeed, sir, I am very unhappy," said the lady, with a melancholy simplicity. "Such few relatives as I possess are not, I fear, kindly disposed toward me."

"Surely they must be very unnatural persons—ahem!" cried Sir Francis, indignantly. "But let me entreat you not to be downcast, my dear madam. Providence sometimes raises up friends to us when we least expect it. If I might speak of myself—"

"Indeed, you are very good," said the lady softly, and with a little movement of one of her hands that seemed to indicate confidence and gratitude. Sir Francis moved his chair a little nearer. The lady continued: "My husband, you must know, has left me the entire control of his property, which I believe is very large. I think his income was what you would call, in your money, ten thousand pounds—is it not?—every year; but I may be mistaken: I am so stupid in those affairs: at least it was more than three hundred thousand francs."

"In that case, madam, you would be rather under than over the truth in your estimate," said the baronet, bowing with increased tenderness of manner, and bringing his chair so close to that of his visitor that she drew back a little, with a movement half-startled, half-coquettish. "We must speak low," the baronet hastened to say; "this room is not quite so secluded as I could wish, and curious ears ... but to the point! This property—"

"I feel so helpless," said the lady, leaning forward with an impulse of confidence. "I do not care for money: I do not understand its value, nor how to manage it. I am overwhelmed with this responsibility, which I would gladly have escaped. But my husband's will was very stringent and precise in its terms, and I have no choice but to accept the burden he has laid upon me."

"Very right, my dear madam: your sentiments do you every honor. 'Tis a responsibility, indeed, but one which, with good advice, you can easily support. I may say, without vanity, that my experience in matters of finance is as extensive—"

"Oh, sir, I am already convinced of it," interposed the lady cordially. "Your reputation is as high on the Continent as here. A friend of my husband's—known, I believe, also to you—counseled me to come to you and to put myself unreservedly in your hands. The name of the gentleman was Mr. Lancaster—Mr. Philip Lancaster, I think."

"Lancaster! yes, yes," said Sir Francis, genially. "I have seen Philip—a fine young fellow, though with a turn for poetry; but he is still young. The Lancasters, madam, as I doubt not you are aware, are kin to the Barons Croftus: it is the family name. They are relatives of my own through my late wife, who was a Lancaster. Philip is my nephew by marriage, though not by blood. In sending you to me he has placed me under a very heavy obligation—ahem!"

"You cannot expect me to believe, sir, that the management of a property like that of my late husband can be much of an object to one who is accustomed to lend money to empires."

"My dear madam, you misapprehend me. The obligation has reference to yourself, not to your property. As to that, I trust you will not think so ill of me as to imagine that I would seek my own profit in any transactions I might be fortunate enough to carry out for you."

"What you say, sir, persuades me that the English are the most genteel people in the world. And besides," added the lady, looking down and turning the pearl and diamond ring upon the finger of her ungloved hand, "it relieves me from an embarrassment." Here she looked up again, and Sir Francis felt the dark eyes meeting his own. He was by this time in a mood to exchange a great deal that financiers hold dear for something not more substantial than a draft upon the bank of sentiment. He had been open to romantic impressions in his youth, and his mature age was not entirely emancipated from occasional bondage of that sort. But never, he thought, in all his experience, had he encountered aught so bewitching in the shape of woman as she who now sat before him. There could be no doubt that she was already extremely well-disposed toward him; and his redoubtable heart, which had seen him through many a tough experience of more kinds than one, actually beat with anticipation as he pictured to himself the felicity that might be in store for him.

"Never!" he exclaimed fervently, laying his hand upon his heart, and allowing the ardor of his feelings to glow through the handsome dignity of his countenance—"never, madam, need you be a prey to any embarrassment from which the utmost of my humble endeavors may suffice to free you."

"I am convinced of your kindness and goodness; but, dear sir, I am aware that matters of business cannot be controlled by the dictates of generous feeling. For my own part I should never have dreamed of making any stipulations; but, as I observed just now, the directions in my late husband's will are painfully stringent. I must confess to you that it was not altogether in accordance with his wishes that I should reside in England after his death."

There was a slight tremor in the tone in which she made this confession. Sir Francis leaned forward, devoured with tender curiosity.

"In fact, sir, he was opposed to it. But it had always been my dream to revisit my native land, for I am an Englishwoman by birth, though so long an exile. I therefore resolved, if it were possible, to overcome the obstacles which he had placed in my way. It rests with you, dear sir, to decide whether or not I am to succeed."

"With me! my dear—my very dear madam," cried the baronet, impulsively extending his hands and imprisoning one of hers between them. "Do I hear you say that it is my happy privilege to be so far the arbiter of your destiny? Oh, charming woman! command me! enlighten me! show me how I can prevent you from ever putting a greater distance between us than—ahem!—than—"

"You must not speak like this," gently interposed the lady, as the baronet hesitated for a phrase. She withdrew her hand from his own, yet so that the deprivation seemed to convey more of regard than would the caress of another woman. "You make me regret my coming to you on this errand. It would be better, I think, if you could direct me to some other banker—"

"Some other! Impossible! How have I been so unhappy as to make you regret this interview?"

"It could be for only one reason," said the lady, still more kindly. "You lead me to esteem so highly the value of your friendship that I cannot but regret it should be mingled with interests of a less elevated character. I could prize you so much as a friend that I am reluctant to think of myself as your customer."

Sir Francis positively blushed, and it was some moments before he recovered himself. "Do not think of yourself as my customer!" he then exclaimed, yielding himself completely to the fascinations of this veiled enchantress; "think of me as yours—as the customer who applies to you for all that renders his existence a blessing to him—for your friendship, your favor, your...."

"Oh, sir!" murmured the lady, rising in confusion.

"Charming creature!" supplicated the baronet; "be to me what you will, but do not rob me of the gift of your presence! Do not distrust me—I am all gentleness and veneration. I am impulsive; but a look, a word, restrains me. Come, we will speak of business; business shall be the lowly yet honorable route by which we may in due course travel to better things. But, business first! How can I be of service to you? Is it your desire to make any deposit? Is there any negotiation ... but pray, honor me by resuming your seat."

"I blame myself for detaining you so long; but I will try to be brief. It amounts to a question of the rate of interest. I am so little acquainted with money matters, sir, as to be ignorant of the current rate in England."

"Your ignorance does you no discredit, madam. The fluctuations in the money market have of late years been great; at present, happily, confidence is being restored, and interest is lower. Six per cent, would I think represent a liberal—"

"Six per cent.? Ah, I understand now the full potency of the conditions my late husband imposed upon me. It would be useless for me to attempt to contend against them. I must return, then, to France." In saying this the lady repressed a sigh, and made a movement as if to close the interview.

"But, for pity's sake, explain yourself, dear madam!" cried Sir Francis.

"It would humiliate me to reveal to you the severity—I must not call it the unkindness—of which my husband.... No, indeed, sir, you must excuse me—"

Sir Francis interrupted her by an eloquent gesture, as much as to say, "At least, trust me!"

"If I must speak, then let it be as to a friend, and in the confidence of friendship," said the lady, uttering herself with an apparent effort. "My husband's instruction was, that in case of my living in England, the property was to be intrusted to an English bank of unquestionable solvency, at an interest of twenty per cent. If this rate were not allowed by the bank, the property was not to be deposited in England; and should I still persist in residing here the whole of it was to go to a blood-relative of my husband. I have to choose, therefore, between being a beggar and remaining an exile. Were I a man I should not hesitate to select the former alternative, trusting to myself to earn an honest livelihood; but, as I am a woman...." Her voice faltered, and she paused.

"As you are a woman, and the most adorable of women," said Sir Francis, gravely, "it shall be my happy privilege to defeat your husband's unjust purpose, and to bid you remain where your own inclination and the urgency of your friends would place you. Consider the matter settled. Nay—do not reply. I claim—I may even affirm that I possess—the right to impose my wishes upon you in this respect. I am the head of the house of Bendibow; and permit me to add, dear madam, that in the course of a long experience I have never been engaged in any transaction which promised me advantages so great as the present." Sir Francis concluded this speech with a bow that was in keeping with the dignity and magnificence of his sentiments. In fact, he could not but be conscious of the grandeur of his act, and his manner uplifted itself accordingly. But the lady shook her head.

"Were the soundness of your reasoning as unmistakable as the goodness and nobility of your heart," she said, "I should have no ground for hesitation; but you offer me what it is impossible I should accept. How can I consent to receive a yearly sum from you equal to the amount of my present income? It would be indistinguishable from a gift. I thank you from the bottom of my soul; but it cannot be."

"Madam, you wound the heart that you pretend to honor. But that is not all; you infinitely exaggerate your profit in the transaction. Although twenty per cent. is considerably in excess of the average rates of interest, it would be easy for me so to arrange matters that the bank's loss would be practically nil."

"Ah, if I could believe that...." murmured the lady, half to herself.

"You may believe it implicitly," said Sir Francis, who had taken a sheet of paper and was writing rapidly upon it. In a few moments he finished the writing with a flourish, and handed it over to his visitor. It was an agreement, signed and dated, to pay interest at the rate of twenty per cent. upon all moneys which she might deposit in the bank. "My only regret is, that the obligation on your side is so trifling as to be merely nominal; I might otherwise have ventured to hope for some return—"

"You do me injustice, sir," interrupted the lady warmly, "if you imagine that I would yield to your pecuniary liberality what I would refuse to—to other considerations. You do yourself injustice if you regard your personal worth as not outweighing in my eyes all the bullion in your bank. You must, indeed, have misunderstood me, to think otherwise."

She had risen as she spoke, and so also had Sir Francis. He saw the error he had committed, and recognized the necessity of correcting it on the instant. He went down upon one knee before her, as majestically as the lack of suppleness which sixty years had inflicted upon his joints permitted.

"I shall remain here, madam," he declared, "until you have consented to condone a fault for which the imperfection of my language, and not the intention of my heart, is to blame. Lovely—irresistible woman, why should I longer attempt to disguise my feelings toward you? Why should I speak of the respect in which I hold you, the honor, the admiration, when there is one word which comprises and magnifies them all? You know that word; yet, for the easing of my own heart, it shall be uttered. I love you!"

"Love?... Oh, sir—you mistake—that is not right—it cannot—"

But Sir Francis had possessed himself of her hand, and was imprinting ardent kisses upon it. The lady trembled; she seemed to be agitated by some strong emotion; with her free hand she pressed her veil over her face. Sir Francis rose and attempted to enfold her in his embrace. But she eluded him, and spoke breathlessly.

"If you really have any regard for me, sir, you will restrain yourself. Let us—ah—let us speak of other things—this paper. Nay, I entreat you ... what would you have me say? Is this a time or a place for me to confess that you have inspired me with a sentiment—oh! have pity, sir. Come to me to-morrow—this evening if you will—but not here, not now." ...

"You give me hope, then? Divine creature, do you grant me an interview—"

"Yes, yes—anything! indeed, you may command me but too easily: only, if you love me at all, have consideration for my position—for—"

"Enough! I am obedient, and I am mute, save as you bid me speak," cried the baronet, almost bewildered with the immensity of his own good fortune, and physically much out of breath besides. He sank into his chair, panting. "We understand each other!" he sighed out, with an impassioned smile. "Till this evening! meanwhile—"

"This paper, then? Is it a legal form? Are you serious in making such a contract with me?"

The baronet nodded profoundly. "It bears my signature: it is complete, and irrevocable!"

"But my own name is not written here. You have left a blank."

"For you to fill up, dearest creature! How could I write your name, when you have not told me what it is?"

"How, sir? You do not know my name?" exclaimed the lady, with an accent of surprise.

"Positively, I have not a notion of it. The servant did not announce it."

"And you enter into this contract with one of whom you know nothing?"

"'Tis yourself, fairest of your sex, not your name that has importance for me," panted the baronet complacently. "But you will tell it me? and lift that veil that obscures so much beauty?"

"Apparently, Sir Francis, it has obscured more than my beauty," returned the lady dryly. She approached the table at which he sat, and added, "Give me your pen."

Somewhat startled at the abruptness of her tone, the baronet complied with her request. She held the paper upon the desk with her left hand while she wrote a name in the blank space which Sir Francis had left for that purpose. His eye followed the swift movement of the pen, and when the writer laid it down, he read out the name mechanically—

"Perdita, Marquise Desmoines."

Sir Francis leant back heavily in his chair, and his arms fell loosely at his side. He stared at the charming figure in front of him with a sort of vacant consternation. She threw back her veil.

The face that was thus revealed was certainly not one to disappoint the most sanguine expectations. In shape it was a full oval, the nose delicate and pointed, with the tip mobile to the changing play of the lips in smiling or speaking. Her chin was firm, her throat solid, round and white. It was the face of one capable alike of luxurious indolence and dangerous energy; endowed with dimples for mirth and with clear-cut lines for resolute purpose. Sound sense and accurate memory dwelt in the broad brow; good temper in the curve of cheek and eyelid; passion in the full lower lip. From the movements of the features and the poise of the head upon the neck might be divined that she was proud, generous, or implacable, as the whim suited her; but the dominant expression at present was one of archly mischievous amusement.

"You don't seem glad to see me, Uncle Francis!" she exclaimed, making a *moue* of lovely irony.

No answer from the baronet.

"You wanted to kiss me just now; come—I am ready."

Sir Francis was still speechless.

"Why, uncle, how unsympathetic you are grown all of a sudden! Don't you love your poor widowed niece, whom you haven't seen or heard of for ten years? You were so complimentary and affectionate a moment ago! And so generous, too, uncle," she added, holding up the signed agreement between her white forefinger and thumb. At the sight of this the baronet's countenance became ghastly, and he emitted a groan.

Perdita, Marquise Desmoines, threw back her head and laughed with all her might—a laugh full of liquid music. "You are a most incomprehensible man, uncle," she declared, when she had recovered herself. "When my veil is down you call me fairest of my sex, dearest creature, and sweetest of women; you go down on your knees to me, devour my hand, and pay me ten thousand a year to live in London. You were so delightfully impetuous, in short, that you almost frightened me. Who would have expected such ardor from a man of your age? Then, when the veil is lifted, you sit as silent and impassive as a bag of guineas; you glare at me as if I were a gorgon. I hope you will be more agreeable when you come to see me this evening? We understand each other, you know—don't we?—eh, uncle?" And she laughed once more.

"Well, well, Perdita," said the baronet at last in a feeble voice, "you are a monstrous clever girl, and you may have your laugh out. As for that paper, you may as well return it me at once. You have your jest; that was mine."

"If all your jests are worth ten thousand a year, I should like to engage you as my court-jester, uncle. You will be worth your weight in silver if you made no more than six jests in a twelvemonth."

"Well, well; but give me the paper; seriously, I insist—"

"You insist! Oh, uncle! Because the uncle is a jester, it does not follow that the niece must be a fool. Besides,

you have owed me this for ten years."

"Owed it you? What the deuce—"

"Ah, uncle, you are growing old—you are losing your memory. Didn't you marry me to my poor marquis without a dowry? and didn't you say you would make it up to me when times improved? Well, in five or six years perhaps I may give you this paper back; but to do so now, dear uncle, would be discourteous; it would be denying you the privilege of doing an act of justice."

"Upon my life, madam," exclaimed Sir Francis, plucking up some resolution, "you may keep the paper or not as you see fit; but the engagement is not worth the ink it's written with; and that you shall find out!"

The marquise regarded her exasperated relative with a charming gleefulness. "But it is only for twenty per cent. you know, uncle," she said; "and you are able to put out money at double that rate—and more, I dare say."

"Zounds, ma'am, I protest I am ignorant of your meaning!" cried the baronet indignantly.

"I mean Raffett's," was Perdita's reply.

Sir Francis changed color and countenance at that word, as if it were a spell that threatened his life. "You don't mean ... I don't know...." he began.

"Come, uncle, we are people of the world, are we not?" said the marquise, with a rather comical smile. "We have all made our little mistakes; I don't mean to annihilate you; but I happen to know all about Raffett's, and have a fancy to make you pay my dowry; not that I need the money, but because I dote upon abstract justice. Let us be good friends. 'Birds in their little nests agree;' and so should uncle and niece. You may come and pay your respects to me to-morrow, if you like—if you can control the impatience that was consuming you ten minutes ago! I have several things to talk over with you. I have taken a house in Red Lion Square for the present; London will not hear of me until next winter. I am only just become a disconsolate widow, and mean to behave accordingly."

Sir Francis sighed, with the air of a man who resigns himself to the rigor of fate.

"And you are really going to remain in England?" he said.

"As long as it amuses me. Paris is dull without the emperor. Besides—but you shall hear the rest to-morrow." She rose to go.

At this juncture Catnip tapped at the door and put in his head.

"A gentleman to see you, Sir Francis."

"What is his name?"

"Mr. John Grant, Sir Francis."

"Who?"

"Mr. John Grant, Sir Francis."

"I don't know him," said the baronet. "However, let him enter."

The Marquise Desmoines, going out, met Mr. John Grant in the passage, which was narrow. He ceremoniously made room for her to pass; glanced after her for a moment, and then went into the baronet's room.

CHAPTER IX.

WE may assume, for the present, that Mr. Grant's object in calling upon Sir Francis Bendibow was to make arrangements whereby the bank might charge itself with the investment and care of his property. Meanwhile we shall have time to review what had been happening during the previous week at Mrs. Lockhart's. Philip Lancaster and Mr. Grant, having passed their first night at the "Plough and Harrow," returned to the widow's with their luggage the next morning. Their reception on this occasion was much more cordial and confident than it had been the day before. The chance which had brought Lancaster into relations with the family of the gallant old soldier, whose body he had rescued from an unmarked grave, gave him a lien upon the interest and gratitude of the two women such as he might not otherwise have acquired at all. The whole history of his acquaintance with Major Lockhart had to be told many times over to listeners who could never hear it often enough; and the narrator ransacked his memory to reproduce each trifling word and event that had belonged to their intercourse. The hearers, for their part, commented on and discussed the story with a minuteness so loving and unweariable as to move Lancaster to say privately to Mr. Grant, "Damme, sir, if it doesn't make me wish that I had been the Major, and the Major me. I shall never have a widow and daughter to mourn me so!"

"It is one of the ills of this life," Mr. Grant returned with a smile, "that while your mourners are your only honest flatterers, their flattery always comes a day too late. If you had been the Major you would have missed hearing his praises. Being yourself, you miss the praises themselves; but upon the whole I think you have the best of it. The love of these good women for their departed father and husband is like yonder ray of sunshine which falls upon his portrait. It falls only there, but see how it brightens and warms the whole room—and your own countenance, I fancy, especially. In some measure, sir, you are heir of that wealth of affection which was the Major's while he lived. Your news of him has partly made you his substitute in the eyes of those who loved him. *Non omnis moriatur.*"

"I wish you would take my poem in hand and put some poetry into it. 'Tis true the wreath of fame, as well as the brand of infamy, is laid only on dead brows. If a man could but return to life long enough to admire his own statue, or read his damnation in the *Quarterly!*"

"The damnation is swifter of foot than the statue, and sometimes overtakes us on this side of the grave," said Mr. Grant. "But your aspiration may be realized. I have known the dead to come to life."

"To find, probably, that the reality of dead features is less comely than the remembrance?"

"As for that, the dead man, if he be wise, will so disguise himself as to avoid recognition. He will renew his life only so far as to be a spectator, not a participant. So that, after all, he is not himself again, nor any other man either, and that is the same as to say that he is nobody, which is as much as a dead body has any right to be."

"I'm not sure of that," said Lancaster, folding his arms and leaning back his head. "There is a fellow in Weimar by the name of Goethe—you may have heard of him—who has written a poem called 'Faust.' Faust comes back to life, or to youth, which amounts to the same thing, and proves to be anything but a mere spectator. He gets caught in a love-scrape, and there is the devil to pay. There is something attractive in this human life which grapples us whether we will or no, and makes us dance to one tune or another. On second thoughts I withdraw my aspiration; one life is enough for me, and may be too much. To live again would be to wear the same old cap and bells, only jingling them to another measure. No man with any self-respect or sense of the ridiculous would do it."

"I apprehend you may be familiar with an earlier work of M. Goethe's, which I also have read, called the 'Sorrows of Werther.' But I question seriously whether mankind are really the poor puppet-show that you speak of. Life is unreal and bootless only so long as you make yourself the centre and hero of it. As soon as you begin to help on the others with their parts, both they and you cease to be puppets. For no man can live in himself, but only in his acts; and if his acts are just, so much the more fragrantly will they survive him."

"I believe that theoretically; but practically I am persuaded that to fall passionately in love is the only way to become alive: and selfishness is the very essence of love."

"Ha!" ejaculated Mr. Grant stroking his chin. "You have been in love no doubt?"

"I have been like other men, or as much worse than the average as my intellectual capacity may be superior to theirs. But—no; I have never been alive in the sense I speak of."

"Too unselfish, eh?"

"Well—not quite selfish enough, I suppose; or too cautious to venture on a final plunge into the abyss. The puppet business is less arduous, and gives a man a better opinion of himself, by lowering his opinion of his fellow-actors."

"Ha! and it's too late to expect you to lose your caution, now, of course?"

"I have experimented too much!" replied Lancaster, getting up and going to the window.

Mr. Grant took a pinch of snuff and said nothing.

Things went on very quietly in the old brick house. Both the older and the younger man were regular in their habits, and gave their hostesses no trouble. In the mornings after breakfast, Lancaster, who was of an athletic complexion, took a walk of an hour or two along the London road, returning toward noon, and shutting himself up in his room, where he occupied himself in writing. Mr. Grant commonly spent the forenoon in-doors, either busying himself about his private affairs, or reading, or chatting intermittently with Mrs. Lockhart or Marion, as they passed in and out of the sitting-room. In the afternoon he sometimes walked out to get the air, and may occasionally have ridden a horse as far as London. But the after-dinner hours were the pleasantest of the day, from a social point of view. Neither Mr. Grant nor Lancaster were heavy drinkers, and seldom remained at table more than a quarter of an hour after the ladies had left it. Then the four remained together in the sitting-room till bed-time; sometimes playing cards, as was the custom of the time; sometimes content to entertain one another with conversation; sometimes having music, when Lancaster would second Marion's soprano with his baritone. Mrs. Lockhart and Mr. Grant had most of the conversation between themselves; Lancaster, save upon the special topic of the Major, seldom doing more than to throw in an occasional remark or comment, generally of a witty or good-humoredly cynical tendency; Marion being the most uniformly silent of the four, though she possessed rare eloquence as a listener. At cards, Mrs. Lockhart and Lancaster were apt to be partners against Marion and Mr. Grant. The latter would then display a polished and charming gallantry toward his young *vis-à-vis*, of a kind that belonged rather to the best fashion of the last century than to this; and which was all the pleasanter because it was more the reticence of a sincere and kindly

disposition than the pretense of a cold and unsympathetic one. Marion reciprocated his advances with a certain arch cordiality which characterized her when her mind was at ease and her surroundings agreeable; and thus a species of chivalrous-playful courtship was established between the elderly gentleman and the young gentlewoman, which was a source of mild entertainment to everybody. The widow and Philip Lancaster, on the other hand, were unscrupulously romantic and informal in their intercourse; Philip paying rosy compliments to Mrs. Lockhart, with earnest gravity, and she expressing her affectionate admiration of him in a manner worthy of simple-hearted Fanny Pell. In a certain sense, this pairing-off was grounded upon a natural and genuine attraction between the respective partners. For there was a child-like element in Mrs. Lockhart which was absent from her daughter; and Mr. Grant had a boyish straightforwardness which was not apparent in Lancaster; and thus the balance was better preserved than had the two younger people contended against the two elder. The former were old where the latter were young. In another point of view, the normal sympathy of youth with youth, conditioned upon the lack of actual experience and the anticipation of an indefinite future, was not to be denied; so that what Lancaster said to Mrs. Lockhart may have had an oblique significance for Marion; and Marion's replies to Mr. Grant could be construed as veiled rejoinders to Lancaster. At the same time it need not be inferred that anything serious was intended on the part of any of the four.

As regards success in card-playing, it commonly fell to Mrs. Lockhart and Lancaster. "And yet I may say, without vanity, that I was accounted a fair hand at it in



PULLING THEMSELVES TOGETHER AND DISCUSSING THE MAGNITUDE OF THEIR DISASTER.

my earlier days," Mr. Grant once remarked apologetically to his partner.

"Cards are not played where you have been living?" Marion suggested.

"No; at least I devoted myself to other games, and my Hoyle was forgotten."

"I think cards are less popular in society than they used to be five-and-twenty years ago," remarked Mrs. Lockhart.

"Oh, it is in many ways a different England from that old one," Mr. Grant said, stroking his chin with his thumb and forefinger. "A great rage for balloons at that time, I recollect. And for boxing—there was the Prince of Wales boxing with Lord Hervey one night after the opera. Dueling, too; why, in 1786 'twas almost a distinction for a man not to have fought a duel; the point of honor was much oftener vindicated than the point of the argument. No wonder; to be drunk at a certain hour of the day was accounted a mark of breeding among gentlemen. Charles Fox was a terrible fellow for drinking and dicing; used to see him at Watthier's."

"Watthier's? Mr. Tom Grantley used to go there a great deal," said Mrs. Lockhart, blushing a little after she had spoken.

"Aye, so he was; I have seen him, too—a very handsome man. But I was still quite young when he died. You knew him, madam?"

"I believe mamma knew him very well," put in Marion, with a touch of mischief. "He was to have danced at your wedding, was he not, mamma?"

"He was very kind to me when I was very young and foolish," replied her mother, with quiet simplicity. "He was not in England when I married."

"Grantley was a relative of mine—or would have been, if he had lived ten years longer," Lancaster remarked. "My father and he both married daughters of old Seabridge. By-the-by, didn't he have a daughter who disappeared, or something of that sort?"

"It was a son. I believe he was a very promising young gentleman, but he came to a sad end. Probably you may have met him, Mr. Grant?"

"Never, madam."

"What end was that?" Lancaster demanded.

"He was discovered in some crime about money—embezzlement, I think. He was a junior partner in the bank; Sir Francis Bendibow trusted him entirely. It almost broke his heart when Charles ran away. But Sir Francis behaved very nobly about it."

"Ah! he had been recently ennobled, had he not?" inquired Mr. Grant in a dry tone. But if he intended any innuendo, Mrs. Lockhart did not perceive it.

"He made good the loss out of his own private property," she went on; "and he supported Mrs. Grantley as long as she lived. Poor woman, she was his sister, and of course knew nothing about her husband's wickedness."

"'Tis indeed a romantic story," said Mr. Grant thoughtfully. "Sir Francis, I presume, took all means to trace the fugitive?"

"I think he did all that he honestly could to let him escape. They had been such friends, you know. Besides, if the unfortunate young man had any feeling left, he must have been punished enough in losing his honor and his family."

"Ha! no doubt. He has never been heard from since?"

"No; except that Sir Francis gave me to know that he died a few years afterwards."

"I don't believe that Sir Francis Bendibow was so wonderfully generous," exclaimed Marion, who had been manifesting some signs of restiveness. "You always think a person is good if they say they are. I dare say the Bendibows were very grateful to Charles Grantley for marrying into their family; he had earls and barons for his kinsmen, and the Bendibows have always courted the great. As to Sir Francis, 'tis true his manners are very soft and courteous; but my father has told me he was very unsteady in his youth, and I think my father meant more than he said."

"Yet, admitting that, still the defaulter would not be excused," observed Mr. Grant.

"Since he was not brought to his trial, it cannot be said how much or how little he was a criminal," returned Marion, turning her eyes upon the speaker and kindling with her cause. "He was the son of a man who had nothing ignoble in him, whatever else he may have had. You have told me that yourself, mother. And his mother was noble of birth, and I have heard, noble of nature, too."

"I can confirm you in that," said Lancaster. "My father used to say that if Edith Seabridge had been born a man instead of a woman, she would have made herself the foremost man in England. But it showed no less nobleness in her to give up everything to the love and service of her husband."

"And the son of such a father and mother should not be judged a thief and coward except upon clear evidence," Marion continued, acknowledging Lancaster's support only by a heightened color. "He died before I was born, I suppose, but I have always thought that perhaps he was not so much to blame—not in any dastardly way, I mean. He was not a rake and a gambler as Sir Francis was; but a man who cared for learning, and for freedom, and the thoughts that make people better. 'Tis not that kind of man that would steal money for himself: if he committed a crime, I can only think it must have been for the good of some one he loved—not for his own good. You say he and Sir Francis were dear friends; perhaps it was for Sir Francis' own sake that he did it—to help him through some strait. And then it would be no wonder that Sir Francis let him escape so easily!"

"But," said Mr. Grant, who had listened with attention to Marion's advocacy, with a curious smile occasionally glimmering across his face, "but, my dear, that is a doubtful cause that can be maintained only on the discredit of the other side. How could this man have embezzled for the benefit of Sir Francis if, as I am given to understand, he absconded with the proceeds of his robbery?"

"No one knows whether he had the money with him," answered Marion, driven to bay. "All that is known is, that he disappeared, and that Sir Francis said the bank was robbed. You say that Sir Francis replaced the loss from his private purse; but perhaps his purse had first been filled for him by the very man he denounced as a defaulter!"

At this audacious hypothesis Mr. Grant laughed, though with so kindly an expression that Marion could not feel she was being ridiculed. "You go near to make me wish, my dear," he said, "that I might be unjustly accused, if I might hope to have you for my defender."

"How fortunate, then, was this questionable cousin of mine, to have made good his embezzlement and his escape, and withal to have found such a defender!" said Lancaster. "You see, Miss Lockhart, my cousinhood with him allows me the liberty of reviling him quietly if I choose. Whatever your cousin has done, you are liable to do yourself; so I am only whipping myself across my cousin's back."

"If you need whipping at all, why don't you whip yourself directly?" Marion demanded, quick to resent whatever seemed to her patronizing or artificial in another's tone.

"Oh, Marion!" exclaimed Mrs. Lockhart, under her breath.

"I only meant," said Lancaster smiling, "that whenever I hear of a man committing a crime, I have a fellow-feeling for him: I believe there is the making of a capital criminal in me, if I am only given fair opportunities."

It was not the first time Lancaster had spoken in this way, and Marion had not made up her mind how to understand him. She looked away and made no reply.

After a moment Mr. Grant said, "You spoke of Charles Grantley having left a family behind him; is one to infer from that there were children?"

"There was a daughter, I think," said Mrs. Lockhart, relieved at the change of subject; "didn't you know her, Marion?"

"She was at the same school with me for a little while; but she was much older than I; she was just leaving when I began. She was very pretty and very genteel; much more genteel than I ever thought of being. She never spoke to me but once, and then she told me to go up-stairs and fetch her slippers."

"Did you obey?" asked Lancaster.

"No. At first she looked at me very indignantly; but soon she laughed and said, 'You don't mind me, because I am a woman; but the day will come when you will fetch a man's slippers for him, and kiss them after he has put them on.' She was not like any other girl I ever saw; but almost every one was fond of her; she could do so much—and yet she was always waited on."

"I should like to know how she turned out. She evidently had a character," remarked Lancaster.

"She married very well, I believe," said Mrs. Lockhart.

"Yes; he was three times her age, and very rich, and so fond of her that he didn't care whether her name was Bendibow or Grantley," rejoined Marion, rather harshly. "She was always called Miss Bendibow, by the way, and she may have been Sir Francis' real daughter for aught I know; she seemed to think so herself, and she certainly didn't speak of any other father. I suppose she didn't much care who her father was. At any rate she became the Marquise Desmoines."

Lancaster moved suddenly in his chair, and seemed about to speak, but checked himself.

Mr. Grant took snuff, and asked, after a pause, "You say he was very fond of her?"

"Yes, I am sure he was," said Mrs. Lockhart; "he often talked to me about her—for he was a friend of ours, and used to visit us often; because my husband saved his life in France, when the Marquis could not have escaped but for his assistance and protection; and after that he lived in London, and was sometimes so poor as to be forced to give lessons in French and in music; for all this time his estates in France were in jeopardy, and he did not know whether he would ever recover them. But he did, at last; and then he entered society, though he was no longer a young man; and it was then that he met Perdita Bendibow, as she was called. He proposed to her and she accepted him; she could scarce have helped but like him, I am sure. After their marriage they went to France, but I have heard nothing of her since."

"There is one thing you have forgotten, mamma," said Marion; "it is another proof how much the Marquis cared for her. Sir Francis gave her no dowry. I suppose he thought it no more than just to save the money out of what her father had cost him."

"It is not charitable to say so, Marion; and I am sure one could not expect that Sir Francis would give her a dowry, when her husband was so wealthy."

"So the girl never knew her real father? Well, doubtless it was better so; doubtless he would have wished it so himself, if he retained any unselfish and noble feelings—as you, my dear child, have been charitable enough to imagine may have been the case. And perhaps Perdita's lot was the one best suited to her—she being as you have described her. For my part, having once had a child of my own, I may hope that she is happy—and that she deserves to be." Mr. Grant uttered all this in a musing tone, as though his mind was dwelling upon other things than those immediately under discussion; but there was much grave tenderness in the sort of benediction with which he concluded. It made Marion's heart go out toward him. She felt sure that he had known some deep love, and grievous sorrow, in his day. Now he was a lonely old man, but she resolved to be in the place of a daughter to him. She leaned her cheek upon her hand, and fell into a reverie, in the midst of which the clock struck eleven.

"Bless me! how late we are keeping you up, Mrs. Lockhart," exclaimed Mr. Grant, shutting up his snuff-box and putting it in his pocket. "The truth is, I have been so long deprived of ladies' society, that now I am prone to presume too much on my good fortune. In future, you must help me to keep myself within bounds. Good-night, madam—I am your most obedient servant. Good-night, my dear Miss Marion; your father must have been a good man; I wish I might have known him. Mr. Lancaster, do you go with me?" The old gentleman was always thus ceremonious in his leave-takings.

"Yes, I'm with you," said Lancaster, breaking out of a brown study into which he had subsided, and getting briskly to his feet. "I have to thank you for a strange story—an interesting one, I mean."

"Is there so much in it?" said Marion, as she gave him her hand.

"I fancy I see a good deal in it," answered he; adding with a smile, "but then, you know, I call myself a poet!"

The ladies courtseyed; the gentlemen bowed, and went up-stairs together.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Philip Lancaster and Mr. Grant reached the landing at the head of the stairs, they faced each other for a moment; and then, by mutual impulse as it were, Grant tacitly extended, and Philip as tacitly accepted, an invitation to enter the former's room. The mind resembles the heart in this, that it sometimes feels an instinctive and unexplained desire for the society of another mind. Cold and self-sufficient though the intellect is, it cannot always endure solitude and the corrosion of its unimpacted thoughts. Therefore some of the most permanent, though not the most ardent friendships have been between men whose ground of meeting was exclusively intellectual. But men, for some reason, are not willing to admit this, and generally disguise the fact by a plausible obtrusion of other motives. So Mr. Grant, as he opened the door (after the tacit transaction abovementioned), said, "Step in, Lancaster, and help me through with a glass of that French cognac and water."

"Thank you, I will," Lancaster replied.

But when the tumblers were filled and tasted, and the liquor pronounced good, nothing more was said for some minutes. At last Lancaster got up from his chair and began to pace about the room.

"It could be worked up into a good story, that character of the Marquise Desmoines," he said; "at least as I conceive it. If I were a story writer instead of a poet, I would attempt it. You would need the right sort of a man to bring into collision with her. While I was abroad, I knew a fellow who, I think, would do. Came of good English stock, and had talent—perhaps genius. His father was a poor man, though of noble descent. Gave his son a good early training, followed up by the university curriculum, and then sent him abroad, with two or three hundred a year income. We'll call him Yorke. The fellow's idea at that time was to enter the Church; he had eloquence when he was moved, a good presence, and a sort of natural benevolence or humanity, the result of a healthy constitution and digestion, and radical ignorance of the wickedness of this world. The truth probably was that his benevolence was condescension, and his humanity, good nature. As for religion, he looked at it from the poetical side, saw that it was susceptible of a pleasant symbolism, that the theory of right and wrong gave plenty of scope for the philosophical subtlety and profundity in which he imagined himself proficient, and that all he would have to do, as the professional representative of religious ideas, would be to preach poetical sermons, be the expectancy and rose of his parishioners, the glass of goodness and the mould of self-complacency. He thought everybody would be led by him and glorify him, that his chief difficulty would be to keep their piety within practical bounds; and that the devil himself would go near to break his sinful old heart because he could not be numbered among the disciples of so inspired a young prig. It was a lovely conception, wasn't it? but he never got so far with it as even to experience its idiocy. His first bout with theological and ecclesiastical lore was enough for him. He found himself the captive of a prison house of dogmas, superstitions, and traditions, instead of the lord of a palace of freedom, beauty and blank verse. If this was religion, he was made for something better; and he began to look about him in search of it. There were plenty of ideas masquerading about just then in the guise of freedom, and flaring the penny-dip of nationality in people's faces; and this fellow—what's his name?—Yorke, gave courteous entertainment to several of them. A German university is as good a place as another to indulge in that sort of dissipation. Freedom—that was the word; the right of a man to exploit his nature from the top to the bottom—and having arrived at the bottom, to sit down there and talk about the top. He had two or three years of this, and arrived at such proficiency that he could give a reason for everything, especially for those things that suited his inclination of the moment; and could prove to demonstration that the proper moral attitude of man was heels in the air and head downward. But unluckily human nature is not inexhaustible, at all events in the case of my single individual. The prospect may be large enough, but he only walks in such few paths as are comfortably accessible to him; and as time goes on, his round of exercise gets more and more contracted, until at last he does little more than turn round on one heel, in the muddiest corner of the whole estate. As Yorke, owing perhaps to the superior intellect and moral organization on which he prided himself, arrived at this corner rather more speedily than the majority of his associates, he was better able than they to recognize its muddiness: and since mud, *quâ* mud, was not irresistibly delightful to him, and he was not as yet inextricably embedded in it, he thought it worth while to try and get out of it; and made shift tolerably well to do so, though no doubt carrying plenty of stains along with him. All this time he had been secretly giving way to attacks of poetry, more or less modeled upon the Byron and Shelley plan. One day he took these scraps out of the portfolio in which he had hidden them, read them over, thought there was genius in them here and there, and made up his mind to be a great poet. There are always poetasters enough; but of great poets, you know, there are never so many as not to leave room for one or two more."

"Here, then," observed Mr. Grant, who had followed this history with complete attention—indeed he was an excellent listener—"here, then, you and Mr. Yorke were on sympathetic ground. It was probably at this epoch that you formed his acquaintance."

"I came to know him very well then, at all events," replied Lancaster, taking a sip from his tumbler, and then resuming his walk up and down the room. "He had a curiously mixed character. It was difficult to help liking him at first sight. He was handsome, cheerful, many-sided, easy-natured; but though he loved his ease, both of mind and body, he was capable on occasion of great physical or mental exertion. He was more comprehensive than commanding; but perhaps he seemed less strong than he really was, because he doubted the essential expediency or virtue of any particular line of conduct; and would rather observe the leadership of others than lead himself. He had great intuitive insight into the moral constitution of other people, but was not so keen-eyed toward his own structure; in considering an event, he had the habit of taking it upon its artistic or symbolical side—it was a device to parry the touch of realities. But often he allowed his imagination to get him into real scrapes—imagine himself to be this or that person, for instance, and act the character into actual consequences. He had a quaint way with him, and shunned giving direct pain, or coming into hostile collision with anybody; but the reason of that was, not the generous humanity of a powerful spirit, but the knowledge of a secret weakness that was in him, and a fear of revealing it. His weakness was a passionate, violent temper, which, once he had given way to it, would strip him of dignity and self-restraint, and uncover all manner of hatreds, revenges, jealousies, burning envies, and remorseless cruelties. There was nothing noble in his rage: it was underhand, savage, and malignant. In fact, subtlety was at the very base of his nature: so that he would constantly be secret and stealthy when there was no reason for it: he would conceal a hundred things which he might more conveniently to himself have left open; he would give a false impression when he might more advantageously to himself have told the truth; though I never met a man who could

upon occasion speak the naked truth more boldly and recklessly than he. I should say he was by instinct and organization a coward, but a brave man by determination. Back to a certain point he would yield and yield; but then he would leap out and fight like a mad tiger. He was liable to wicked conceptions: although, whether from constitution or caution, he commonly did what was right, and did not like to be suspected of acts of which he secretly knew himself either guilty or capable. In short, there was an ignoble, treacherous region, underlying his visible and better character, which he made use of that better character to disguise. The peril he stood in was, lest the baser nature should get the upper hand; and if he was saved from that, it was, I should say, by virtue of what may be called his genius. It was his good genius in more senses than one. It filled his imagination with lofty images: when his pen was in his hand no man was more pure-minded, well-balanced and upright than he. In those moods he was even reverential, which in practical affairs he never was. The custom of those moods influenced him like association with good men and women: or like some beneficent spell, which should suspend the action of a poison until either it lost its virulence, or he had recovered strength enough to disregard it. Have you heard enough about my friend Yorke?"

In putting this abrupt question, Lancaster stopped as abruptly in his walk, and fixed his eyes upon Mr. Grant, who lifted his face and met the look thoughtfully.

"'Tis a portrait not devoid of life and substance, and does credit to your discernment more than to your charity," he replied. "But the features are so true as to be in a measure typical; I have met men who resembled him, and therefore I may modify your interpretation by my own. With all his sensitiveness to rebuke and his fair-seeming, was he not a man given to self-depreciation?"

"Sometimes—yes."

"The issue of that kind of vanity which would simulate what is dark and terrible, to make the hearers stare. He would not do the evil that he uttered. Besides, he was aware of a certain softness or womanishness in his nature, which his masculine taste condemned, and which he sought to rectify at least in words."

"But that would show a fear to let the truth about himself be known."

"Aye; and a moral indifference to ill repute. On the other hand, I doubt not he often sinned in thought, when a physical or mental fastidiousness withheld him from fixing his thought in action. As to his genius, I grant you it was purgative to him; but less because it put him in noble company than because it gave vent through the imagination, and with artistic balance, to the wickedness which might else have forced a less harmless outlet. You say his general bearing was genial?"

"Yes; but his bearing was often much pleasanter than his feelings. He disliked to say or hear ugly words; though he could write savage letters, and could imagine himself being very stern in intercourse; but when he came to the point, he was apt to sweeten off—more, I think, from dread of being tempted to lose his temper than from natural kindness."

"You judge him too harshly, because too minutely. Every human motive has its shady side. He was a man—if I may hazard an opinion—who was never so gay and good-humored as under specially trying or perilous circumstances: upon slighter occasions he might be less agreeable."

"You have chanced upon a truth there," said Lancaster, apparently somewhat impressed by his interlocutor's sagacity. "We were once in a boat together on the Lake of Geneva, and a storm put us in imminent danger of our lives for a couple of hours. He was laughing and jesting all the time—not cynically or mockingly, but from genuine light-heartedness. Perhaps you can explain that?"

"No further than to remind you that great or dangerous crises burn the pretense out of a man and leave him sincere: and then it will be known, to others as well as to himself, whether he be brave or craven. In the case of your friend Yorke, with his dread of being accused of fine feelings, imminent peril would annul that dread, because he would perceive that no one about him was likely to be in a state of mind serene enough to be critical: therefore his self-consciousness would leave him, and he would become his spontaneous self. The chief vice of your friend seems to me, indeed, to be that same self-consciousness. He would be for ever watching and speculating about himself. Pray, did you consider him of a fickle disposition?"

"He has given many instances of it, both in mind and heart."

"Nevertheless," rejoined Mr. Grant, taking a pinch of snuff between his fingers, and regarding Lancaster with a smile of quiet penetration, "nevertheless I will wager that he was, at bottom, no more fickle than you or I. His fickleness was of the surface merely; within, he was perhaps more constant than most men."

"You speak confidently, sir."

"Nay, I am no conjuror, nor no dogmatist either. Your friend's character is, in reality, not quite so complex as it appears. What are its main elements? Powerful imagination, independence, affability, love of approbation, evidenced by the pride that veils it; a skeptical habit of conversation, to conceal a perhaps too credulous faith, unwearable spiritual curiosity, noble ideals; modesty, unless depreciated, sensitiveness to beauty, and docility unless opposed. That enumeration might be condensed, but let it pass. Here, then, we have a man open to an unusual variety of impressions, and fond of experimenting on himself; in the habit, therefore, of regarding himself as a third person. What more probable than that such a man should imagine changes in his beliefs or affections, and should amuse himself by acting as if those changes were actual? Yet, when it came to some vital matter, his deeper-rooted sense of right and justice would take the reins again, and curb the vagaries of his fancy."

"But it might happen," said Lancaster, "that some person became involved in this amusing experiment of his, who should mistake the experiment for earnest. What would my friend's sense of right and justice have to say to that?"

"Nay, that lies between him and his conscience," quoth Mr. Grant, applying the pinch of snuff to his nostrils, "and you and I have no concern with it."

Lancaster took a couple of turns up and down the room, and then seated himself in a chair at the opposite side of the table. "Enough about my friend Yorke," he said; "between your analysis and mine, he has grown too big for his share in the story. What I intended was to bring him into relations with a woman who should be a match for him: and this Marquise Desmoines, as I conceive her, will answer the purpose as well as another. Even while yet a girl at school, she had, as Marion's anecdote showed, the instinct of woman's power and conquest. She had already divided the human race into male and female, and had appraised the weapons available on her side. She had perceived that the weak point of woman is the heart, and was resolved to fence her own with triple steel. To marry a rich foreign

nobleman of more than thrice her age was precisely her affair. She would have the world before her, as well as at her feet. She was—I imagine her to have been—beautiful, dimpled, luxurious, skeptical, and witty. She was energetic by nature, selfish by philosophy, clever and worldly-wise by training. She could appreciate you like a friend, rally you like a critic, flatter and wheedle you like a mistress. She would caress you one moment, scoff at you the next, and put you in the wrong by your argument what it might. She could speak in double meaning, startle you, deceive you, and forgive you. She was fond of intrigue for its own sake, fertile in resources and expedients; she was willful and wayward from calculation, and dangerous at all times. She was indolently despotic, fond of playing with her sensations, and amusing herself with her passions. She was the heroine of a hundred perilous anecdotes, which showed rather the audacity of genius than commonplace impropriety. She could say with grace and charm things that no other woman could say at all. She could assume a fatal innocence and simplicity; and to have seen her blush was an unforgettable experience in a man's life. Physical exercise, especially dancing and riding, were indispensable to her; her toilets, baths, clothes, and equipment were ideals of luxury. She was superstitious, because she believed in no religion; indifferent to inflicting suffering, because never suffering herself; but she loved the pleasure of pleasing, was kindly in disposition, mindful of benefits as well as of injuries; and in her loftier moods she could be royally or savagely generous, as well as fiercely implacable. She had a lawyer's head for business; was a better companion for men than for women; was even capable of genuine friendship, and could give sound and honest advice; and it was at such times that the real power and maturity of her understanding were revealed. That is the sort of woman that the plot of my story requires her to have been. When Yorke met her, she was the Circe of a distinguished company of noblemen, authors, actors, artists, abbés, soldiers, wits, and humorists; all of whom, by her magic, she could cause to assume the forms of turkey-cocks, magpies, poodles, monkeys, hogs, puppies, parrots, boa-constrictors, and other animals, according to their several dispositions. But Yorke was the Ulysses upon whom her spells had only so much effect as to incline him to spend most of his time in her company."

Here Lancaster paused, and drank off the remains of his tumbler of brandy and water.

"Well?" said Mr. Grant, moving the bottle toward him.

"No more, thank you," said Lancaster.

"You are not going to leave your drama just as the curtain is ready to go up?"

"I have come to the end of my invention."

"Ah! I should scarce have thought you had begun upon it, as yet," returned the other dryly.

Lancaster made no reply. At last Mr. Grant said, "Unless my genealogical inferences are at fault, you and Sir Francis Bendibow should be of kin."

"It is one of the impertinences of human society," said Lancaster, with a twitching of his eyebrows, "that whatever filibuster happens to marry the sister of your father has a right to call you nephew. It might as reasonably be decreed that because I happen to cut the throat of some hook-nosed old money-lender, his women and children would have the right to style themselves my cousins and aunts. That law might, to be sure, prove a beneficial one, for it would do more than hanging to put a stop to murder. But the other law makes marriage a nuisance, and one of these days the nephews will arise and compel its repeal at the sword's point. Meanwhile I remain the baronet's nephew and your humble servant."

"You would abolish all but blood-relatives then?" said Mr. Grant, resting his elbows on the arms of his chair and interlacing his fingers.

"I would have no buts; abolish the whole of them!" exclaimed Lancaster—"even the rich uncles and the pretty cousins. Take a leaf from the book of animals, and let each human creature stand on his own basis and do the best he can with it. When I found a republic there shall be no genealogies and no families. So long as they exist we shall never know what we are really made of."

"The Bendibow Bank is, however, a highly prosperous and trustworthy concern?"

"You must get my uncle to sing its eulogies for you; I know nothing. But I am of opinion that Miss Marion Lockhart has an intuition for detecting humbugs. That Charles Grantley affair ... is none of mine. But Sir Francis had two sides to him in his youth, and there may be some passages in his account book that he would deprecate publishing."

"Ah! I had contemplated calling at the bank to-morrow—"

"Oh, don't interpret my prejudices and antipathies as counsel!" interrupted the young man, throwing back his hair from his forehead and smiling. "The bank is as sound as the Great Pyramid, I doubt not. Bless your heart, everybody banks there! If they ruin you, you will have all the best folks in London for your fellow-bankrupts. I'm afraid I've bored you shamefully, but a little brandy goes a long way with me."

"You have said nothing that has failed to interest me," returned the old gentleman courteously. "As you may conceive, I find myself somewhat lonely. In twenty years such friends as may have been mine in England have disappeared, and the circumstances in which those years have been passed—in India—have precluded my finding others. At your age one can afford to wish to abolish kindred, but by the time you have lived thirty years longer you may understand how I would rather wish to create new kindred in the place of those whom fate has abolished for me. Human beings need one another, Mr. Lancaster. God has no other way of ministering to us than through our fellow-creatures. I esteem myself fortunate, therefore, in having met with yourself and with these kind ladies. You cannot know me as the vanished friends I spoke of would know me—my origin, my early life, my ambitions, my failures; but you can know me as an inoffensive old gentleman whose ambition for the rest of his life is to make himself agreeable to somebody. If you and I had been young men together in London thirty years ago, doubtless we might have found ourselves in accord on many points of speculation and philosophy wherein now I should be disposed to challenge some of your conclusions. But intellectual agreement is not the highest basis of friendship between man and man. I, at all events, have been led by experience to value men for what I think they are, more than for what they think they are. I will make no other comment than that on the brilliant and ingenious ... confidence, shall I call it?—with which you have honored me to-night. If it should ever occur to you to present me to your friend Yorke, under his true name, I am sure that I should enjoy his acquaintance, and that I should recognize him from your description. Perhaps he might be able to reinforce your invention as to the Marquise Perdita. Well, well, I am detaining you. Good-night!"

Lancaster colored a little at the latter sentence and a cloud passed over his face, but in another moment his

eyebrows lifted with a smile. "God knows what induces me to masquerade so," he said. "I care to conceal myself only from those who can see nothing on any terms—which is certainly not your category. Let Yorke and Lancaster be one in future. As for Perdita ... there goes twelve o'clock! I was startled at hearing her name to-night; she has just returned to London in the capacity of widow. It only needed that ... however, what is that to you? Good-night."

"Perdita, a pretty name, is it not?" said Mr. Grant musingly, as he followed the other to the door. "It makes one hope there may be some leaven of Shakspeare's Perdita in her, after all."

" 'Tis an ominous name, though—too ominous in this case for even Shakspeare to save it, I'm afraid," returned Lancaster. With that he went out and left Mr. Grant to his meditations.

CHAPTER XI.

THE next day Mr. Grant hired a saddle-horse, and rode up to London, where, among other business, he made the call at Bendibow Bank, which has been already mentioned. His affair with that institution having been arranged, presumably to the satisfaction of both parties, Mr. Grant set out on his return home. As it was already six o'clock, however, he stopped at the "Holy Lands" hotel in the Strand, where he dined. By the time he was ready to resume his journey it was nearly dark, the rather as the night was moonless, and the sky was overlaid with heavy clouds. Partly by chance, partly because he fancied it would save him some distance, he took the northern or Uxbridge road, instead of that which goes through Kensington. After passing the northwest corner of Kensington Gardens, this road lay through a region which was, at that epoch, practically uninhabited. Mr. Grant rode easily along, absorbed in thought, and only occasionally taking note of his direction. He was a practiced horseman, and riding was as natural to him as walking. It was a very still night, though a storm might be brewing; and the only sounds audible to Mr. Grant's ears were the steady tramp of his horse's feet, the slight creaking of the saddle, and the rattle of the bit as the animal flung up his head. By-and-by, however, the rider fancied he heard the noise of another horse's hoofs beating the road at a gallop, and coming up behind him. He drew his left rein a little, and glanced over his shoulder.

Meanwhile, at Mrs. Lockhart's house in Hammersmith, dinner was ready at the usual time; but as Mr. Grant did not appear, it was resolved to wait for him. He had informed Mrs. Lockhart, previous to setting out, that it was his intention to go to London, and added that he might be detained some hours by business. No anxiety was felt, therefore: but, as Marion observed, dinner would not seem like dinner without Mr. Grant; and it was not worth while sitting down to table so long as any chance remained of his being present. Accordingly, the dishes were put to warm in front of the kitchen fire; and Marion and Lancaster went to the piano, and tried to set to music some words that the latter had written. But singing conduces to appetite; and appetite will get the better even of sentiment. When more than half an hour had added itself to the abyss of the past, it was generally admitted that Mr. Grant was hopelessly derelict, and neglectful of his social duties: the dishes were brought in from the kitchen, and the trio seated themselves at table, with Mr. Grant's chair gaping vacantly at them all.

Now, whether a man be well or ill spoken of behind his back, depends not so much upon the man himself as upon those who speak of him; but probably the worst thing that can happen to him is not to be spoken of at all. Mr. Grant fared well in all respects; he was spoken of, he was well spoken of, he was well spoken of by honest people; and it may not be too much to add that he was not undeserving of having honest people speak well of him. The goodness of some good men is a long time in getting the recognition that it deserves; that of others is appreciated at once; nor does it follow that the latter's virtues are necessarily shallower or less honorable than those of the former. Ten days ago, for example, Mr. Grant had been as good as non-existent to the three persons who were now discussing him with so much interest and even affection. There was something in his face, in his glance, in the gradual, kindly brightening of his smile, in the pleasant melody of his voice, in the manly repose of his general walk and conversation, that inevitably inspired respect and liking in such persons as were disinterestedly susceptible of those sentiments. And yet Mr. Grant was far from being handsome either in face or figure; and no one knew what his life had been, what was his social position, whether he were rich or poor, or wherefore he was living in lodgings at Hammersmith; none of which subjects of inquiry are apt to be disregarded in the life of a country so compact and inquisitive as England. But even in England, sheer and naked individuality has vast weight, altogether unaccountable upon any general theory whatever: and Mr. Grant was in this way the passive subject of a special social dispensation.

"He told me last night," remarked Lancaster, "that he had been living in India for the last twenty years. I had been puzzling myself whom he reminded me of—physically, I mean; and that enlightened me. You have probably seen the man I mean, Mrs. Lockhart. I saw him the year he was acquitted, when I was eight or nine years old; and I never forgot his face—Warren Hastings."

Mrs. Lockhart replied that she had never seen Mr. Hastings, but she was sure Mr. Grant bore no resemblance to him in character. Mr. Hastings was a cruel and ambitious man; whereas Mr. Grant was the most humane man she had ever known, except the Major, and as simple as a child.

"There is mystery about him, too," said Lancaster.

"Not the kind of mystery that makes you suspicious though," said Marion. "I feel that what he hides would make us like him better if we knew it."

"What I hide is of another color," observed Lancaster.

"I'm sure it can be nothing bad," said Mrs. Lockhart.

Marion broke out, "So am I! Mr. Lancaster thinks it would be picturesque and poetical to be wicked, and so he is always talking about it. If he had really done anything wicked, he would be too vain to make a mystery of it; he could not help telling. But he has only been good so far, and he has not outgrown being ashamed of it. If he had committed more sins, the people in his poetry would have committed much fewer."

When Marion struck, she struck with all her might, and reckless of consequences. Mrs. Lockhart sat appalled, and Lancaster winced a little; but he was able to say good-humoredly, "I shall give up being a hypocrite; everybody finds me out. If I were a whited sepulchre, detection would not humiliate me; but when a bottle labeled 'Poison' is found to contain nothing worse than otto of roses, it can never hold up its head again."

"Anybody can say what they please," rejoined Marion; "but what they do is all that amounts to anything."

"That is to say you are deaf, but you have eyes."

"That is a more poetical way of putting it, I suppose. But some words are as good as deeds, and I can hear those."

"It is not your seeing or hearing that troubles me, but your being able to read. If I had only been born an Arab or an ancient Hebrew, I might have written without fear of your criticism."

"I suppose you wish me to say that I would learn those languages for the express purpose of enjoying your poetry. But I think you are lucky in having to write in plain English. It is the most difficult of all languages to be wicked in—genteelly wicked, at least."

"You convince me, however, that it must have been the original language spoken by Job's wife, when she advised him to curse God and die. If she had been as much a mistress of it as you are, I think he would have done it."

"If he had been a poet, 'tis very likely."

"I hope," said Mrs. Lockhart with gentle simplicity, "that nothing has happened to Mr. Grant."

Lancaster and Marion both turned their faces toward the window, and then Lancaster got up from the table—they had finished dinner—and looked out. "It has grown dark very suddenly," he remarked. "I fear Mr. Grant will get wet if he does not return soon."

Marion also arose and stood at the other side of the window. After a while she said, "I should like to be out in such a night as this."

"I hate darkness," returned Lancaster. "Come what come may, as long as I have a light to see it by."

"I love darkness, because then I can see my mind. When father was alive, and I had more time to do what I wished, I used to lie awake at night as much as in the day-time."

"Your mind must be fuller of light than most people's, if you can see it only in the darkness."

"I am light-minded—is that what you mean?"

"No, I am serious. You never are serious except when you are angry."

"If I am never serious, I must be light-minded. Very likely I am light-headed, too, sometimes; mother has often told me so. I like to be out in the rain, and to get my feet wet and muddy. I should like to have been a soldier in my father's regiment; he said I would make a good soldier."

"And shoot Frenchmen?"

"I prefer killing with a sword. Washing dishes and marketing becomes tiresome after a while. I shall probably kill the baker or the greengrocer some day; I have a terrible tongue, and if I don't let it have its way once in a while it will become worse. Hitherto I have only broken dishes; but that is not terrible enough."

"I'll be hanged if I can understand you," said Lancaster, after a pause.

"You are such a handsome man you don't need to understand people. The object of understanding people is to get the better of them; but when one is handsome, people open their doors at once."

"Then why don't you open yours?"

"If I don't, it is as much on your account as on mine."

"How is that?"

"When I tell you that, I shall have told you a great deal. But why didn't you protest that you had no notion you were handsome, and that I was a flatterer?"

"I know I'm handsome, and I'm glad of it."

"Do you often speak the truth like that?"

"You get more truth out of me than I suspected of being in me. But if, some day, you provoke me to some truth that I had better have kept to myself, it will be your fault."

"I don't think there is much danger. I like this first truth of yours. If I were handsome I should be glad of it, too. Ugly women are suspicious, designing and jealous. They talk about the charms of a cultivated intelligence being superior, in the long run, to beauty. But beauty does not wait for the long run—it wins at once, and lets the cultivated intelligence run on to Jericho, if it likes. I imagine most cultivated intelligences would be thankful to be fools, if they could afford it."

"But beauty doesn't always imply folly."

"Oh, I am speaking of women!"

"Thank you. But, speaking of women, what have you to say to the Marquise Desmoines, for instance?"

"So you know her?"

"I heard you speak of her last night as being both beautiful and clever."

"But you know her?"

"I ran across her abroad," said Lancaster, with an indifferent air. But before saying it he had hesitated for a moment, and Marion had noticed the hesitation.

"How did you like the Marquis?" she inquired.

"He was a very distinguished old gentleman, very punctilious and very bilious. He always wore a red ribbon in his button-hole and sat in a large arm-chair, and four times a day he had a glass of absinthe. 'Tis a wonder he lived so long."

"Oh, did he die?"

"He is dead."

"What did you do then?"

"I did not know of it until a few days ago. He has been dead six months."

"Then Perdita is in England!" said Marion rapidly, meeting Lancaster's glance with her own. Except when she was angry, or for some other reason forgot herself, she habitually avoided another person's glance. For she was of an extremely sensitive, nervous temperament, and the "personal equation" of those with whom she conversed affected her more than physical contact would affect other people.

At this point the dialogue was interrupted by a startling glare of lightning, succeeded almost immediately by a crash of thunder so loud and so heavy as to rattle the window in its frame and jar the floor on which they stood. Marion laughed, and opening the window leaned out. Mrs. Lockhart, who had fallen into a gentle doze in her chair, awoke with a little jump and an exclamation.

"Oh, Marion ... what has gone off? Mr. Grant? Why is the window open? Dear heart! is that the rain? He will be drenched to the skin, Mr. Lancaster."

"So will you if you don't shut the window," said Lancaster to Marion.

She looked round and appeared to answer, but her words were inaudible in the thunderpeal that accompanied them. The rain drove straight downwards with such force and weight that the drops might have been liquid lead. The sky was black.

"I shall take an umbrella and go out and meet him," Marion was now heard to say.

"Oh, my child, you are mad!" cried Mrs. Lockhart. "Do put down the window, Mr. Lancaster."

Lancaster complied. Marion glanced at him with an odd, quizzical kind of a smile. He did not know what she meant; but he joined Mrs. Lockhart in denouncing Marion's project as impossible.

"He would be as wet as he is capable of being before you found him," he said; "besides, he couldn't use an umbrella on horseback; and even if you knew where he was and which road he was coming by, it's a hundred to one you'd miss him in a night like this."

"La! what a regiment of reasons!" she answered, with her short, irregular laugh. "I only wanted a reason for going out. As to being of use to Mr. Grant, 'twould be but a chance, of course; but so is everything for that matter."

She did not persist in her intention, however, but began to move carelessly about the room, and made no answer to several remarks that her mother and Lancaster addressed to her.

When nearly half an hour had passed away, her bearing and aspect suddenly changed; she went swiftly out of the room, shutting the door behind her. Then the outside door was heard to open, and Marion's step going down to the gate, which was likewise flung back; then, after a minute's silence, the sound of voices, and Lancaster, peering out of the window, saw, by the aid of an accommodating flash of lightning, Marion and Mr. Grant (who was without his hat) coming up the paved way to the porch.

"What a strange thing!" he exclaimed. "How could she possibly have known he was coming?"

"Marion has wonderful ears," said Mrs. Lockhart with a sigh, as if the faculty were in some way deleterious to the possessor of it. But Lancaster thought that something else besides fine hearing was involved in this matter.

The girl now came in, her cheeks flushed, her hair, face and shoulders wet, conducting Mr. Grant, with her arm under his. He was splashed and smeared with mud and looked very pale; but he smiled and said with his usual courtesy: "I am not going to spoil your carpet and chairs, dear madam. I do but show you my plight, like a truant schoolboy who has tumbled into the gutter, and then I retire for repairs."

"No: you shall sit down here," said Marion determinedly but quietly; and in despite of himself she led him to the stuffed easy chair which her mother had just quitted, and forced him into it. "Mr. Grant has had some hurt," she added to the others; and to Lancaster, "Go up to his room and bring down his dressing-gown. Mother, get some water heated in the kitchen. I will attend to him."

Her manner to the old man was full of delicate and sympathetic tenderness; to the others, of self-possessed authority. Lancaster went on his errand with a submissive docility that surprised himself. He had seen a great deal of Marion in the last few hours; but he was not sure that he had seen into her very far.

When he returned with the dressing-gown, Marion had got Mr. Grant's coat off, and was wiping the mud from a bruised place on his right hand with her wetted handkerchief. "Nothing dangerous, thank God!" she was saying, in a soothing undertone, as Lancaster approached.

"You got a fall?" asked the latter of the elder man, who nodded in reply.

Marion said brusquely, "Don't you see that he is too exhausted to talk? Wait, and you will know everything."

In truth, Mr. Grant appeared a good deal shaken, and for several minutes could do little more than accept passively the ministrations that were bestowed upon him. Marion continued to direct the operations, the others assisting with abundant good will. At last Mr. Grant said:

"It is very pleasant to find you all so kind—to be so well taken care of. I fear I'm ruining your chair, Mrs. Lockhart. There was really no need for this. I am none the worse, except for the loss of a hat. Thank you, my dear; you are very good."

"Have you had your dinner?" inquired Mrs. Lockhart.

"Yes, I am obliged to you, madam. I was belated, and.... But you must hear my adventure. I thought the highwaymen days were over in this neighborhood."

"I wish I had been with you!" murmured Marion resentfully.

"Highwaymen? oh!" faltered Mrs. Lockhart.

"My highwayman was not so ceremonious as the best of the old-fashioned ones," continued Mr. Grant smiling. "He came upon me just before the storm broke. I heard his horse overtaking me at a gallop, and I drew aside to let him pass. But he rode right against me—he was mounted on a very powerful animal—and nearly threw me down. As I turned toward him, he held a pistol in his hand, and fired at me. The ball knocked off my hat, and missed me. I had a heavy riding-whip, and I struck at him with it. I think I must have hit him across the wrist; at all events, he dropped the pistol. Neither of us had spoken a word. It was at that moment that the first flash of lightning came. It showed me that he was a large man, dressed in dark clothes; he put his arm across his face, as if to prevent my seeing it. The thunder was very loud, and my horse plunged and burst his girths; and I slipped to the ground. What with the rain and the noise, and the suddenness of it all, I was confused, and hardly knew what happened for a few moments. When I got on my feet again, I was alone; my highwayman had disappeared; and so had my horse, though I picked it up on the road later."

"He may have thought, from your falling, that he had not missed his shot after all," said Lancaster.

"It was the lightning that frightened him away," said Marion. "He counted on darkness, and dared not risk recognition."

"How did you get home? did you have to walk?" asked Mrs. Lockhart.

"Only a short distance. A wagon happened to come along, and the driver gave me a lift as far as the corner. And there Marion met me. What spirit told you I was coming, my dear?"

Marion replied only by a smile.

"It seems singular," remarked Lancaster "that he should have ridden at you and fired at once, instead of going through the customary formality of inquiring whether you preferred your life to your purse. Those fellows are usually more cautious for their own sakes."

"He was as much afraid of having his voice heard as of having his face seen," said Marion. "He wished to kill Mr. Grant more than to rob him. You didn't have much money with you, did you?"

"Not much, as it happened, my dear; though, as I had been to the Bank, whoever had taken the trouble to follow my movements might have inferred that I did have."

"The Bendibow Bank?" demanded Marion.

"Yes; I introduced myself to your friend Sir Francis."

Lancaster chanced to be looking at Marion, and noticed a troubled expression pass across her face. She laid her hand lightly on Mr. Grant's shoulder, and passed it down his arm; the action seemed at once affectionate and reproachful. "You disapprove of that, don't you?" the young man said to her, smiling.

The question appeared to annoy her: "I am glad he got home," she said coldly. Then she got up and went out of the room.

CHAPTER XII.

TOWARD the close of the month, Sir Francis Bendibow, having seriously turned the matter over in his mind, wrote a note to his solicitor, Merton Fillmore, asking him whether he could spare time to come over to the bank that afternoon, and have a chat with him. This note he dispatched to Mr. Fillmore by a private messenger, who was instructed to wait for an answer. In half an hour, the messenger returned, and Sir Francis read the following:

"DEAR BENDIBOW—I don't see my way to come to you to-day. If you have anything particular to say, dine with me at my house this evening at seven o'clock.

"Yours truly,

"MERTON FILLMORE."

"Well, perhaps that will answer better, after all," murmured the baronet, folding the paper up again with sombre thoughtfulness. "He gives a decent dinner, too." So, punctually at seven o'clock, Sir Francis' carriage drove up to Mr. Fillmore's door; the footman gave a loud double knock, and the baronet, in black tights and ruffled shirt, was ushered into his host's presence.

Though a solicitor, Merton Fillmore was an English gentleman, of Scotch descent on his mother's side, and more Scotch than English in personal appearance; being of good height and build, lean, bony and high-featured, with well-formed and powerful hands, carefully-groomed finger nails, short reddish whiskers, and bushy eyebrows. His eyes were dark blue, sometimes appearing black; clear and unflinching in their gaze. The head above was well balanced, the forehead very white, and hollowed at the temples. His movements were quiet and undemonstrative; when speaking at any length, he habitually pressed his clenched right hand into the palm of his left, and kept it there. At the end of a sentence he would make his handsome lips meet together with a grave decisiveness of expression. His voice had unexpected volume and depth; it could be resonant and ear-filling without any apparent effort on the speaker's part; it could also sink until it was just above a whisper, yet always with a keen distinctness of enunciation that rendered it more audible than mere vociferousness. Soft or melodious it never was; but its masculine fibre and vibration were far from unpleasing to most ears, certainly to most feminine ones. Fillmore, however, was a bachelor; and though still a little on the hither side of forty, he did not seem likely to change his condition. He threw himself with unweariable energy into his profession; it almost monopolized his time and his thoughts. He saw a good deal of society; but he had never, so far as was known, seen any woman who, to his thinking, comprised in herself all the attractions and benefits that society had to offer. He might, indeed, have been considered cold, but that was probably not so much the case as it superficially appeared to be.

That he should have chosen the solicitor's branch of the legal profession was a puzzle to most people. His social position (his father had been a gentleman, living upon his own income, and there was no economical reason why Merton should not have done the same) would naturally have called him to the Bar. It can only be said that the work of a solicitor, bringing him as it did into immediate contact with the humors, the ambitions, the disputes and the weaknesses of mankind, suited his peculiar genius better than the mere logical partisanship of the barrister. He cared more to investigate and arrange a case than to plead it before a jury. He liked to have people come to him and consult him; to question them, to weigh their statements against his own insight, to advise them, to take their measure; to disconcert them or to assist them. He by no means cared to bring all the suits on which he was consulted before the court; on the contrary, he uniformly advised his clients to arrange their disputes privately, furnishing them at the same time with such sound reasons for so doing, and with such equitable advice as to a basis of agreement, as to gain for himself the reputation of an arbitrator rather than of an advocate. Nevertheless, whenever it became necessary to push matters to an extremity, the side which Merton Fillmore was known to have espoused was considered to be already half victorious. No other solicitor in London, in fact, had anything like the reputation of Merton Fillmore; he was among his fellows what Mr. Adolphus or Mr. Serjeant Runnington were among barristers. But his acquaintance with the domestic secrets of London fashionable society was affirmed, doubtless with reason, to be more extensive than that of any physician, confidential clergyman or private detective in the metropolis. He held in his hand the reputation and prosperity of many a man and woman whom the world delighted to honor. Such a position is not attained by mere intellectual ability or natural ingenuity; it demands that rare combination of qualities which may be termed social statesmanship, prominent among which is the power of inspiring others with the conviction that their revelations will be at least as safe in the hearer's possession as in their own; and that he is broadly and disinterestedly tolerant of human frailties. Most men, in order to achieve success and eminence, require the spur of necessity or of ambition; but it is doubtful whether Fillmore would have been so eminent as he was, had either ambition or necessity been his prompter. He loved what he did for its own sake, and not any ulterior object. From the social standpoint he had nothing to desire, and pecuniarily he was independent. What he made with one hand in his profession he frequently gave away with the other; but no one knew the details of his liberality except those who were its object. He seldom spoke cordially of any one; but few were more often guilty of kindly acts. He was a man with whom nobody ventured to take a liberty, yet who spoke his mind without ceremony to every one. No one could presume to call Merton Fillmore his friend, yet no honest man ever found him unfriendly. He was no conventional moralist, but he distinguished sharply between a bad heart and a good one. These antitheses might be produced indefinitely, but enough has been said.

Fillmore lived in a handsome house in the then fashionable district of London. It was one of the best furnished and appointed houses in the town; for Fillmore was a man whose naturally fine taste had been improved by cultivation. During his annual travels on the Continent he had collected a number of good pictures and other works of art, which were so disposed about his rooms as to show that their owner knew what they were. The machinery by which his domestic economy moved was so well ordered as to be invisible; you never remarked how good his servants were, because you never remarked them at all. Once a week he gave dinners, never inviting more than five guests at a time; and once a month this dinner was followed by a reception. People renowned in all walks of life were to be met with there. Lord Byron made his appearance there several times—a young man of splendid eyes and an appalling reputation, which his affable and rather reticent bearing scarcely seemed to justify; Lady Caroline Lamb, who was supposed to be very much in love with him, and to whom his lordship was occasionally rather impolite; William Godwin, a dark little creature, too ugly not to be clever, but rather troublesome to converse with; a tall

black-haired man, superbly handsome, in clerical garb; a man whose great black eyes had seen more trouble than was wholesome for their owner—who, indeed, as Hazlitt once remarked to Fillmore, would probably have been a great deal better if he hadn't been so damned good; an agreeable little Irish lady, the author of an irretrievably moral work for the young, entitled "Frank"; a small-chinned, lustrous-eyed, smiling, fervent gentleman, who had written a number of graceful essays and poems, and who also, oddly enough, was editor of a terrific Radical journal with a motto from Defoe; a short, rather stout, Italian-looking fellow, with flashing face and forcible gesticulation, the best actor of his day, and a great toper; another stoutish man of a very different complexion, with a countenance like a humanized codfish, thick parched lips that always hung open, pale blue prominent eyes, and an astonishing volubility of philosophical speculative dogmatism; a fastidious, elderly, elegant, womanish, sentimental poetaster named Samuel Rogers, who looked not unlike a diminished Sir Francis Bendibow with the spine taken out; and, in short, a number of persons who were of considerable importance in their own day, and have become more or less so since then. He would be hard to please who could not find some one to his mind in Merton Fillmore's drawing-room.

Sir Francis Bendibow, on the evening with which we are at present concerned, had a good deal on his mind; but that did not prevent him from enjoying an excellent dinner. He was happy in the possession of a strong and well-balanced physical organization, upon which age and a certain amount of free living in youth had made small inroads. If he had become a trifle stiff or so in his joints, he was still robust and active, and bade fair to outlive many who were his juniors. That injurious chemistry whereby the mind and emotions act upon the animal tissues was but faintly operative with Sir Francis; though it is not to be inferred that he was deficient in mental or in a certain kind of emotional vigor. He and Merton Fillmore were on familiar terms with each other—as familiar as the latter ever was a party to. Fillmore had been the legal adviser of the bank for ten years past, and knew more about it, and about Sir Francis himself, than the baronet was perhaps aware of. But the baronet was thoroughly aware of the solicitor's abilities and force of character, and paid deference thereto, by laying aside, when in his company, the air of courteous superiority which he maintained toward the generality of men. Fillmore's tendency in discussion was toward terseness and directness; he expressed himself in few words, though ordinarily pausing a few moments on the threshold of a sentence. Sir Francis, on the contrary, inclined to be ornamental, intricate, and wavy; not because he was ignorant that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, but because there was an arabesque bias in him, so to speak, that prompted him to shun straightforwardness as if it were a sort of vulgarity. Sometimes, no doubt, and with some men, this method was effective; as the simple person on foot is outdone by the skater, who, at the moment of seeming to accost him face to face, all at once recedes sideways in a wheeling curve that brings him wonderfully behind the other's shoulder. But it was time thrown away to indulge in such caprioles with a man like Merton Fillmore; and as Sir Francis had the good sense to comprehend this, the two commonly got on together very comfortably.

This evening, however, when the cloth had been drawn, and the servants had disappeared, Fillmore, looking at his guest as he pushed toward him the decanter of claret, perceived that there was something more than usual on his mind. Therefore he said:

"Has that boy of yours been getting into more scrapes?"

"Not he," answered the baronet, holding his glass up to the light for a moment, and then turning the contents down his throat. "Poor lad, he's scarce recovered yet from the fall he got off that coach."

They cracked filberts for a while in silence. At last Fillmore said:

"Is the bank doing well?"

"Oh, if it never does any worse, I ought to be satisfied."

"You must look out for a partner," observed Fillmore, after a pause. "Your son will never make a banker. And you won't live forever."

"The experience I have had with partners has not been encouraging," said Sir Francis, with a melancholy smile. "The boy has plenty of brains, but he's not strong; and, hang it! a spirited young fellow like him must have his fling. Time enough to talk to him about business when he's seen a bit of the world."

"He will see a bit of the next world before long, if you don't keep him better in hand," said Fillmore. "You ought to get a partner. All men are not Charles Grantleys, if you refer to him. You can do nothing else, unless you intend to marry again."

"I marry again? Good God, Fillmore! If everybody else were as far from that as I am, the child born to-day would see the end of the world. No, no: I'd sooner give up business altogether. There are times, begad, when I wish I had given it up twenty years ago."

The baronet said this with so much emphasis that Fillmore, after looking at him for a few moments, said:

"What times are those, Bendibow?"

"It's rather a long story," the other replied; and hesitated, wrinkling his forehead. As Fillmore kept silence, he presently resumed: "You know what confidence I have always reposed in you. To others I show myself only as the banker, or the man of the world; but to you, my dear Fillmore, I have always opened myself without disguise. You comprehend my character; and I suppose you would say that I'm a fair average specimen of the genus homo—eh?"

"If you require my opinion of you, I can give it," replied Fillmore quietly.

"Well, 'tis not often one gets his portrait drawn by an artist like you," said the baronet laughingly. "'Extenuate naught, nor set down aught in malice,' as Charley Kean has it. I expect to be edified, I assure you."

"To begin with, your bank is the last place where I should think of putting my money," said Fillmore, with deliberation.

"What the dooce...!"

"You may be as prosperous as report says you are," continued Fillmore; "but you are a gambler to the marrow of your bones. You have put money in ventures which promised cent per cent: but they were carried on at imminent risk of ruin. If you have not been ruined, you have only your luck to thank for it. I like you well enough; and you have made a great success for a man of your beginnings; but you have no more morality than there is in that decanter of claret. Don't take offense, Sir Francis. The day I find you, or any other man, committing a crime of which no alteration in my circumstances or temperament could have rendered me capable, that day I shall throw up my profession and become a journeyman evangelist. We have always been on friendly terms, and I shall never take

advantage of facts about you that have come to my knowledge; but ... well, are you determined to be indignant?"

"Damme, sir, you have insulted me in your own house! I—"

"Don't be a fool, Bendibow," interrupted the other coldly. "You have come here to ask my advice, and perhaps my assistance. You can have both, within certain limits; but on condition that you don't require me to shut my eyes to your character. Technically speaking, I have insulted you; and you may resent it if you like. But as a man of the world, you may remember that I have not spoken in the presence of witnesses; and that if you were blameless, the insult would recoil on myself. Take time to think it over, and then do as best pleases you."

Sir Francis, however, whatever may have been his other failings, was not slow-witted; and he had already taken his attitude. "You have a damned disagreeable way of putting things, Fillmore," he said; "you ought to know that something more than logic is necessary to make social intercourse agreeable. It is not so much what you say, as your manner of saying it, that got the better of my temper for a moment. I'm not going to quarrel with you for not believing me to be a saint; you may distrust my financial discretion if you like; but you can't expect me to be interested in hearing your reasons. Let me try the other claret. I have made my mistakes, and I've repented of them, I hope. No man, unless he's a fool, gossips about his mistakes—why should he? Do you mean to say that I can't consult you on a matter that annoys me, without your raking up all my follies of the last five and twenty years?"

"My intention was not to alter our relations, but to define them," Fillmore replied. "As we stand now, we are not likely to misconceive each other. What is this annoyance?"

"It comes from one of my follies that you've not been at the pains to remember. But I suppose you know that when Grantley absconded, he left a daughter behind him, whom I adopted; and that ten years ago she married and left England."

Fillmore nodded.

"She came back a week or two ago," continued the baronet: "and she acted a little scene at my expense in my office. It was at my expense in more ways than one. She is a devilish clever woman. She had a grudge against me for not having given her the dowry she wanted at the time of her marriage; and ... well, the upshot of it was that I compounded with her for ten thousand pounds. It was confoundedly inconvenient at the time, too; and after all, instead of banking with us, as she had given us to understand she would, the little rascal has gone to Childs'. Her husband left her a very pretty fortune. There's not a widow in London better off or better looking than she is."

"She means to settle here?"

"She does. And I would give a good deal if she had settled in New Zealand instead!"

"From what you have said," observed Fillmore, after a pause, "I infer that the lady knows something to your discredit."

"Thank you! It's not what she knows, but what she may come to know—at least, something might happen which might be very annoying. Hang it, Fillmore, can't you keep your inferences to yourself? I'm not in the dock—I'm at your table!"

"If I am to understand your story, either you must tell it, or I must guess it."

"I am telling it, as fast as I can use my tongue," returned Sir Francis, who was beginning to be demoralized by the lawyer's imperturbable high-handedness. "To hear you, one would suppose that I was talking in riddles."

"It may be my obtuseness; but I cannot see why the fact that a good-looking woman, who is your niece and adopted daughter, chooses to live in London, should in itself cause you annoyance."

"If you will do me the favor to listen to me for a moment, I may be able to explain it. This niece and adopted daughter of mine is ... is not my own daughter, of course."

"Does any one believe that she is? The lady herself, for example?"

"If she did, I should not be inconvenienced in the way I am. Had I foreseen all contingencies, I should have brought her up in the belief that she was my own daughter. As far as giving her every advantage and indulgence that was in my power is concerned, no daughter of my own could have been treated differently. But though I omitted to disguise from her the fact that she was not my own flesh and blood, I was careful never to enlarge upon the misfortunes of her actual parentage. I never spoke to her about Charles Grantley. Whatever she may have learnt about him did not come from me. I have always discouraged all allusion to him, in fact; but a girl's curiosity will be gratified even to her own hurt; and Perdita has more than once given me to understand that she knew her father's name, if not his history." Here Sir Francis paused, to pour himself out a glass of claret.

"Since the man is dead," said Fillmore, "and his reputation not of the brightest, her knowing about him can injure no one but herself."

"Let us put a case," said the baronet, narrowing his eyes and turning his face toward the ceiling. "Let us suppose she were to say to herself, 'My father disappeared so many years ago, a fugitive from justice. Some time after, report came of his death. Now, there may be true reports and there may be false reports. Has this report had such confirmation as to put its truth beyond all possibility of question? It has not. It is therefore within the range of possibility that it may be false. Now, whose interest would it be that a false report of that kind should be circulated? Who, and who only, would benefit by it? Who would be relieved by it from an imminent and incessant peril? Whom would its belief enable to begin a new career, unhampered by the delinquencies of his past? And to do this, perhaps, in the very spot where those former delinquencies had been committed? What—'"

"You mean to imply," interposed Fillmore, "that your adopted daughter believes her father to be living in London?"

"Not so fast, not so fast, my friend! So far as I am aware, the idea has not entered into her mind. I am speaking of possibilities."

Fillmore gazed at his guest several moments in silence. At length he said: "I will adopt the hypothetical vein, since you prefer it. We will suppose that Grantley is alive and in London, and that his daughter finds it out, and seeks or grants an interview with him. What would be the nature of the inconvenience that would cause you?"

"But surely, my dear Fillmore," cried the baronet, "you cannot fail to see how awkwardly I should be placed! The man, of course, would have some plausible story or other to tell her. She would believe him and would plead his cause with me. What could I do? To deliver him up to justice would be as much of a hardship and more of a disgrace to me than to him, not to speak of the extremely painful position in which it would place her. Matters would be raked

up which were far better left in merciful oblivion. Were I, on the other hand, to allow him to establish himself amongst us, under the assumed name which he would probably have adopted, he would presume upon my tolerance and become an impracticable nuisance. Having once accepted him I should never afterward be able to rid myself of him; he would make himself an actual incubus. The thing would be unendurable either way."

"It will simplify this affair, Bendibow," said the lawyer slowly, "if you inform me whether Charles Grantley is in London or not."

Sir Francis, who looked a good deal flushed and overwrought, tossed off another glass of wine by way of tranquilizing his nerves, and said, "Of course, my dear fellow, I might confide in your discretion. You understand my dilemma ... my object is to prevent—"

"Come, Bendibow, answer my question, or let us change the subject."

For a moment it seemed probable that the baronet would give vent to the spleen which was doubtless grilling within him; but the moment passed, and he answered rather sullenly, " 'Tis not likely that I should have been at the pains to prolong this interview had I not good reason to believe that he is in this neighborhood. In fact, the fellow had the audacity to call on me at the bank the other day and introduce himself under the name of Grant."

"Is he in needy circumstances?"

"No—not as far as I know," said Sir Francis, wiping his face with his handkerchief. "In fact, now I think of it, the clerk gave me to understand that he had deposited a certain sum in the bank."

"Did he express an intimation of visiting his daughter?"

"He inquired about her. Of course I did not inform him of her whereabouts; I was but an hour before made acquainted with them myself. The assurance of the man passes belief."

"It is certainly remarkable, if there is nothing to be added to your account of the events that led to his disappearance. What do you wish me to do?" As the baronet hesitated to reply, the other continued, "Shall I speak with the man and threaten him with the severity of the law unless he departs?"

"No, no—that won't do at all!" exclaimed Sir Francis with emphasis. "No use saying anything to him; he knows very well that I don't choose to have any scandal; and if he would keep himself quiet and not attempt to renew any of his former ties or associations, he might go to the devil, for me. I forgave him twenty years ago, on condition that he would take himself off, and I would forgive him now for not keeping to the letter of his agreement, provided he would observe the spirit of it. No, no—it's the Marquise—it's Perdita whom we must approach. You can manage her better than I. She won't suspect you. You must sound her carefully. She's a doocid clever woman, but you can do it if any man can. If you can induce her to change her residence to some other country, so much the better. Find out what she knows and thinks about this father of hers. If the opportunity offers, paint the devil in all his ugliness. At any cost put all possible barriers in the way of their meeting. That's the main thing. No use my giving you instructions; you'll know what to do when you see her, and find out the sort of woman she is. Shall depend on you, my dear Fillmore—your sagacity and friendship and all that. You know what I mean. Use your own judgment. Damme, I can trust a friend!"

"I will think it over, and speak to you again on the subject in a day or two," said Fillmore, who perceived that the claret had not improved the baronet's perspicacity or discretion. Moreover, the subject appeared to him to demand more than ordinary reflection. Long after Sir Francis had been bundled into his carriage and sent home, the lawyer sat with folded arms and his chin in his hand, examining the topic of the evening in many lights and from various points of view.

"Never knew an honest man so shy of the malefactor who had swindled him," he muttered to himself when he went to bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. GRANT, although he had doubtless been the victim of some bitter experiences, had possessed enough native generosity and simplicity not to have become embittered by them. His youth had known what it is to love, and now his old age was able to take an interest in the loves of others. He had accordingly observed with a great deal of interest the contact of the two young characters with whom chance had associated him; and pleased himself with the notion that they might become man and wife. Being a sagacious old gentleman, however, as well as a benevolent one, he had abstained from making any direct communication of his hopes to the parties most concerned, or even to Mrs. Lockhart. He was well aware that human beings, especially while they are under thirty, object to being guided, even though their guide lead them whither they themselves would go. He rather sought to fathom their peculiarities of character, in order that he might, without their suspecting it, incline them to his purpose. At the first view, the enterprise did not appear a very hopeful one. Beyond that Marion and Philip had ample opportunities of becoming acquainted with each other, and were of an age to marry, circumstances seemed rather against the match. They were both poor; Marion could not well be more so, and Philip, save for such income as his poetry might bring him, had no more than enough for his own support. They could scarcely be said to belong to the same class in life, and their outward associations and sympathies were far from being identical. What was more serious than all this, however, they were, as a general thing, more inclined to quarrel than to agree. There was a satirical vein in both of them, and neither of them were old enough to forbear giving utterance to a keen remark that happened to come into their minds. In matters affecting the conduct of life, Philip assumed a cynical tone, which Marion never failed to impeach as unworthy and contemptible. There was much subtlety and intricacy in both their characters, but Philip was an inveterate self-analyst, and prone to make the most of his contradictions, while Marion took but a faint interest in herself, and was never inclined to make herself the subject of discussion; she scouted all cut-and-dried rules of behavior, and was far more genuinely reserved, and therefore more abstruse a problem, than Philip. She was almost savagely independent; and Philip, partly because he really put his own independence in jeopardy, attempted to wear a condescending manner toward her, which she altogether resented and laughed to scorn. On the other hand, she was continually making unexpected attacks upon his self-esteem, and exposing his Machiavelism, in a manner that he found it difficult to sustain with equanimity; and the apprehension of these onslaughts diminished his ability to show himself in his truer and more amiable colors. Thus, in one way or another, there was always a surface contention going on between them. Whether the hostility went deeper than the surface it was not easy to decide. No doubt each appreciated the good qualities that the other possessed, as abstract good qualities; but that would not prevent their objecting to the fashion in which the good qualities were called into play. It is not so much what a person is, as how he is it, that determines the opinion his fellows have of him. Marion, for example, felt herself under deep and permanent obligation to Philip for his conduct in relation to Major Lockhart; and she must have perceived that such an act was worth much more as an indication of character than intrinsically. But had she been questioned on this point, she would probably have said that Mr. Lancaster would be more agreeable if all his acts were as little agreeable as himself. It is beneath the intelligence of any woman—certainly of any young woman—to like a man merely because, upon logical, demonstrative, or syllogistic grounds he deserves it. She is more likely to make his desert a point against him.

Such were some of the obstacles in the way of Mr. Grant's scheme; and the fact that Philip was handsome and high-bred would have but small weight in determining the choice of a girl like Marion. Philip, on the contrary, was of a fastidious and Aristarchian turn that would incline him to look for visible and palpable charms and graces, as well as mental and moral ones, in the woman of his heart. Now, Marion, as has already been intimated, was by no means pre-eminently beautiful; and it was not among her notions of duty to make the most of such attractions as she had. She was tall, and rather largely made, with a figure finely developed, but not graceful in its movements. Her face had nobility and intelligence, but not comeliness; she was an example of how a woman may have all the elements of good looks except the finishing touches, and yet not appear good looking. Some imperfection of health, not uncommon to girls of her age and temperament, had impaired the smoothness of her complexion; and she had overtaxed her gray eyes by reading at night in bed. She often fell into taciturn moods, when she would hardly speak for days together; at other times she would talk rapidly and at some length, and when, as rarely happened, she was sensible of affection and sympathy, she could be deliciously and fancifully voluble, revealing a rich and tender spirit, original, observant, and keen. But, on the whole, she was more prone to act than to speak; attached



"I TIED THE CARD TO THE GATE ITSELF. NOBODY CAN FAIL TO SEE IT."

importance rather to what others did than to what they said; and could express more, and more subtle things, by deeds than by words. She had a fiery and almost wild temper, but it was never ungenerous or underhand; and she was sensitively and unreasonably proud. There was an almost insane streak in her, showing itself in strange freaks and escapades; she would laugh when she might have wept, and wept but seldom, and then in secret, and obstructedly or revengefully. She enjoyed the unusual aspects of nature and things, and was amused where other women would tremble. There was a vein of mischief in her; but this belonged to the brighter side of her character, and was arch and playful. What she needed, in order to the full health of her body and mind, was more deep and broad mental and moral occupation; what declared itself as ill health being but the effect of unemployed energy reacting upon itself. Her worst faults were perhaps an alert and intractable jealousy, and a readiness perversely to suspect others of insincerity and meanness toward herself. But the latter of these errors was caused by her low opinion of her personal deserts; and the former by her not ignoble zeal for the integrity of honorable and pure emotions, which, though harbored by her, belonged not to her individually, but were to the credit of our general human nature.

That Mr. Grant did not lose heart in face of the difficulties against which he had pitted himself, showed either that he possessed great temerity, or that he could see further than most people into millstones. It was not so much his aim, at first, to force the young people into each other's society as to talk to each about the other, and about love and marriage; not obtruding his own views, but eliciting and criticising theirs. He was a pleasant man to talk with, for he made his interlocutor talkative; and the topics upon which he chiefly dwelt were such as seldom fail to interest any man or woman whose heart has not been misused—I will not say by others, or by the world, but—by the owner of it. To hear him, you would have thought that Mr. Grant, so far from desiring to impart information or understanding, was in search thereof, and needed support at every step. For one who had so much an air of cultivation and refinement, he was an amazingly unenlightened old gentleman.

"I remember, when I was a young fellow," he said one day to Marion, "I held an opinion which was very unfashionable. Indeed, for the matter of that, a good many of my opinions were unfashionable. Since then I have come to reconsider not a few of them. One's point of view changes as one moves on. Perhaps the notion to which I refer was erroneous, as well as the others."

"You have not told me what it was," said Marion.

"I mean, whether or not it is prudent and sensible to marry for love?"

"I don't think love is a thing about which one ought to be prudent. Because prudence is to be careful not to put yourself to some inconvenience: and love outweighs all the inconveniences in the world ... I should think."

"Aye; but suppose that, after a while, all the love should be gone, and only the inconvenience left? Then I should wish I had been prudent, shouldn't I?"

"But a real love never can be gone. It is all there is of you. It must last as long as you do. And when you are gone, prudence is no matter."

"I would agree with you, my dear, were it possible for us to know love when we see him. I fear there is a great deal of evidence that we do not do that. And though it takes only one person to make that mistake, not all the world can set it right again."

"That is like Humpty Dumpty," said Marion, with a laugh. "But I don't think there can be any mistake about the love we feel. 'Tis like being in the sunshine; we don't mistake sunshine for moonlight, or starlight, or for all the lamps and candles that ever burned."

"Ah! then you admit that we may be mistaken in the object for which our love is felt. And that comes to the same thing after all."

"But I don't say that; I'm not sure of that," said Marion thoughtfully, and looking somewhat troubled. "Besides, even if you loved ... some one who did not love you, or was not worthy of your love—still, you know, you would have

loved. You could afford to be unhappy after that! If I were a common pebble, and some enchanter transformed me into a diamond, he might crush me afterward: I should have been all I could be."

Mr. Grant sighed. "You young folk know how to be eloquent," said he. "And you may be right, my dear—you may be right. I should like to think so. I suppose every one is not born with the power of loving; but, for those who are, what you say may be true. And possibly Providence may so order things—I am an old-fashioned fellow, you see, and believe in Providence—that those who can truly love are never ignobly disappointed. They will have griefs, no doubt—for it would be an empty world that was without those—but not ignoble ones. There may be something purifying and divine in a real love, that makes it like an angel, before whose face all that is base and paltry flees away." After saying this, Mr. Grant was silent for a little while; and Marion, glancing at his face, fancied that he was thinking of some vanished love of his own, and she would have liked to have asked him about it, but could not find words to do it in. Presently he looked round at her, and said, with a smile:

"You, at any rate, have a right to your belief, my dear. It comes to you by inheritance. Your mother, I am sure, made a love-match."

"Oh, yes! But mamma was born for such things—to love and be loved I mean. I sometimes think though, she would not have loved my father so much, if she had not first met Mr. Tom Grantley. She imagined she was in love with him, you know; just for a little while; and he must have been a grand man; he made her heart wake up—he made her know what love was, without making her really love him. So, when she met father, she knew how to give herself to him. Wouldn't it have been strange if she had married Mr. Grantley? But she would not have been happy. How strange if she had married him! I could not bear to have any other father but my own father; I shall never care for any one as I did for him."

"Indeed, it would have been strange if she had married Mr. Grantley," returned the old gentleman musingly. "But as you say, 'tis doubtless better as it is. In my life, many things have happened that I would gladly have averted, or altered: but looking back on them now I can see how they may have been for the best. For instance, I am very fond of you, my dear Marion—you won't mind me saying this, will you?—and I might wish that I had some substantial right to be fond of you, and to expect you to be fond of me: that you might have been my niece or daughter, or my young sister—my step-sister, let us say. But, after all, I would have nothing altered; and I dare say you will give me, out of free generosity, as much affection as if you were my kinswoman."

"Oh, at least as much," said Marion, smiling. "And I might like you even more than I do if there were some good reason why I should not like you so much."

"I doubt if I have audacity enough to take you at your word ... and yet, I don't know! I might devise some plot against you which you would only discover after my death; as people leave hampering legacies to their survivors, who are then obliged to grin and bear it. Will you like me better on the mere chance of such a calamity?"

"It is very hard to forgive benefits; and I'm afraid that this is the only sort of calamity you will bring down upon me."

"But don't you think there is a point at which independence becomes selfishness?"

"I think it is better to run that risk than the other. It would be for me, I am sure. I don't believe in myself enough to venture on making a milliner's block of myself—all my value to be in the fine things that are hung on me. Mamma is always hoping I may get married—she can't understand that all women are not created marriageable, as she was—and wants me to 'make the most of my advantages,' as she calls it. As if I wouldn't take more pains to appear disagreeable to a man who wanted to marry me than to any one else!"

"You remind me of something Philip Lancaster said the other day. We were speaking of the extraordinary marriages one hears of—the most unlikely people falling in love with each other—and he made the remark that the people best worth knowing were those who refused to be known—or something of that kind; and that probably, in the case of a man marrying a woman—or vice versa—of whom it is asked, 'What on earth could he see in her?' the truth is he sees in her what is reserved only for the eyes of love to discern—something too rare and precious to reveal itself at any less magic touch than love's. It struck me as a good saying; because it rebukes surface judgments of human nature; and develops the symbol of the diamond, which is the most beautiful of all gems, and therefore the least accessible."

"I should have expected Mr. Lancaster to say that the diamond is the least accessible and therefore the most beautiful—in the finder's opinion; that is the way he would have put it had he been talking to me."

"As to that," replied Mr. Grant, with a smile, "Lancaster, in his dealings with you, reminds me of a young officer I once saw carrying despatches in a battle across the line of fire. In his anxiety to show that the imminent peril he was in did not in the least frighten him, he put on such an affected swagger—he was naturally a very modest and unpretentious young fellow—that his most intimate friend would hardly have recognized him. Now, I apprehend that my friend Lancaster's native simplicity is disguised by a like effort to appear indifferent to your sharp-shooting. 'Tis hardly fair, Marion. It is one thing to hide the graces of one's own mind and heart; but to force another to disfigure his is less justifiable, methinks!"

"Mr. Lancaster would be amused at the idea of my being unjust to him," said Marion, reddening and laughing. "He'd be expecting me to criticise the sun at noonday next!"

"There is a difference betwixt appreciating one's self, and being self-conceited," replied Mr. Grant. "Lancaster is at the age when a man sees himself rather as a reflection of humanity in general, than as an individual. He has much insight; he detects a great number of traits and qualities in people with whom he comes in contact; and whatever he has the sympathy to detect in others, he fancies he possesses himself. 'Tis a natural misconception; he lacks the experience that will hereafter enable him to distinguish one's recognition of a quality from one's ownership of it. The older we grow, the more we find the limits of character contract; we actually become but a small fraction of what we see and understand. And then, it may be, a young man receives a sharper impression from the evil that is in the world than from the good; and that may be the reason why our friend Philip sometimes refers so darkly and ominously to his moral condition. 'Tis not his own wickedness that oppresses him, but that which he has divined in the capacities of human nature. An old fellow like me prefers to look at the brighter side of mankind; and therefore, perhaps, ceases to take so much interest in himself."

"It may be all true—I suppose it is," said Marion, with a great air of indifference. "But Mr. Lancaster probably won't need my appreciation so long as he is not tired of his own."

"Ah, my child," the old gentleman said, with more gravity than he had yet spoken, "we are all foolish and feeble creatures, and 'tis pathetic how we strive—clumsily and mistakenly often, God knows!—to appear wise and strong in one another's sight. If you would take my word for it, I would tell you our saddest regret at the close of life is that we have been less forbearing and helpful to our fellows than we might have been. And I would have you believe, too, that to do some good is much easier than it seems. It is as easy as to be ironical and self-sufficient. Here is a young man's soul passing your way on its long journey, not knowing how to ask your womanly sympathy and influence, but much in need of them nevertheless. Perhaps you might say a word or do a deed to him that would make an eternal difference in the path he takes and the goal he reaches. To underrate your power is to wrong both yourself and him. For we know—do we not, my dear?—that the source whence good comes is not in ourselves."

Marion's face had grown intensely expressive while Mr. Grant was speaking; her cheeks and forehead flushed, her eyes showed disquietude, and she moved her hands restlessly. Presently she exclaimed, "It is not as you suppose, sir. I don't feel unkindly to Mr. Lancaster—he was kind to us before he knew us. But it is not my place.... I am a girl ... he would not thank me. There is some one else—he knows Perdita Desmoines; I cannot interfere." She stood up and moved, as if she intended to leave the room.

Mr. Grant rose and took her hand. "I know of his acquaintance with that lady," he said; "but I think Philip is neither so young nor so old as you would imply. And the truth is, Marion, you have won my heart, and so has he; and my conscience never feels quite at ease until I have made my friends friends of each other. What else does Providence give them to me for?"

"For their own good, I should imagine," replied Marion, with a smile.

"Aye—the good I may be the means of their doing each other."

She shook her head and laughed.

"Though to be sure," she added, " 'twould be scarce worth while to count the good they are like to do you!"

"I am too far on in years to begin to count the good you have done me, my dear," said the old gentleman. And then, as they were at the door, he opened it for her, and she passed out. After closing it again, Mr. Grant took out his snuff-box and helped himself to a pinch with an air of much quiet contentment.

CHAPTER XIV.

JUNE in England sometimes combines the tender afternoon of spring with the dawning beauty of summer. There is joyful potency in the sunshine, but no white colorless glare; it seems to proceed almost as much from the face of the earth as from the sun. The air, both in light and in shadow, is of an even warmth—the happy medium between heat and cold—which, like perfect health, exhilarates us with so much subtlety that we are hardly aware of it until it is no more. Nature, who has no memory, triumphs over our weary hearts by telling over once more the sweet story, repeated a myriad times, and with such youthful zest as half to beguile us into the belief that it is new indeed. So, too, the infant man begins the heavy journey whose end we know too well, unshadowed by the gloom of our grim experience, shielded from our dreary sophistries by the baby wisdom brought from Heaven, which we can never learn. We know how soon he must lose that shield of light, yet we prolong for him, if we may, the heavenly period. For our human life is a valley, the gloom of whose depths would be too terrible to endure did we not believe that its limits, on either side, bordered on the sky.

Mr. Grant was, perhaps, peculiarly appreciative of the charm of this English season, because he had been so long exiled to the torrid damps of India. One morning, accordingly, when the family were seated round the breakfast-table, with the fresh air and sunshine streaming through the open window, he pulled out of his fob the large old-fashioned gold watch which he always carried, and having consulted it, said:

“ ’Tis now eight o’clock, Mrs. Lockhart. Shall you be ready in an hour?”

To which Mrs. Lockhart, who had all that morning worn upon her gentle countenance an expression of mysterious presage, strangely alien to her customary aspect of guileless amenity, replied, mantling with a smile, “Quite ready, Mr. Grant.”

“At nine o’clock, then, we will set out. Marion, get on your riding-habit; you and Mr. Lancaster must accompany us on horseback.”

Philip and Marion looked inquiringly at each other, and then at their elders, and Philip said: “Is this another Popish plot?”

“Nothing so unsubstantial,” Mr. Grant replied. “Mrs. Lockhart and I are going to drive to Richmond Hill, and Marion and you are to escort us. The carriage and the horses will be at the door an hour hence. So—no cookery and no poetry in this house to-day!”

Marion went round to her mother and kissed her cheek. “But Mr. Grant is having a bad effect on you, mamma,” she said. “You never kept a secret from me before!”

By nine o’clock everything and everybody were ready. Philip, booted and spurred, and with a feather in his steeple-crowned hat, was as handsome as one of the heroes of his own poems, who, indeed, all, more or less, resembled him, and Marion had never looked so well as in her dark blue riding-habit. As for Mrs. Lockhart and Mr. Grant, they were at least as youthful as any of the party, and the June morning glorified them all. The two elder people took their seats in the carriage; Philip helped Marion into her saddle and then leaped into his own; the coachman gathered up his reins and they started off. In a few minutes they were moving along the broad highway toward Kew Bridge, Marion and Philip riding side by side in advance. The tall elms shook green shadows from their rustling leaves, interspersed with sunbeams and sweet bird-voices; veils of thinnest cloud softened the tender horizon and drew in tranquil arcs across the higher blue. A westerly breeze, coming from the coolness where the dawn was still beginning, breathed past their faces and sent freshness to their hearts. The horses shook their heads and stretched their limbs, and slanted forward anticipative ears. Marion’s cheeks were red and her eyes sparkled.

“I wish Richmond Hill were t’other side the world,” she said, “and we to ride there!”

“I would ride with you as far as that, and then home the other way,” said Philip.

“We should lose our road, perhaps.”

“No matter, if we did not lose each other.”

“Could you write poetry on horseback?”

“ ’Tis better to ride through a poem than to write one.”

“Would this poem be blank verse or rhyme?”

“Rhyme!” cried Philip.

“Why?”

“Because that poem should make Marion rhyme with Philip.”

“Yes—when it is written!”

“I would rather be the author of that poem than of any other.”

Marion laughed. “You would find it very poor prose when it was done.”

“It would turn all my prose into poetry, if I might hope even to begin it. Marion—”

She reined in her horse. “We are going too fast and too far,” she said gravely. “The carriage is almost out of sight.”

“But your mother will trust you with me,” said Philip, looking at her.

“You do not know that; nor whether I care to be trusted.”

“Ah! that is what I fear,” said Philip, biting his lip. “You prefer to ride alone; I don’t.”

“You’re not accustomed to it, perhaps?”

“I have been alone all my life!”

Marion laughed again. “I thought the Marquise Desmoines was a horsewoman,” she said.

Philip blushed; and the carriage having by this time come up, the conversation was carried no further.

But it was impossible to be dispirited on a day like this. The deep smile of a summer morning, though it may seem to mock the dreariness of age, is generally found contagious by youth. The mind must be powerfully preoccupied that can turn its eyes inward, when such a throng of outward loveliness invites it. As the party approached the bridge, a narrow and hump-backed structure, which made up in picturesqueness what it lacked in convenience, the broad reaches of the river came into view, widening down on the left toward distant London, and,

on the right, curving round the wooded shores of Kew. The stream echoed with inward tones the blue aloft, varying its clear serenity with a hundred frets and trills of sparkling light. Many boats plied to and fro, oared by jolly young watermen who dreamt not of railways and steam-launches. There were voices of merry-makers, laughter, and calling, after the British fashion, all taking so well the color of the scene as to appear to be its natural utterance; though when, with a finer ear, you caught the singing of the birds, that seemed the natural utterance too. Crossing the bridge, and winding past Kew Green, they began to behold, at the distance of a mile or so, the pleasant town of Richmond grouped betwixt the river and the hill. Leaving a venerable hostelry on the right, and turning sharply westward, carriage and horses trundled and tramped conspicuous along the high-shouldered street; butcher-boys and loafers turned to stare; shop-keepers stood in their doorways, rubbing super-serviceable hands, and smirking invitations; a postboy, standing at the door of the Castle Inn with a pot of ale in his hand, emptied it to Marion's health; while the neat barmaid who had fetched it for him paused on the threshold with the corner of her apron to her lips, and giggled and reddened at handsome Philip's nod. Anon they breasted the hill, whose sudden steepness made the horses bob their heads and dig their iron toes sharply into the road. As they mounted to higher air, so did the arc of the horizon seem to mount with them, and the wide levels of rich country lying between retired from verdurous green to remote blue, divided by the lazy curves of glancing Thames. It is the most cultivated prospect in the world, and second to none in wealth and variety of historical association. It gives range and breathing room to the spirits; it has endless comely charm, but it is not inspiring. It is redolent of the humdrum flatness of respectable and prosperous mediocrity. The trees look like smug green cauliflowers; and the blue of the distance seems artificial.

"I am sure there can be nothing so lovely as that in India, Mr. Grant," said Mrs. Lockhart.

"A bare rock would be lovelier than India to me if it bore the name of England," he replied. "I thank God that I shall die, after all, within hail of so sweet a plain as that."

"No!" said Marion, in a low, disturbed voice. Her horse was standing close to that side of the carriage on which Mr. Grant sat, and the word was audible only to him. He looked round at her and added with a smile, "In the fullness of time."

The coachman began to point out the points of interest: "That's Twickenham Church, ma'am. Mr. Pope's willa is a bit furdur down. Yonder's Mr. Orace Walpole's place. Of a clear day, sir, you may see Winsor Cassel, twenty mile off. Hepsom will be that-away, sir."

"What do you think of it?" Philip asked Marion.

"It has a homely look," she answered—"home-like, I mean."

"Yes; we might ride round the world, and not find a better home than that," said he, pointing down the declivity to a house that stood by the margin of the river, on a smooth green lawn overshadowed by stately elms.

"Or a worse one, maybe!" she returned coldly. But the next moment she glanced at him with a smile that was not so cold.

The party moved on once more, and at the end of a little more climbing, reached the famous inn, which, at that epoch, was a much less grandiloquent structure than it is now, and infinitely more humane toward its guests. The riders dismounted, the horses were led to the stable; and Mr. Grant, having had a confidential consultation with the host and the head waiter, proposed to his friends a ramble in the park. So off they all went, at first in a group; but after a while Mrs. Lockhart wished to sit down on a bench that was wedged between two oaks of mighty girth; and as Mr. Grant seemed equally inclined to repose, Philip presently drew Marion away across the glade. It dipped through a fern-brake, and then sloped upward again to a grove of solemn oaks, each one of which might have afforded house room to a whole family of dryads.

"I remember this grove," Philip remarked; "I was here long ago—nearly twenty years. I was an Eton boy then. It has changed very little."

"Less than you have."

"I sometimes doubt whether I am much changed either. What is it changes a man? His body grows, and he fills his memory with good and bad. But only so much of what he learns stays with him as naturally belongs to him; the knowledge he gains is only the confirmation of what he knew before. A word is not changed by magnifying it."

"But if you put in another syllable—?"

"Yes, then it becomes different: either more or less than it was before, or, may be, nonsense. But it is not learning that can put a new syllable into a man."

"What does, then?"

Philip did not immediately reply; but by-and-by he said, "I believe Providence meant our brains only to show us what fools we are. At least, that's the most mine have done for me. The more fuel we put into it, and the more light it gives out, the more clearly does it reveal to us our smallness and poverty."

"Perhaps—if we turn the light against ourselves. But clever people generally prefer to throw light upon the smallness and poverty of others."

Again Philip paused for several moments; then he said suddenly, his eyes darkening, "By God, were I to be tried for my life, I would not choose you for my judge!"

They were sitting together on the roots of one of the oaks. Marion turned her head slowly and encountered Philip's look. She put out her hand and touched his, saying, "Forgive me."

He grasped her hand and held it. At first she made a movement as if to withdraw it; but, meeting his eyes again, she let it remain. She looked away; a long breath, intermittently drawn, filled her bosom. The contact of her hand, sensitive and alive, was more significant than a kiss to Philip. He did not venture to move or to speak; thoughts flew quickly through his mind—thoughts that he could not analyze; but they were born of such emotions as joy, eagerness, self-distrust, the desire to be nobler and better than he had ever been: a feeling of tender pathos. A voice in his heart kept repeating "Marion! Marion! Marion!" with a sense that everything womanly and sacred was implied in that name. He felt, also, that a sort of accident had brought him nearer to her than he had as yet a right to come: that he must wait, and give her time.

They got up, at last, by a mutual impulse, after how long a time they knew not. They had spoken no words. They looked at each other for a moment, and each beheld in the other something that had not been visible before: there was a certain surprise and softness in the look. The touch of the hands was over; but they seemed to be encircled by

a secret sympathy that sweetly secluded them from all foreign approach. The nearness was spiritual, and demanded a degree of physical severance. They moved along, with a space between them, but intimately conscious of each other.

Presently Philip said, "I am changed now; but you see, it was not memory or knowledge that changed me."

"Do you like the change?" she asked.

"I don't like to think how much time I have wasted without changing."

"Perhaps, since it pleases you so well, you'll want to change again?"

"I'm afraid you will never change!" he returned, with a cadence of half-humorous expostulation. "There'll be no more change in me this side death."

As he spoke he looked toward her; she was walking with eyes downcast, a doubtful smile coming and going about her lips. About a hundred yards beyond, in the line of his glance, a man and a woman on horseback passed rapidly across an opening between two groups of trees. Just before they swept out of sight the woman turned her face in Philip's direction, and immediately made a gesture with her right hand. Whether it were a signal of recognition, or whether it had no reference to him, Philip could not decide. A painful sensation passed through his mind; but he was glad that the episode had escaped Marion's notice. Soon after they rejoined Mrs. Lockhart and Mr. Grant; and Marion seemed to be relieved to be once more, as it were, under their protection. The importunity of an ungauged and unfamiliar joy may affect the heart like a danger.

For the rest of the day, accordingly, the four remained together, and, save for some slight intermittent anxiety on Philip's part, they were all as happy as human beings are apt to be. Marion and Philip said very little to each other, and that of the most conventional description; but an inward smile, that seldom ventured beyond the eyes, illuminated both of them. Meanwhile, Mrs. Lockhart certainly, and Mr. Grant apparently, were most comfortably unconscious of anything exceptional having taken place. The serene geniality of the weather was perfectly reflected in the sentiments of those who enjoyed it. When the air of the hill had made them remember that something was to be done at the inn, they betook themselves thither, and were shown into a western room, whose open window gave upon the famous prospect. Here a table was set out and dinner served by a profoundly respectable and unexceptionable waiter, who had the air of having spent his previous life in perfecting himself for this occasion. They had a couple of bottles of very delicate Lafitte; and always, before raising his glass to his lips, Philip lifted his eyes, and quaffed an instant's sweet intelligence from Marion's.

"How do you find the wine, Lancaster?" Mr. Grant asked.

"I wish I might never drink any other," was his reply.

"It is very good, but it goes to my head," remarked Mrs. Lockhart.

"It goes to my heart," said Philip.

"All the same, you may feel the worse for it to-morrow morning," said Marion, with one of her short laughs.

"A heartache instead of a headache," smiled Mr. Grant.

"Heartache would come only from being denied it," Philip rejoined.

"I must try and get you some of it to drink at home," said guileless Mrs. Lockhart.

"'Tis Lafitte—you may get it anywhere," put in Marion. As she spoke she pushed back her chair from the table, adding, "Come, mamma, we have had enough; let us go out on the terrace." So she triumphed over Philip in having the last word.

The afternoon was mellowing toward evening by the time the unexceptionable waiter announced that the carriage and horses were waiting. As Philip helped Marion to her seat he said:

"After all, it is not so long a ride round the world, is it?"

She answered: "I don't know. We are not got home yet, remember."

Going down the hill, they halted at the spot whence they had first caught the view on ascending, to take a farewell look at it. A noise of hoofs following down the road above caused Philip to look around, and he saw approaching the same lady and gentleman whom he had caught a glimpse of in the park that morning. The blood flew to his face, and he set his teeth against his lips.

The lady, riding up, saluted him with her whip, exclaiming laughingly, "Philip Lancaster, after all! You naughty boy—then it *was* you I saw coming out of the grove, and you would not answer my greeting!"

"Indeed!" was all Philip found to reply.

She reined her horse and extended her hand to him. "Indeed! Yes. But you were always so! ... well, I forgive you because of your poetry." Here she turned her eyes, which were very bright and beautiful, upon the occupants of the carriage. "Surely I have known this lady," she murmured. "Madame, are you not Mrs. Lockhart? Oh—then this—yes, this must be Marion!" She clapped her hands together with a sort of child-like gayety. "And you have all forgotten me! You have forgotten Perdita Bendibow!"

Hereupon ensued a sociable turmoil—giving of hands—presentation of Mr. Grant—and of Perdita's cavalier, who was no other than Tom Bendibow, the hero of the coach-upsetting exploit. But the chief turmoil was in Philip's mind. Everything passed before his eyes like a dream—and an extremely uncongenial one. Once or twice he glanced at Marion; but she was not looking his way—she was laughing and chatting with the Marquise and Tom Bendibow alternately; there was vivid color in her cheeks. Philip was also aware that the Marquise occasionally spoke to him, or at him, in very friendly and familiar terms. It was charming. And at last she said:

"There, I cannot stay—I am late; but you will come—mind! You have all promised. There will be no one but ourselves. Thursday—a week from this day—at six o'clock. Mr. Grant and all. You will not forget, Mr. Grant?"

"I shall not forget, madame," he said gravely and courteously.

"And you, *ma chère*," she continued, turning to Marion; and then playfully tapping Philip with her whip, "because then we shall be sure of him! Mrs. Lockhart, I have so much to talk to you of your dear husband ... he saved my husband's life! ... I must kiss you!" She forced her horse to the side of the carriage, and, bending low from the saddle, touched the old lady's cheek with her lovely lips. The next moment she was erect again. "Come, Tom!" she exclaimed, "we must gallop! Good-by, all of you!" and down the hill they rode at speed.

"How charming and beautiful she is!" said Mrs. Lockhart, smiling with tears in her eyes. "She has a warm heart.

She has made the day quite perfect.”

“Yes, she appeared at the right moment,” assented Marion lightly.

In one sense, certainly, Perdita could be said to have been the consummation of the holiday; but, even in a party of four, the same event may have widely different meanings.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. GRANT, like other men in whom a quiet demeanor is the result rather of experience than of temperament, was very observant; and he had observed several things during and after the day at Richmond. It may be assumed that he had not planned that expedition without some anticipation that it might have results particularly affecting Philip and Marion; and up to the moment when the party were overtaken, on their way home, by the Marquise Desmoines, he had reason to think that his anticipations had not been deceived. Since that moment, however, a change had taken place. Philip had worn an aspect of gloomy dejection at variance with his customary bearing; and Marion's mood had been exaggerated and unequal; sometimes manifesting an over-accented gayety, at other times relapsing abruptly and without apparent cause into depths of wayward perversity. This state of things continued without much modification for several days; it being further noticeable that the young people avoided private interviews, or at any rate did not have any: for, if Philip desired them, Marion had the means of balking his desire. In the presence of other persons, however, she seemed not averse from holding converse with him, but her speech on such occasions had a mocking and unconciliating ring about it; and Philip's replies were brief and unenterprising. Evidently, the pegs that made their music had been set down awry. There had been some sweet melody for a while. Who was their Iago?

"What a very charming lady is the Marquise Desmoines," remarked Mr. Grant one day to Philip. "I have seldom seen a more lovely face or a more engaging manner."

"Yes," returned the young man, looking away, and drumming on the table with his fingers.

"It was easy to see that you and she were on the best of terms with each other," the old gentleman continued.

Philip folded his arms, and tapped on the floor with his foot.

"She seemed to take a great fancy to Marion," Mr. Grant went on. "They bid fair to become great friends. It would be an excellent thing for Marion, would it not?"

"Upon my word, sir, it's none of my business," exclaimed Philip, rather impatiently. "Miss Lockhart will choose her friends to please herself, I presume. If it were my place to offer her advice in the matter, it might be different. With your permission, I prefer not to discuss the subject."

"As you please, my dear Philip," replied Mr. Grant, composedly taking snuff. "For my own part, it appeared to me that the Marquise could give Marion those social advantages and opportunities that she especially needs. This invitation to her *soirée* will probably be the precursor of others. By the by, you will be present, of course?"

"Yes, that is my intention," said Philip, after a pause; and his tone had something defiant or threatening in it, as if he meant not only to be present, but to do some deed of note when he got there.

The Marquise's party was, as she had intimated, strictly limited as to numbers. It was not her wish to begin her formal entertainments as yet; her bereavement was still too recent, and, moreover, her new house was not in order. She might, possibly, have contrived to get along without giving any party at all, just at present; but she was enough a woman of the world not always to demand logical behavior of herself, any more than to expect it in other people. She wished to feel the atmosphere of the new society into which she was about to enter, and to compare it with that which she had left. It would be novel; it might or it might not be preferable. The Marquise might decide, upon this experiment, not to settle in London after all. Straws may show how the wind blows. She had no one's pleasure or convenience to think of but her own. There was not even the Marquis now, who, if he did not have things his own way, at all events had occasionally afforded her the gratification of having hers in spite of him; and whose demise she perhaps regretted as much on that account as on any other. For the lady was of a strong and valiant disposition, and wanted something more in life than abject assent, and yielding beds of down. She wanted resistance, almost defeat, in order to give zest to victory. She wanted a strong man to fight with. In her heart, she believed she was stronger than any man she was likely to come across; but there were men, no doubt, who might be formidable enough to be temporarily interesting. What manner of man in other respects this champion might be, would matter little to the Marquise. Like most women of first-rate ability she was at bottom a democrat: rank was her convenience, but she had no respect for it or belief in it. Had she detected, in a stevedore or Hindoo, stuff that was not to be had elsewhere, she would have received and entertained him. Meanwhile, she was well content to put up with Philip Lancaster. There was stuff in him: there was perhaps something in his past relations with her which rendered their present mutual attitude more piquant; and then, there was that little bud of a romance which the Marquise had surprised on Richmond Hill. Upon the whole she was justified in giving her little party.

Sir Francis Bendibow was the first to arrive, bringing with him Merton Fillmore, whom he introduced as follows: "A man, my dear creature, whom I've long wished to make known to you. Most brilliant fellow in London; my personal friend, as well as the trusted adviser of the House." He added in her ear, "You know—Fillmore, son of old Cadwallader Fillmore ... uncle the Honorable ... and Constance, you know ... married Lord Divorn ... that's the man! make friends with each other."

"I think," said the Marquise, glancing at the lawyer as she gave him her hand, "that Mr. Fillmore is more accustomed to choose his friends than to be chosen."

This bit of impromptu criticism arrested Fillmore's attention. After a pause he said:

"My friends are my clients, and I don't choose them."

"I mean, you have not found it wise to be troubled with women. If I were a man I might think as you do, but I should act otherwise. But then I should not be a barrister."

"I am a solicitor."

The Marquise laughed. "Men of real genius distinguish their professions—they are not distinguished by them ... I comprehend!"

"You would have made a better solicitor than I," said Fillmore, with something like a smile. "Your cross-examination would be very damaging."

"We shall be all the better friends," rejoined the Marquise, good humoredly. "Mr. Fillmore is charming," she added to Sir Francis, who had just returned from a promenade to the other end of the room, where he had been admiring himself in a looking-glass, under cover of smelling a vase of flowers on the mantelpiece.

"Aye, indeed, kindred spirits," said the baronet, nodding and smiling complacently. "But how is this, eh? May we

hope to monopolize these privileges all the evening?"

"Here comes a rival," answered the Marquise, as the door opened, and Mr. Thomas Bendibow was ushered in. "I expect Mr. Philip Lancaster also. Do you know him, Mr. Fillmore? How do you do, Tom? What lovely flowers! For me? You are *preux chevalier*; that is more than your papa ever did for me."

"You know I don't think of anything but you—well, I don't, by George! Oh, I say, don't you look ravishing to-night, Perdita!" exclaimed this ingenuous youth. "I say, there ain't any other people coming, are there? I want to have you all to myself to-night."

"Tom, you are not to make love to your sister—before company!"

"Oh, sister be—! I know—you are going to flirt with that Lancaster fellow—"

"You have not told me if you know Mr. Lancaster?" said the Marquise, turning to Merton Fillmore.

"I have read his 'Sunshine of Revolt,' " replied the solicitor.

"Good Gad!" ejaculated Sir Francis, below his breath. He was gazing toward the doorway, in which several persons now appeared—the Lockhart party, in fact—and his ruddy visage became quite pallid.

The Marquise's beautiful eyes lighted up. She had had some secret doubts as to whether Lancaster would come, for she understood not a little of the intricacies of that gentleman's character; but here he was, and she felt that she had scored the first success in the encounter. To get the better of any one, the first condition is to get him within your reach. But Perdita took care that the brightness of her eyes should not shine upon Philip too soon. She turned first upon Mrs. Lockhart and Marion. She had taken the former's measure at first sight, and knew how to make her feel pleased and at ease. Marion was a more complex problem; but Marion did not know the world, and it was simple enough to disappoint her probable anticipation that the Marquise would at once monopolize Philip. The Marquise lost no time in introducing Philip to Mr. Fillmore, on the basis of the latter's having read "The Sunshine of Revolt," and left the two gentlemen to make friends or foes of each other as they might see fit. She then devoted herself to the two ladies, and incidentally to Mr. Grant, whom she had invited simply as a friend of theirs, and in whom she took no particular interest. Mr. Thomas Bendibow, considering himself slighted, strolled off into an adjoining room to indulge his wrongs over a glass of sherry. The baronet, who was almost manifestly laboring under some unusual embarrassment or emotion, attached himself, after some hesitation, to the Marquise's party, and endeavored to monopolize the conversation of Mr. Grant. That gentleman, however, met his advances with a quiet reticence, which was beyond Sir Francis' skill to overcome. By degrees he found himself constrained to address himself more and more to Mrs. and Miss Lockhart; and Perdita, somewhat to her own surprise, was drawn more and more to look and speak to Mr. Grant. There was something about him—in his old-fashioned but noticeable aspect, in his quiet, observant manner—in the things he said—that arrested the Marquise's attention in spite of herself. Here was a man who had seen and known something: a man—not a suit of clothes, with a series of set grimaces, attitudes and phrases. Manhood had an invincible attraction for this lady, no matter what the guise in which it presented itself to her. At last she and Mr. Grant insensibly settled down to what was practically a *tête-à-tête*.

"You must find it lonely here in England after so many years," she said.

"My exile is a cage of invisibility for me," answered Mr. Grant. "I find few to see and recognize me, but that does not prevent me from seeing and recognizing much that is familiar. I find that England stands where it did, and is none the less homelike for having forgotten me. Indeed, one may say, without being cynical, that the memory of old friends is almost as pleasant, and in some respects more convenient, than their presence would be."

The Marquise laughed. "I think your old friends might call that cynical, if they could hear it."

"You would recognize its truth in your own case," said Mr. Grant, half interrogatively.

She lifted her eyebrows, as if the remark required explanation.

"An old fellow like me sometimes knows more about the origins of the younger generation than they know themselves. I had the honor of your acquaintance when you were learning to say 'Papa,' and wore little pink slippers."

"Ah!" murmured the Marquise, looking at him keenly. "Then...." she paused.

"And your father also," said Mr. Grant, in a low voice.

"Sir Francis Bendibow," said Perdita, after a pause.

Mr. Grant met her glance, and said nothing.

"Now I think of it," remarked Perdita, tapping her chin lightly with the handle of her fan. "I am inclined to agree with you. Memories may sometimes be more convenient than presence."

"It is not always the convenient that happens, however," rejoined the old gentleman. "And convenience itself may sometimes, on some accounts, be less desirable than an acceptance of facts. If Sir Francis Bendibow, let us say, had been suspected of a grave indiscretion in early life, and had in consequence disappeared from society, leaving his family behind him—"

"His family would probably, in the course of time, become reconciled to his absence," interrupted Perdita, coloring slightly. "Human relationship is not so rigid and important a matter as romancers and sentimentalists try to make it out, Mr. Grant. As long as my child, or my husband, or my father continues to live within my sight and reach, I acknowledge myself the mother, wife, or daughter, and conduct myself accordingly. But if they vanish from my knowledge and remembrance, I learn to do without them, and they have no further concern with me. If they die, I shall not weep for them, and if they return, I shall not care for them. If I were more imaginative, or more inclined to feel my emotions to order, it might be otherwise. But it is my nature to feel my own emotions, and not other people's, and to see things as they are, and not as poetry pretends. My father, sir, is not the man who brought me into the world and then abandoned me, but—on the whole," she added, suddenly and completely changing her tone and manner, and speaking smilingly, "I prefer to say that I have no father at all, and want none."

Her speech had been more like that of a frigid and saturnine man, than like the utterance of a beautiful and youthful woman. Mr. Grant had listened to it attentively. He appeared to meditate for a few moments after she had ceased, and then he said, "I too have felt the force of circumstances, and should be the last to underrate it. Ambassadors, you know"—here he smiled a little—"are less deaf to the voice of reason than principals might be. I am intrusted with plenary powers, and may relinquish my side of the discussion definitively. I should regret my mission, were it not that it has obtained me a charming and valuable acquaintance"—here he bowed ceremoniously—"which I

trust may continue. If I have annoyed you, be satisfied that I shall never subject you to the same annoyance again—nor to any other, I hope.”

“I have made no disguise of my selfishness, you see,” said the Marquise, with gayety in her voice, but with a somewhat contradictory expression about her eyes and mouth. After a moment she went on as if impelled, despite a certain reluctance, “But I am unselfish too, as you will find out if you come to know me better. You will find out that I am not a daughter whom any parent with a sense of prudence and self-respect would put out his hand to reclaim.” And hereupon the Marquise laughed, while tears sparkled for an instant on her eyelashes.

“What says our fair hostess,” called out the voice of Sir Francis Bendibow, from the other side of the table, where he was conversing with the other two ladies, while his eyes and thoughts were elsewhere; “Should a man who loves two women give up both of them, or settle upon one? Come, ladies, the Marquise shall be our umpire—eh?”

“It is not a question for an umpire to decide,” replied the Marquise. “Let the man put his case before the two women, and leave them to settle it between themselves.”

“But we are supposing him to be an ordinary man, not a hero.”

“Then he would not find more than one woman to be in love with him.”

“And it might turn out,” remarked Marion, “that he was deceived in supposing himself capable of being really in love with anybody.”

“If he were a hero, I’m sure he would not love more than one,” said Mrs. Lockhart, gently.

“Altogether, your problem appears to have been deprived of all its conditions,” observed Fillmore, who with Philip Lancaster, had approached during the discussion.

“A man who really loves one woman, finds in her all that is worth loving in all women,” Lancaster said.

“A poet’s eyes,” remarked the Marquise, “create, in the woman he loves, nine-tenths of what he sees there.”

“And may blind him, for a time, to nine-tenths more,” was the poet’s reply; at which every one laughed except Mrs. Lockhart and Mr. Grant, but which very few understood.

After this, the company readjusted itself: the Marquise made Philip sit down and talk to her and Marion; and the three gradually got on very good terms with one another. Meanwhile, Sir Francis improved his opportunity to buttonhole Fillmore, and drew him into the next room, where Mr. Thomas Bendibow was sitting, still in the sulks, behind a large pot of azaleas in the embrasure of the window.

“What did I tell you?” exclaimed the baronet, hushing his voice, but with a vehement gesture. “Did you ever see anything like that fellow’s assurance? Damn him, he was *tête-à-tête* with her for half an hour. Ten to one he’s told her the whole thing.”

“What thing?” inquired Fillmore composedly.

“Why, that he’s her father, and—”

“Well, since he is her father, I know of no law to prevent him saying so.”

“Damme, no, if that were all: but how do I know what pack of lies he may have been telling her about me—”

“Come, Bendibow, don’t be a fool. If I were you, I shouldn’t mind what lies he told her about me, so long as I was sure that no truth he might tell would do me any harm. Besides, Mr. Grant, or whatever his name is, does not look to me like a scoundrel or a liar. And the Marquise does not seem to be a lady likely to let herself be imposed upon, or to act imprudently. You have not been open with me about this matter, Sir Francis. You are afraid to act against this man, and you are concealing the reason from me. I don’t ask it, and I don’t want to know it. But I am not going to undertake anything in the dark. You must manage the affair without my co-operation. You should have known me well enough never to have invited it.”

Several expressions—of anger, of dismay, of perplexity—had passed across the baronet’s features while Fillmore was speaking; but at the end he laughed good humoredly, and put his hand for a moment on the other’s shoulder.

“If I were to live with you, day in and day out,” he said, “you’d make either a saint or a devil of me before six weeks were over. You have the most irritating way with you, begad, that ever I came across. But I know you’re a good fellow, and I shan’t be angry. You might allow me a little natural exasperation at seeing things go topsy-turvy—never mind! I believe you’re right about Perdita, too; she’s no sentimental fool. Dare say matters will come out all right, after all. There! we’ll think more about it. I’ll talk it over quietly with Grantley—with Grant, you know—ah! Here we are!”

The Marquise, leaning on the arm of Mr. Grant, and followed by the rest of the company, were entering the room, being come in quest of supper, which was to be served here, and of which the sherry, whereof Mr. Thomas Bendibow had already partaken, was but an accessory. The Marquise rallied the baronet on his lack of gallantry in not having been on hand to do his part in escorting some one; and they all took their places at table with much gayety and good humor; Mr. Thomas having watched his opportunity, when no one was looking in his direction, to emerge from the shelter of the azaleas and take his seat with the rest. His aspect was so dazed and distraught as to suggest the suspicion that the sherry had been exceptionally potent; only it so happened that no one noticed him. His sulkiness had vanished; but from time to time he turned his eyes on Mr. Grant with a secret expression of consternation and bewilderment, which, considering the peaceful and inoffensive aspect of that gentleman, seemed rather gratuitous.

There were more gentlemen than ladies present, and Mr. Grant chanced to have Mr. Fillmore for his left-hand neighbor, and presently fell into talk with him. “I have heard your name mentioned,” he remarked at length, “by my friend Mrs. Lockhart. You are, I believe, a member of the legal profession?”

Fillmore inclined his head in assent.

“There are some affairs of mine which need putting in order,” continued Mr. Grant, “and as they may require a good deal of judgment for their proper disposition, I had been thinking of applying to you for assistance. Will you pardon me for taking advantage of this unexpected opportunity to mention the matter to you?”

“I am obliged to you, sir. You are, perhaps, aware,” added the lawyer, turning so as to look his interlocutor directly in the face, “that I have for several years been legal adviser to Sir Francis Bendibow?”

“Yes: yes, to tell the truth, I was partly influenced by that also,” replied the old man quietly. “Sir Francis will doubtless tell you that he and I are old acquaintances: and I—in short, then, I may request you to appoint a time for

our interview."

Fillmore named a day near the end of the following week; and then relapsed into silence, being fairly taken by surprise, and unable to make the joints of his puzzle fit together. Mr. Grant and the Marquise were both enigmas in different ways, and worth being studied. After a while, however, he decided that the Marquise was the more inviting, if not the more difficult enigma of the two; and he experienced an unusual degree of pleasure in keeping his eyes upon her. He was not inclined to think that anything would be gained by her leaving London.

She was in a very brilliant and fascinating humor; her talk was witty and entertaining beyond what is common even with clever women. Indeed, one who had known her well might have fancied that her vivacity was the indication of some excitement, which, perhaps, had its origin in something less enjoyable than the lustre of the wax candles on the walls and table. Philip Lancaster no doubt knew the Marquise better than did any one else in that room; but, if he saw more in her behavior than the others did, it is likely that he accounted for it on erroneous grounds. He did not notice that, although she glanced frequently at Mr. Grant, yet that gentleman was the only person at table whom she never addressed. But Philip, in fact, was too much occupied with his own affairs to devote much time to general observation. He was sitting next to Marion, who had young Mr. Bendibow for her neighbor on the other side. Marion, after making several quite ineffectual attempts to draw the latter into conversation, was at length obliged to listen to Philip; and, he fancied, less unconciliatingly than of late. The events of the evening had been rather different from Philip's anticipation. He had come burdened with a saturnine resolve to offer some deliberate slight to his hostess, by way of improving his position in the eyes of his lady-love; but—whether most to his relief or to his disappointment it would be hard to say—the Marquise had given him no opportunity. Save for one ambiguous remark—to which he had made a prompt rejoinder—she had throughout had the air of bringing him and Marion together, and desiring their felicity. When she had addressed him, which had been but seldom, it had been on literary or indifferent subjects. Philip was not so pig-headed as to fail to perceive that the Marquise might make herself an exceedingly agreeable and even advantageous friend. If she were willing to forget the past, all might be right and pleasant in the future. His gloomy thoughts were considerably lightened by these reflections; and yet, somewhere in the back scenery of his mind, there may have been a faint shadow of resentment at something—for Philip, in spite of his superior poetic and intellectual endowments, was not much more than human after all.

He could not know that the Marquise, also, had found the course of events different from what she had expected; she had aimed her party at Philip, but had started quite other game. Nevertheless, her object as regarded Philip had accomplished itself quite as well as if she had been able to pursue it in her own way. He had received the impression which she wished, and she had the opportunity of estimating the degree of influence which Marion had over him. That was all she desired at the moment. As for the other affair, although she had answered Mr. Grant explicitly and decidedly enough, she was less decided in her own mind; she meant to think it over by herself, and to modify her course should that seem ultimately advisable. There was no need to hurry herself about it; she would have ample opportunities for renewing her conversation with Mr. Grant whenever she wanted to do so. To discover a father after so many years, was at least an excitement and an adventure; and if Mr. Grant were really able to bring about such a meeting, it might be worth while to permit it. But then it was desirable, in the first place, to find out what manner of man this father was. Perdita, on questioning her memory, could not form even the vaguest image of him. She had let herself forget him easily, and it was now too late to recall him.

Upon the whole, destiny seemed to be in an interesting and not unamiable mood. In reality, destiny had never been more sardonically pregnant, as regarded every one of those assembled in the Marquise's dining-room, than on that evening.

CHAPTER XVI.

It came to the knowledge of Sir Francis, during the ensuing week, that Mr. Grant was going to have a business interview with Fillmore. He thereupon took pen and paper, and wrote Mr. Grant a very polite note. He said that he had been thinking over their relations with each other, and had come to certain conclusions thereon, which he wished to communicate to Mr. Grant, in the confident belief that Mr. Grant would not find them distasteful. To do this by letter, however, would be, for several reasons, inexpedient; word of mouth, in matters of this kind, was a more convenient and flexible way of coming to an understanding. Sir Francis went on to say that he possessed a villa in Twickenham, whither he occasionally repaired during the summer to get a breath of fresh air. It chanced that he had arranged to drive out to this villa on the afternoon of Friday next; and if Mr. Grant did not object, he would call for him on the way, at any place which Mr. Grant would please to indicate. They would dine together at the villa, and Sir Francis would then provide his friend with a horse to ride home on. Hoping for a favorable reply, he had the honor to be Mr. Grant's faithful friend and servant, Francis Bendibow.

Mr. Grant replied by return of post that he would be happy to accept Sir Francis Bendibow's invitation, and that Sir Francis might call for him at four o'clock at the chambers of Mr. Fillmore in the city.

When Sir Francis read this answer, he flushed up to the roots of his hair, and sat quite still in his chair, staring fixedly at the letter which he held in his hand, and breathing in a labored and irregular manner. Presently the color faded out of his face, and he became extremely pale, and his hands cold. He rang the bell, and told the servant to bring him a decanter of wine, the greater part of which he drank, though it wanted but an hour of dinner. But the baronet had been in a nervous and anxious state for several days past; he had been worried, probably, by some of the exigencies and disappointments which are inseparable even from the most sagaciously conducted business; and he had moreover been seriously harassed by the odd behavior of his son Thomas, who, since the night of the Marquise's party, had not been behaving like himself. He had been moody, reticent and inactive; had attended no cock-fights or rat-catchings; had foregone his customary horseback exercise, and had even gone so far as to refuse to drink more than half his usual quantity of wine. When his father addressed him, he had replied curtly and evasively; and yet Sir Francis had several times detected his son in the act of watching him with a very intent and peculiar expression. What was the matter with him? Had he contracted a secret marriage? or had he suffered a disappointment in love? or had he been losing money at play? These questions, which the baronet could not, and his son evidently would not answer, occasioned the former a good deal of disquietude. But all this would scarcely account for his vivid emotion at the receipt of so commonplace a thing as an acceptance of an invitation. Had he expected Mr. Grant to refuse?

On the forenoon of Friday, Mr. Grant put into his pocket a leathern wallet containing a variety of papers, and betook himself to the city. Previous to starting he had a short colloquy with Marion.

"I shall not return until after you are all in bed and asleep," he said. "You must on no account sit up or keep awake for me."

"What are you going to do?" inquired Marion, point blank.

"Something which will perhaps give you a chance to display your magnanimity," Mr. Grant answered with a smile.

The girl gave him a deep and somewhat troubled look.

"I shall be glad when there are no more mysteries," she said. "Nothing good comes of them."

"It depends in some measure upon yourself how soon this mystery is dissipated," returned Mr. Grant. "Have you no mysteries of your own?"

"Oh, housekeeping mysteries—how to boil a potato, or starch a frill; I shall never have any other kind," answered Marion with a laugh, and turning away.

"To-morrow," said Mr. Grant, after a pause, "you and I will have a chat about mysteries, and perhaps we may clear each other up. Good-by, my dear." He took her hand, and drawing her a little toward him, kissed her cheek. She looked at him, reddening, and said:

"Be careful of yourself. Good-by."

"Proud and jealous," said the old gentleman to himself, as he marched down the street to the corner where the coach passed; "but we shall circumvent that, I hope. What is the use of my twenty thousand pounds if she will not be my daughter? But there is common sense at the bottom of Philip's romance, that will counteract and persuade her stubbornness—if it comes to that."

The coach came along, and in due time landed Mr. Grant in the city; and ten minutes later he had entered Merton Fillmore's private office, which had witnessed many singular revelations, but none more so, perhaps, than the one which was now going to take place.

"Good day, sir," said the lawyer, rising ceremoniously as his visitor entered. "Is your business likely to occupy us long?"

"It chiefly concerns the drawing up of my will," replied Mr. Grant. "And since the dispositions that I wish to make are somewhat precise and complicated, we may as well put the limit at not less than two hours."

"I am at your disposal, then, until four o'clock." Here Fillmore took out some blank sheets of paper, which he placed before him on the desk. Resting his hands upon these, with the tips of the fingers meeting each other, he fixed his eyes upon Mr. Grant and said slowly:

"Before we begin, I wish to put one question to you. You will, of course, decide whether or not it be worth your while to answer it."

"I am at your service," said the other courteously.

Fillmore paused a moment, looking down at his hands. Then, raising his head, he asked abruptly, "What is your name?"

"I had intended to inform you on that point as soon as the occasion required," answered the old man quietly. "The name by which I have chosen to be known here is not mine. I am Charles John Grantley. My father was Thomas Grantley, of whom you have doubtless heard."

Fillmore leaned back in his chair and stroked his chin. Presently he said, "Sir Francis Bendibow spoke to me

regarding your identity a few weeks ago; and, taking all the circumstances into consideration, I own that I shared the surprise he seemed to feel at your reappearance in England."

"I can understand that," was the composed reply; "but it has always been my intention to end my days in my native land."

"It seems you have amassed a fortune during the interval?"

"I have laid by some twenty thousand pounds."

"Which you now propose to dispose of by will?"

"With your assistance, sir."

"You are a man of the world, Mr. Grantley, and acquainted with the general rules by which society is regulated. I cannot suppose you to be ignorant that a person in the peculiar position which you are understood to occupy might find it difficult to establish a claim to this, or any other property."

"I shall not affect to misapprehend your meaning, sir," returned the old gentleman, with a manner of grave kindness; "and I will answer you with as much openness as justice to myself and others allows. I left England twenty years ago under a cloud of disaster and contumely. I chose exile in preference to inquiry, and the results which such an inquiry would produce. My reasons for taking that course I did not disclose then, nor shall I willingly do so now. I do not apprehend that I shall be called upon to alter this purpose; but, should it turn out otherwise, I have the means to meet the emergency, and I shall know how to use them." Here he laid his right hand upon the leathern pocket-book which he had placed upon the table. "It is far from being my wish, however," he continued, "to become the occasion of any disturbance or controversy. I rather desire that such small influence as I may still be able to exercise over my fellow beings may be in the direction of making some of them happy."

"Am I to infer that you contemplate anything in the way of restitution?" the lawyer demanded.

"No."

"You are quite right, of course, in withholding your confidence," rejoined the other, with a coldness that was partly assumed to veil his perplexity. "But—is it your intention to present yourself hereafter under your true name?"

"There is only one other person beside yourself, to whom it was necessary I should declare myself—I mean Sir Francis Bendibow; and I took an early opportunity of doing that. To the rest of the world I intend at present to be Mr. Grant. The fulfillment of the bequests of my will may hereafter necessitate the revelation of who I really am; but I trust that may not occur during my lifetime. And, even in the alternative event, I doubt not the revelation could be so managed as not to incommode any one."

"Well, Mr. Grantley," said the lawyer, taking up a pen and turning it between his fingers, "your attitude is unexpected and, so far as my information would lead me to judge, unaccountable. But that is none of my affair. I need only to put it to you whether you feel so secure in that attitude as to warrant a belief that the directions of your will have a reasonable chance of getting themselves fulfilled—whether you feel confident that third parties may not interfere to thwart your intentions?"

"On that point I have no misgivings whatever," replied Mr. Grantley, with a slight smile. "My only apprehension would respect the principal legatee."

"I will not attempt to understand you," said Fillmore, smiling also. "If you please, we will proceed to the particulars."

Hereupon the two entered upon a prolonged discussion, into which we shall not be obliged to follow them; since what is of import in it will appear in its proper place. At a few minutes after four o'clock the colloquy ended, and Mr. Grant, after shaking hands very cordially with the lawyer, bade him farewell and went down stairs.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Mr. Grant got to the door of the building, he found Sir Francis Bendibow awaiting him in a small but stylish turn-out with two horses. He took his seat beside the baronet on the box, and the footman sat behind, with his arms folded. In this fashion they drove westward.

Sir Francis knew how to make himself an entertaining companion, and he availed himself of his knowledge on this occasion. He talked volubly and genially, giving his companion the gossip of the society of that day, a society which somehow seems to have been more amusing and eventful, and to have possessed more character and variety than is the case in our times. The footman with folded arms had often listened to his master's conversation sallies, but had seldom heard him so agreeable as on the present occasion; and he inferred that the gentleman, his companion, who said very little, but whose manner was courteous and attentive, must either be a particular friend of master's or else some one from whom he had received or was anticipating a favor.

"We should see more of each other, you know, Grant," the baronet said heartily. "A man makes many acquaintances as he moves on in the world, but, damme, there are no friends like the friends of one's youth, after all! No friend has been more often in my thoughts during the last twenty years than you have, and good reason, too!" To which, and to much more of the same tendency, Mr. Grant responded in terms of grave and composed politeness. Altogether it was a very amicable drive, and the weather and the roads were all that could be desired.

Their route lay through Richmond and across the gray stone bridge that separates the town from the parish of Twickenham. "When you ride home to-night," said Sir Francis, "you'll find it an agreeable change to follow the Isleworth road, on the west bank of the river; and cross by Brentford Bridge. Mighty pretty quiet stretch, and but a trifle longer if at all." The footman could have told exactly how much further it was, but of course held his peace, as he would have done had the baronet affirmed it to be two miles shorter. Still bowling easily westward, the horses tramped through the narrow winding street of a sleepy little town, which seemed wearied out as it were with the burden of its historic associations, and drew up at last before a wrought-iron gateway in a high brick wall, the bricks cemented with green moss and crowned with ivy. The gate having been promptly thrown open by the alert footman, the horses tramped through it and up the graveled crescent of a drive overshadowed with fragrant lime trees, until their driver pulled them up before the gabled portal of an elderly but comfortable and solid-looking edifice, faced with white plaster, and dignified by far-projecting eaves. Tossing the reins to the man, Sir Francis got actively down and assisted his friend to alight. They entered the house arm-in-arm. A large cool shadowy hall received them; beyond, a broad staircase, and opening inward to the right of it a vista of spacious drawing-room, with windows giving upon a verandah, and a rich lawn at the back of the house.

"Serve dinner at six, sharp!" said Sir Francis to the obeisant butler. "Now, my dear Grant, no ceremony here, you know; but I remember your fastidious habits. If you want to wash your hands, give yourself the trouble to follow me up-stairs, and I think you'll find everything arranged to make you comfortable."

"Uncommon civil the governor is to-day," remarked the butler to the footman, when the two gentlemen had disappeared in the upper regions. "Who *his* Mr. Grant, I'd like ter know?"

"Ha! you may arsk that, Mr. Tuppin," returned the footman, with airs of superior knowledge. "You may arsk that, and no blame to yer!"

"Well, I does hax it," answered Mr. Tuppin brusquely; "not that I supposes you can tell me hanythin' about it, neither!"

"Ha! per-raps not!" retorted the footman, abandoning the vagueness of mystery for the definiteness of imagination. "Per'aps I didn't 'ear 'em conversin' as we came along, and the gent a-sayin' as 'ow 'e'd arf a millium as he was dyin' to invest, and could the baronet adwise 'im on the subjick? And the baronet he says, says 'e, 'Why, if ten per cent. is any good to you, my dear friend,' says 'e, 'I fancies we can take it hoff yer 'ands and no questions arsked.' And the gent 'e said as 'ow 'e'd think about it."

"Oh, that's the story, his it?" said Mr. Tuppin, pushing up his eyebrows and turning down the corners of his mouth. "Well, I thought it might ha' been somethin' new. But as fur that, my good feller," he added, turning away indifferently, "Sir Francis was talkin' about it arter dinner no longer ago nor day before yesterday. I 'eard 'im myself."

To this assertion the footman was unable to frame a reply; being undecided whether to credit his own ears with miraculous inspiration, or to charge Mr. Tuppin with being a liar. The former course appearing the more agreeable both to his vanity and his self-interest, he ended by adopting it.

Dinner, instead of being served in the dining-room, which was in the front part of the house, and commanded no pleasant outlook, was laid out in the drawing-room, through the open windows of which the friends could let their eyes wander out upon the expanse of silken turf, and the verdurous masses of whispering foliage. A sentiment of cultured and imperturbable repose was expressed by this little region: not the vacant or helpless repose of wild nature; but the repose that comes of over-ripeness, or of containing more than can be uttered. The quaint ghosts of past times paced the deep smoothness of the lawn, and lurked in the shadows of the trees.

"Other parts of the world are better, perhaps, to live in than England," remarked Mr. Grant: "but the place to die in is here."

"What's that? Die in? Pooh! time enough to talk of dying twenty years hence," cried the genial baronet.

"Twenty years is a long time to wait," replied the other meditatively. "The time to leave life is when you find it pleasant, but no longer necessary. My former interests are finished. I should not care to become absorbed in new ones; not in this world at all events."

Here the servant entered with the after-dinner wine.

"We can't afford to lose you yet awhile, my dear friend," exclaimed the baronet. "Now that we have you safely with us again, we mean to keep hold of you. What do you say to finishing our wine out yonder on the lawn? Yes—Tuppin, take the small table out, and a couple of chairs. Such weather as this should be taken advantage of."

"And, by the way," he resumed, after the change had been made, and they had been left finally alone in their seclusion, "talking about life in England—whereabouts do you propose actually to settle? Of course I assumed that you've no notion of remaining permanently in your present quarters—not even if you have designs on the widow—"

eh? ha! ha!"

The other rested his eyes coldly on the baronet and replied: "Possibly not: but I have no other definite plans touching a dwelling."

"Well, if your coming back to England was as unexpected to you as it was to us, your plans might easily be a bit ... undigested!"

"As to that, I question whether there was any moment during my absence when I did not cherish the purpose of returning; and 'tis at least a year ago that the date of my departure from India was fixed. What I might do on my arrival was, indeed, another question."

Sir Francis crossed one leg over another and caressed his shapely knee. "Upon the whole, you know," he said, "I rather wonder at your remaining so faithful to us. You were well enough placed in India, I suppose? Seems to me I would have stayed there. What did you expect to find here? One's acquaintances get pretty well used up in twenty years."

"Considerations had weight with me that might not have affected you in my place. I acted according to my feeling, as does every one who acts freely."

"Ah! I understand: the Marquise—eh? Parental affection and all that! Well, does the lady reciprocate?"

This was uttered in a somewhat strained tone, and the speaker's countenance wore a smile that was anxious and perfunctory rather than spontaneous and genial. But Mr. Grant seemed not to notice the alteration.

"I can't say I've been disappointed," he replied; "perhaps because I expected little. The child I left in your care has grown up to be a woman of the world, wealthy and fashionable, and naturally not much given to sentiment. She has fascination, ambition, and common sense; she is quick-witted, independent and adventurous. I saw the germ of these traits in her long ago; but I also saw—or so I fancied—a generous and passionate heart, which might counterbalance whatever was dangerous in her other qualities. Doubtless 'twas this hope that influenced my determination to return to England."

"Ah! a passionate and generous heart! ... well. And may I enquire whether the lady meets your anticipations in that particular?"

Mr. Grant did not at once reply; but after awhile he said in a measured tone, his eyes turned toward the ground, "With due allowance for accidents and circumstances, I do not think my estimate of Perdita was a mistaken one."

"Accept my congratulations then!" rejoined the baronet, with a short and heavy laugh. "I am to take it, then, that, in order to win the sympathy of this passionate and generous heart, you have not spared the reputation of the lady's foster-father?"

Grant looked up quickly and keenly. "I made no such insinuation!" said he.

"But you can't deny the fact?"

"I'm not concerned either to deny or to admit it."

"Well, well—you're quite right: no use disputing about that. And Fillmore—another sympathetic confidant, I presume?"

"As a man of affairs, I found Mr. Fillmore all I could wish."

"Exactly! and who is to be next? I'm interested to know the persons who are henceforth to behold me in my true colors! Or perhaps you intend to be impartial in your favors, and publish the matter broadcast?" All this was said with a kind of ghastly jocularity. "Let me hear just what I'm to expect. That's only fair—eh?"

"Doesn't it occur to you, Frank," said the other, looking fully at him, while the color reddened in his face, "that what you are saying is offensive? Has my past conduct given you grounds to adopt this tone toward me? You try my temper, sir! and I ... I shall not, however, allow myself to be angry." By a manifest effort he, in fact, controlled his rising heat, and constrained himself to an austere coldness.

The baronet seemed not to wish to provoke his guest any further. Either he was afraid of him—and there was a stern fire at the heart of the uniformly serene old gentleman which did not encourage wanton experiment—or else there were reasons why he desired rather to conciliate than to irritate him. "I expressed myself clumsily, Charles," he said. "'Pon my honor I meant no insult. But a man wants to know how he stands—where he's to look for enemies and where for friends. Now you and I are not going to rake up old matters—eh? For good or bad, the past is done with. The wrong can't be righted now; you can't right it, nor can I; if I could, I would in a moment. But time has arranged things after its own fashion. I did what I could for the wife and child, didn't I? I stuck to Perdita till she got a good husband, and then 'twas she left me, not I her. You ... well—you made your way in the world, and if all were known, perhaps you're in a better position to-day than if all this had never happened. But your turning up again has put a new face on the affair—eh?"

"In what manner?"

"Why, in this manner—but you mustn't mind my speaking out: we know each other well enough not to stickle at formalities—eh?"

"Say on, sir."

"I understand human nature as well as most men; and I don't expect too much of it—not even of you, my dear Charles. I can put myself in your place, and look at things in your way. Quite right and natural you should wish Perdita to feel toward you as a daughter to her father. And as to Fillmore, of course it might be necessary, in doing business with him, to enter into certain explanations: for Merton has his crotchets, and is not the man to go into anything he doesn't, in a certain way, approve of. But, allowing all that, I have to consider my own position also. I'm compromised; and taking my age and yours into consideration (not to mention other things), it makes me doocidly uneasy. I can believe you mean me no harm; but others might be less considerate. I'm not half sure of Fillmore; and as for Perdita ... who trusts a woman at the best of times?"

"Let me point out to you, Bendibow, that you are proceeding upon an assumption of your own: namely, that my daughter and Mr. Fillmore know your secret."

"Well," said the other, with a husky laugh, "appearances look that way, and what's more, you've not denied it."

"I have neither denied nor affirmed it," repeated Grant.

"Quite right of you not to commit yourself. But, passing that over, if you really mean me no mischief, why the

devil can't you give me tangible proof and pledge of it?"

"Bendibow, have you had any occasion to suspect me of unfriendliness since my return here?"

"H'm! nothing definite, perhaps. But it would have seemed more natural if you had banked with us instead of Childs, for instance."

"That is a matter of financial judgment. You cannot expect me, who know what your business practices are, to have the same confidence in your financial orthodoxy that I have in Childs'? But I did leave a thousand in your hands, precisely in order to avoid remark."

"And if 'twere a hundred thousand, you might have it back, with interest, to-morrow!" exclaimed Sir Francis with vehemence. "But that's not our topic. You have something in your possession—you know what I mean—which you can't object to making over to me, if we are friends."

"Do you refer to the letter you wrote to me at the time"—

"Never mind the details! Yes, that's the thing—that and the other papers. Many a wakeful night they've given me, since then!"

"I shall never surrender them to you," said Grant, with decision. "Your only use for them would be to destroy them. They are my protection. My personal security, as well as my right to my property, might depend on them. Were you a far more trustworthy man than you have ever shown yourself to me, Frank Bendibow, I would not place myself so helplessly at your mercy."

"You won't let me have 'em, then?"

"No. I am immovable on that point. Remember, that the possession of those papers was the condition of my action when ... twenty years since. What influenced me then has at least as much weight now. You must be content with some other pledge than that. An honest man should ask no other pledge than an honest man's word."

"Look here, Grantley," said the baronet, leaning forward and speaking in a husky and uneven voice: "I swear to you by all that's sacred, if you'll give me the papers, I'll never take advantage of you. I'll down on my knees and take what oath you please—I'll do it this moment if you say so. Think, man! If anything should happen to you, and those things were found and read, what would become of me ... but it's not that—'tis not myself I care about. If the worst comes to the worst, I should know how to deal with myself. But it's that boy of mine—poor little fellow! I love him better than my own soul, or anything else. Sooner than he should ever think ill of his father, I'd let you shoot me dead here where I sit. All I live for is to make him happy, and leave him an honorable name and fair prospects. And if, after all I've hoped and done, he were to get wind of this—I can't endure to think of it!" cried the baronet, his voice breaking.

"You're the same Frank Bendibow as in the old days," said the other sadly. "I cared a great deal for you then, and I fear I'm not quite cured of it yet. The worst is, you make yourself believe your own deceptions. I won't do what you ask; it would be to risk interests and obligations which needn't be mentioned now. But perhaps we might make some compromise. The papers might be handed to some third person—to Mr. Fillmore, for example"—

"Fillmore be damned!" cried the baronet violently, striking the table with his fist, while his face flushed dark red. "I'll have no compromises! I'll trust neither you nor Fillmore! How do I know what plot you've been hatching against me this very day? Will you give me the papers, or not? Yes or no?"

"I can only repeat that I will not," said the baronet's guest, gravely.

"Then.... But, oh, for God's sake, Charley," said Bendibow, abruptly changing his tone from menace to entreaty, "think of my Tom! You're a father yourself, you"—

"Let's have an end of this," interrupted the other, between compassion and scorn. "You needn't fear for the boy, nor for yourself either. The papers can never be made public, except by my voluntary act: and it depends solely on you whether that ever becomes necessary. I always carry them upon my person, in a sealed cover, addressed to a friend who, on receiving them, and after taking certain precautions, would probably destroy them. In case of my dying suddenly, therefore, you would suffer no detriment. That's all I have to say: and now, if you please, we'll drop the subject."

"You always carry them about you?" repeated the baronet.

"I have them on me now. Isn't it getting a little damp out here? My Indian experience makes me cautious."

"'Tis a cloudy night: there'll be no dew," said the baronet absently. "What did you say? Yes, certainly, we'll go into the house. I have some prints I want you to look at. Wait a moment! I say, Charley—it's all right—it's all right. I didn't mean anything. Fact is, my head is not always quite right, I fancy. I get carried away ... damme, I ask your pardon—shake hands with me, Charley!"

He stretched out his hand and grasped the other's, which he shook hard and mechanically, then letting it go abruptly.

"Life's a queer business!" he continued with a laugh. "We get pushed into doing things we wouldn't have believed ourselves capable of: 'tis all circumstances ... fate! As far as I can see, I'm no worse nor better than others. Come in—come into the study. The evening hasn't begun yet."

"I must turn homewards. 'Twill be a dark night."

"Pooh! not a bit of it. Can't let you off before ten or eleven. And your horse won't be ready yet. Come now—else I'll think you bear me a grudge. You've had it your own way so far—give me my turn a bit now—eh?"

"I'll stay a little longer, if you wish," said the guest courteously.

"That's right! You shan't go off to call me a brute and a bully. Why, we used to hit it off pretty well together in the old times! Let's have 'em over again, for this one evening—eh? just as if nothing had happened."

And herewith Sir Francis cast aside his dejection and preoccupation, and became once more vivacious and agreeable. His guest had again occasion to admire the man's really great social and mental powers. Two or three hours passed rapidly. Then, all at once, Sir Francis complained of severe twinges in his right leg and foot.

"That damned gout of mine!" he exclaimed ruefully. "Ah! ah! all up with me for the next day or two! Ah!—may I trouble you to ring that bell? Tuppin—here, Tuppin! I've got another attack. See that everything in my room is ready. Whew! Well, my dear Grant, sorry our evening should end so. Better luck next time."

"Shall I carry a message to your physician?" asked Grant, who had risen to take his leave.

"No—oh, no—I have everything here; shall have to fight it out—no hastening the thing—ah! Good-by, then, till next meeting. Tuppin—ah!—Mr. Grant's horse; have it brought round to the door."

"The 'orse is quite ready, Sir Francis, if you please."

"Good-by, then, Grant, good-by. The lower road, you know, through Isleworth; the lower road, eh?"

"Thank you, I remember. Farewell, and a speedy recovery to you!" And with a kindly look at his suffering host, Mr. Grant left the room under the respectful guidance of Tuppin, and having bestowed a gratuity upon that worthy butler, he mounted his horse and rode away into the summer darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT now becomes our duty to follow for a time the fortunes of Mr. Thomas Bendibow. This honest and prosperous young gentleman, had he been as familiar with the text of Shakspeare as he was with those of some other dramatic authors, might have compared his plight to that of Prince Hamlet, when the noble Dane was in a state of collapse at the scene of domestic revolution which followed so hard upon his father's decease. Though never exceptionally dutiful in his filial relations, he had a genuine fondness for the author of his being, and allowed no liberties to be taken with his name and character by any one beside himself. But since the reception at the house of the Marquise Desmoines, and the conversation that he had overheard there, his mental attitude had undergone a dolorous transformation. Whatever his other failings, Tom had always possessed the honesty and fearless candor that belonged to his idea of a gentleman, and had never thought of questioning his father's proficiency in the same virtues. Even now he could not bring himself fully to adopt the inferences that obtruded themselves upon him. Further information might modify the aspect of the case. Nevertheless, an uncertainty as to whether the modification would be for the better or for the worse, hindered the young gentleman from putting it to the test. Moreover, he recoiled, when it came to the point, from directly questioning his father on a subject involving the latter's honor. The degradation of such a situation would be mutual. Therefore poor Tom nursed his despondency in secret; when all at once it occurred to him, as an illumination from on high, to seek sympathy and perchance enlightenment from the Marquise. He did not give this inspiration time to cool, but acted upon it at once. With his ostensible purpose in visiting her may have mingled another, not the less dear because not openly avowed; and which we, as well as he, may leave to its own development. So, at about the hour when Merton Fillmore and Mr. Grant were having their interview in the lawyer's office, Thomas Bendibow, Esquire, caused himself to be announced at Madame Desmoines'.

Perdita was in a delightful humor. She had, indeed, a singularly even and cheerful temper, the result of an habitually good digestion and a general sense of the adequacy of her means to her ends. Yet she, too, had her moments of especial loveliness, and this was one of them. She was sitting in a chair by the window, with her hair drawn up on the top of her head, and arranged in flat curls on her forehead. She wore a thin, black silk gown, charmingly disposed about the throat and shoulders; a book lay open on her lap, and in her white hands she idly held a piece of embroidery, on which she might be supposed to be at work, though in reality she had taken hardly a dozen stitches in it that afternoon. She was languorous and dreamy.

"Oh, Tom!" she said, stretching her arms above her head, and parting her smiling lips in a pretty yawn. "How pleasant to see you. Poor boy, my pleasure is your pain."

"Eh? Why do you say that?" he demanded, stopping midway in the ceremonious obeisance he was making.

"Your face told me. So pale and sorrowful! Poor child, what is it?"

"I am not a child, Madame Desmoines," said Tom with dignity.

"You are not civil, sir."

"Not civil—to you!"

"It is not civil to remind a lady of her age. I like to remember the time when you and I were children together, Tom, and to forget the years since then."

"Oh, to be sure! I didn't look at it in that way; and I hope you'll forgive me," said the youth repentantly. "I wouldn't hurt your feelings for the world, Perdita; upon my soul, now, I wouldn't! But about my being a child, you know—in a certain way I shouldn't mind—for your sake, I mean, so that you needn't imagine you're any older. But in another way—as a matter of fact—of course I can't help being a man, and feeling it. And in that way I'd like you to feel it, too; because what I feel for you isn't at all what a child would feel; and ... I hope you understand me!"

"There's a great deal of feeling in what you say," responded the Marquise, with innocent gravity, "but I'm not sure I know what the feeling is about. Is it about yourself?"

"I don't believe there's a fellow alive who could feel anything about himself when he's with you: that is, except to feel that he felt ... you might feel...."

"There! see how mysterious you are. I'm afraid you're chaffing me!" put in the lady, delivering Tom a glance that might have upset an ascetic of seventy.

"Oh, this is too bad, and I can't stand it!" cried Mr. Bendibow with a groan. Then he burst out: " 'Tis you I feel about, Perdita! and I don't care who knows it! I've met lots of women in my life, and—all that sort of thing; but never a woman like you, and I don't believe there is another like you in the whole world. And if you'd only ... look here! Can't you feel that way for me? Oh, do!"

"Oh! Tom, is it really about me?" cried the lovely Marquise, in the tenderest warble of a voice. She folded her hands in her lap and gazed at him with hesitating wonder, as if, in the first place, she had that instant realized the fact that such a person as herself existed; and secondly, was struggling to comprehend so incredible a circumstance as that another person should exist who could regard her otherwise than with indifference. Miranda upon Setebos would have seemed a sophisticated woman of the world beside the Marquise Desmoines at that moment.

Having allowed this shaft time to rankle, she proceeded. "But why do you ask me whether I feel for you? You know I love you, Tom. Have I ever disguised it?"

"You love me? O Perdita!" cried the gentleman, fairly breaking into a giggle of unanticipated bliss.

"Why, who could help loving you?"

Tom suddenly became grave, with a momentary misgiving. "But you understand I mean marrying," said he; "husband and wife, you know!"

She replied with a smile of radiant sympathy, "Ah! well, now I do understand you. You mean to marry, and you are come to tell me all about it! Sit down here beside me and begin. Is she worthy of you, Tom? But first, tell me her name!"

"Her name?" faltered Mr. Bendibow. "Why, it's—you!"

"See how stupid I am!" exclaimed the Marquise, laughing with an air of perplexity. "I meant to ask you what is the name of the lady you intend to marry?"

"Don't I tell you 'tis you? Who else, since we both love"—

The Marquise threw up her hand; her eyes flashed: there was an instant's dead silence. Then she said in a low voice of mingled amazement and indignation, "You, Thomas Bendibow, marry me!" And she added, with a tragic tone and gesture, "You trifle with me, sir!"

"'Pon my soul, Perdita," asseverated the wretched Thomas, quaking at he knew not what, "I never was further from trifling in my life. I mean an honest thing, and I mean it with all my heart. And I can't think what you're so angry"—

"You have shocked me, Tom—and grieved me! I can't tell you what you've made me suffer. You—my brother—to betray your sister's confidence and twist her words like that! I shall never trust another man as long as I live—no, never!"

"But I never thought ... and besides, you're not my sister at all!" stammered Tom, from pale becoming very red. "You know that my father is no more yours than—than I am; nor my mother neither! But if you don't want to have me, you should put it on some fairer ground than that. I offered you the most a man can give a woman; and I'm in right dead earnest, too!"

The Marquise, having played out her little comedy to her satisfaction, was now ready to deal with her victim on a less fanciful basis.

"Sit down here, Tom," she said, "and look at me, my dear. Yes, I am a beautiful woman; and I am wise: at least ten times as wise as you will ever be. And I've seen the world—the great world; and ... I'm a widow! All the finest gentlemen in Europe have made love to me. I knew you'd fancy you'd lost your heart to me too; and for both our sakes I wished the affair over as soon as possible. You could no more be my husband, my dear, than you could wear the moon on your watch-chain. My husband—if I ever have another—will be a man wiser, stronger, and handsomer than I am: a man who can rule me with a word or a look: a king of men—and that's more than a king of nations. How near do you come to being such a man as that? You and I might go to church together, and a priest might pronounce the marriage service over us; but it would take more than a priest and a marriage service, Tom, to make you and me man and wife! The man who can be my husband will have no need of forms of law and religion to keep me safe; though we'd have those, too," she added with an odd smile, "because it's proper!"

Tom pulled up his stock ruefully, and strove to maintain as manly a bearing as possible. "I know I'm nothing very great," he said; "but loving a woman like you makes a fellow ever so much better, and more of a fellow than he was before. If it hadn't been for that, maybe I wouldn't have dared say anything. But if you won't have me, Perdita, I suppose.... I shall have ... to do without you! And I wish I'd never been born! I beg your pardon. I think I'd better go!"

"No; you must stay until you are happy," said Perdita, firmly, laying her hand on the youth's arm as he was about to rise. At her touch he subsided, helpless.

"There's something you'll enjoy better than being my husband," continued the Marquise, looking at him kindly, "and you'll have no rivals! I need a brother, Tom, much more, perhaps, than a husband. I want a friend; no woman can be my friend, and no man, unless you will. Don't you think it might be pleasant to be my friend? Would you rather be that or—nothing?"

"I don't know what I want if I can't have you. I'm awfully miserable. Look here—don't marry any other fellow! I could stand anything but that! Well, I'll see if I can be your friend. Better break my heart with you than away from you, I suppose. Only I won't have you call me your brother—that would be too desperate! Look here, do you know who your father is?"

"I know who he was."

"Well, he is still. He's back here. Don't you know? You talked with him long enough the other day. Didn't he tell you?"

Perdita lifted her head high and looked at him intently. "Who do you mean?" she demanded.

"Why, old Grant, to be sure! Grantley is his real name, and he is your father."

Perdita looked aside, with a thoughtful expression, and said, "He didn't tell me."

"Well, he is."

"Who told you so?"

"I heard my father and Fillmore saying it in the dining-room. That's what's been plaguing me ever since. I hoped you'd know about it. Because, if he's the thief and scoundrel, my father said, why isn't he arrested? Instead of that, father acts as if he was afraid of him. 'Tis as if father was the scoundrel and Grant the honest man. I'd ask father myself, only it wouldn't be decent."

"I see!" murmured Perdita, meditating. "But why did he not tell me? It may be an imposture. But he would have no motive for that. Besides, he couldn't impose on Sir Francis. Yes, it does seem strange. Let me think."

She leaned back in her chair, her eyes downcast, folding and unfolding the work in her lap. She had evidently forgotten all about Tom. That unfortunate youth sat staring at her with burning eyes. How little he cared about his father, or anything else, in comparison with her! And she would never be his. Tom suppressed a groan and felt the hollowness of life. He longed to do something extraordinary, frantic, heroic. Not to forget himself in dissipation—he loved her too truly for that, but to rise to the level of such a man as might worthily possess her. Since that happiness could never be his, to deserve it would be the next best thing. And, perhaps, after all, no achievement could be so arduous and heroic as to be her friend—her true and unselfish friend. Some day she should esteem him at his true value and thank him. She should be made to feel that he was not a child, and that he was something more than a brother. Hereupon Tom felt an aching in his throat, and two tears trickled down his face. He surreptitiously wiped them away.

"Will you do something for me, my dear?" asked Perdita, looking up.

Tom nodded, not wishing just then to trust his voice.

"This thing will have to be cleared up some day," she continued, "and it might as well be now. You can help me already, you see. I can do nothing without you. You shall be my friend and my confidant. If that man is my father I must see him again and find out ... whatever he has to tell me."

"What shall you do when you find out?"

"Then we can consult together, since we are both interested."

"If there should be anything wrong about my father"—

"We will arrange to keep it secret. Mr. Grant—or whoever he is—cannot profit by any public revelation, and I'm sure I wish Sir Francis nothing but good. I should have preferred not to have the matter come up at all, and I told Mr. Grant as much; but I must know about it, since others do, and it must be settled definitely."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Go to Mr. Grant and tell him ... or stop! I'll write a note for you to take to him. You'll find him, I suppose, at the Lockharts' house in Hammersmith. Give the letter only into his own hands. Will you do that for me?"

"I wish I could die for you, Perdita," was his reply, with a lack of outward emphasis that made it impressive.

She glanced sidelong at him and drew in her breath with a half sigh. He was an honest fellow and he loved her truly. Perhaps she was sorry, for a moment, that she could not love him. For it is the pleasure of fate to turn the affairs of lovers topsy-turvey; and even so redoubtable a Marquise as Perdita might one day find herself discomfited in somewhat the same way that Tom was now. However, fate is fate and cannot be defeated.

She followed up her sigh with a smile. "I love myself too well," she said, "to send you on any deadly errand. Shall I write the note now?"

"Yes, if you'll be so kind. My mare needs exercise and I shall like to ride over to Hammersmith this evening. 'Tis not six o'clock yet."

So Perdita sat down and wrote her letter and gave it to Tom, and also gave him her hand to kiss. But he said, "Not yet, if you please; I couldn't kiss it the right way."

Perdita said nothing. But after her rejected suitor had departed with her letter stowed away in the breast of his coat, she looked in her glass and murmured, with a queer little laugh:

"Is that a blush I see?"

Tom marched home with a solemn and dignified air, and, having caused his mare to be saddled, he mounted her and set out toward Hammersmith, on the errand which, neither to him nor to Perdita, seemed to involve any deadly peril.

CHAPTER XIX.

As Tom Bendibow left London and approached Kensington, the afternoon was warm and still, and slight puffs of dust were beaten upward by each impact of his horse's hoofs upon the dry road. The foliage of the trees, now past its first fresh greenness, had darkened considerably in hue, and was moreover dulled by the fine dust that had settled upon it during the preceding week of rainless weather. Pedestrians sought the grassy sides of the road, and fancied that the milestones were further apart from each other than they ought to be; and, in the fields to the right and left, the few laborers who were still at work moved with a lazy slowness, and frequently paused to straighten their backs and pass their brown forearms across their brows. Toward the north and west the pale blue of the sky was obscured by a semi-transparent film of a brownish tint, which ascended to meet the declining sun, and bade fair to overpower it ere its time. It was a day of vague, nervous discomfort, such as precedes a thunderstorm, though there were no indications that a storm was brewing. On such a day neither work nor indolence is altogether comfortable; but the mind involuntarily loiters and turns this way and that, unready to apply itself to anything, yet restless with a feeling that some undefined event is going to occur.

Mr. Bendibow's mind did not lack subjects with which it might have occupied itself; nevertheless, no special mental activity was indicated by his features. He rode for the most part with his head bent down, and a general appearance of lassitude and dejection. Once in a while he would cast his glance forward to take note of the way, or would speak a word to his horse; but thought seemed to be at a standstill within him; he was in the state of partial torpor which, in some natures, follows vivid and unusual emotion. He paid no heed to the meteorological phenomena, and if he felt their effects at all, probably assigned them a purely subjective origin. The sunshine of his existence was obscured before its time, and the night was approaching. He looked forward to no storm, with its stress and peril and after-refreshment; but he was ill at ease and without hope; his path was arid and dusty, and the little journey of his life would soon be without object or direction.

For the moment, however, he had his mission and his message, and he must derive what enjoyment he might therefrom. He passed listlessly through Kensington, taking small note of the familiar buildings and other objects which met his sight. Had he not beheld them a thousand times before, and would he not see them as often again? A little while more and he began to draw near Hammersmith town, and now he sat more erect in his saddle and drew his hat down upon his brows, with the feeling that he would soon be at his destination. Passing the "Plough and Harrow", the ostler, who was crossing the road with his clinking pail, touched his forelock and grinned deferentially.

"Good day, sir—yer servant, sir! Tiresome weather to-day; a man can't 'ardly bear his flesh. Bound for Twick'nam, sir?"

Tom shook his head.

"Oh! beg parding, sir. Seein' Sir Francis drive by with the pair just now, I says to myself"—

"What's that?"

"The bar'net, sir—well, 'twas mebbe an hour since; and another party along with him. So, I says to myself"—

"Go to the dooce!" ejaculated Mr. Bendibow, putting his horse in motion.

"Thankee, sir; dry weather, this, sir; 'ope yer honor'll keep yer 'ealth.... Thankee, sir!" he added, deftly catching the coin which Tom tossed to him and spitting upon it before thrusting it in his pocket; "and if ever yer honor wants to be put in the way of as pretty a piece of 'orseflesh...." But by this time Tom was out of earshot; so the ostler winked at the chambermaid, who was looking out of the inn window, and resumed his way across the street, whistling. Tom, meanwhile, after riding quarter of a mile further, turned off to the left, and presently drew rein in front of Mrs. Lockhart's gate. Marion was fastening some ivy to the side of the door; she turned round on hearing the horse's hoofs; and Mr. Bendibow, having lifted his hat, descended from the saddle and hitched his bridle to the gatepost. Marion remained standing where she was.

"Good evening, Miss Lockhart," said Tom, advancing up the path; "don't know if you remember me—Mr. Bendibow. Hope I see you in good health."

"Thank you, sir. Have you ridden from London? You choose dusty weather."

Tom was aware of a lack of cordiality in the young lady's manner, and, being in a somewhat reckless mood, he answered bluntly, "As for that, I'm not out for my own pleasure, nor on my own business neither; and I ain't going to keep you long waiting. I've a letter here for Mr. Grant—that's the name the gentleman goes by, I believe; is he at home?"

"I think Mr. Grant is in the city; at all events, he is not here."

"I've a letter for him from Perdita—the Marquise Desmoines, that's to say," said Tom, producing the letter and twisting it about in his fingers, as if it were a talisman to cause the appearance of the person to whom it was addressed.

"If you'll give it to me Mr. Grant shall have it when he returns," said Marion.

"That won't do—much obleeged to you all the same; I'm to deliver it into his own hands. You don't know where I might find him, do you?" inquired Tom, feeling disconsolate at this miscarriage of his only remaining opportunity of usefulness in the world.

"He'll be back some time to-night; won't you wait for him here?" said Marion, softening a little from her first frigidity; "mother will be glad to see you, and...."

"Mr. Grant won't be back till toward midnight, but I can tell you where you'll find him," interposed a voice from the air above them—the voice of Mr. Philip Lancaster, who was leaning out of his window on the floor above. "How d'ye do, Mr. Bendibow? He's dining with your father at his place in Twickenham."

"Dining with my father! The dooce he is!" exclaimed Tom, now disguising the surprise which this information afforded him. "I take it you're quite sure of what you say, Mr.—er—Lancaster," he added, growing quite red as he stared up at that gentleman.

"Mr. Grant seemed quite sure of it when he left me to-day," Philip replied, smiling; "but 'the best-laid plans o' mice and men gang aft agley,' you know."

"What's that? Well, it's beyond me, the whole of it, that's all I know. Dining with Sir Francis, is he? Well, stifle me if I'm going up there!" And Tom struck his foot moodily with his whip and stared at the fluttering ribbon on

Marion's bosom.

"You won't come in, then?" said Marion, who began to have a suspicion that Mr. Bendibow had been taking a little too much wine after his dinner; wherein she did him great injustice, inasmuch as he had drunk scarce a pint of spirits in the last three days. Her tone so plainly indicated a readiness to abbreviate the interview, that poor Tom felt it all the way through his perplexity and unhappiness.

"No, I'm going, Miss Lockhart," he said, with a rueful bow. "I know I ain't on my good manners this evening, but I can't help it. If you only knew what a lot of things there is troubling me, you'd understand how 'tis with me. Beg your pardon for disturbing you, and wish you good evening."

"Good evening," said Marion, kindly; and unexpectedly she gave him her hand. He took it and pressed it hard, looking in her face. "Thank you," he said. "And I like you—by George, I do! and I wish there were more women like you in the world to care something about me." He dropped her hand and turned on his heel, for there were tears in his eyes, and he did not wish Marion to see them. He reached the gate and mounted his horse, and from that elevation saluted Marion once more; but he bestowed merely a stare upon Philip, and so rode away.

"I like that little fellow; I believe he has a good heart," remarked Marion, addressing herself to her ivy, but speaking to Philip.

"I'm afraid he doesn't like me," Philip rejoined.

She paused a moment, and then said, "I don't wonder at it."

"Why?" he demanded.

"Oh, I can put two and two together," answered she, nodding her head with a kind of ominous sagacity; and she would give no further explanation.

When Tom found himself upon the high road again, he stood for some time in doubt as to which way he should proceed. Obedience to Perdita required that he should ride on without delay to Twickenham; but so strongly had his feelings been revolted by the picture presented him of his father hob-nobbing amicably with the man who ought to have been, at best, his enemy, that he could not prevail upon himself to make a third at the party. The mystery surrounding Sir Francis' relations with Grant had in fact entered, in Tom's opinion, upon so acute a stage of impropriety, that his own official recognition of them would necessitate instant open war and rebellion, and this crisis he was naturally willing to postpone. On the other hand, no real harm could come from waiting till next morning before delivering Perdita's letter, inasmuch as Mr. Grant could certainly not act upon it at that hour of the night. After a minute's irresolution, therefore, Tom turned his horse toward London, in an exceedingly bad humor.

But when he came in sight of the "Plough and Harrow" his troubled spirit conceived a sort of compromise. He would spend the night here instead of returning to London. He could then discharge his commission the first thing in the morning, and report to Perdita by breakfast time. The difference was not great, but such as it was, it was for the better. So into the court-yard of the inn he rode, with a curvet and a prance, and a despotic shout for the ostler.

Now the ostler of the "Plough and Harrow" was an old acquaintance of Mr. Thomas Bendibow's, and under his guidance and protection Tom had enjoyed the raptures of many a cock-fight and rat-catching, and had attended many an august exhibition of the manly art of self-defense, and had betted with varying fortune (according to the ostler's convenience) on many a private trial between horses whose jockeys were not bigotedly set on winning upon their merits. Latterly, it is true, the son of the baronet had made some efforts to walk more circumspectly than in the first flush of his hot youth, and, as a first step in this reformed career, he had abated the frequency of his consultations with Jim the ostler; and beyond an occasional chance word or two, and the exhibition on Tom's part of an eleemosynary half-crown, the friendship had outwardly fallen into disrepair.

But there are seasons when the cribbed and confined soul demands release and expansion, and yearns to immerse itself once again in the sweet old streams of habit and association that lead downward, and afford a man opportunity to convince himself that some shreds of unregenerate human nature still adhere to him. Such a season had now come for Tom Bendibow, and he was resolved to let nature and the ostler have their way. Accordingly when the latter, having seen to his patron's horse, and skillfully tested the condition of his temper, began to refer in guarded terms to the existence of the "loveliest pair of bantam chickens as hever mortal heyes did see," Tom responded at once to the familiar hint, and no long time elapsed ere he found himself in the midst of surroundings which were more agreeable than exclusive. Into the details of these proceedings it will not, however, be necessary for us to follow him. It is enough to note that several hours passed away, during which the heir of the Bendibows subjected himself to various forms of excitement, including that derived from a peculiarly seductive species of punch; and that finally, in obedience to a sudden impulse, which seemed whimsical enough, but which was no doubt directly communicated to him by the finger of fate, he sprang to his feet and loudly demanded that his horse be brought out and saddled forthwith, for he would ride to Twickenham.

"Never you go for to think of such a thing, Mr. Bendibow," remonstrated Jim the ostler, with much earnestness. "Why, if the night be'nt as dark as Terribus, I'll heat my nob; and footpads as thick betwixt 'ere and there as leaves in Wallumbrogia!"

"Have out my horse in two minutes, you rascal, or I'll footpad you! Look alive, now, and don't let me hear any more confounded gabble, d'ye hear?"

"It do go ag'in my conscience, Mr. Bendibow," murmured the ostler sadly, "it do indeed! Howsumever, your word is law to me, sir, now as hevermore; so 'ere goes for it!" and he arose and departed stablewards. And on the whole, he had no reason to be dissatisfied with his night's work, as the plumpness of his breeches' pocket testified.

Mr. Bendibow's horse had spent the time more profitably than his master; yet he scarcely showed more disposition to be off than did the latter. There was a vaulting into the saddle, a clatter of hoofs, and a solitary lantern swinging in the hand of Jim the ostler, as he turned and made his way slowly back to his quarters, wondering "what hever could 'ave got into that boy to be hoff so sudden."

The boy himself would have found it difficult to answer that question. A moment before the resolve had come to him, he had anticipated it no more than his horse did. But, once he had said to himself that he would ride out and meet Mr. Grant on the way back from Twickenham, the minutes had seemed hours until he was on his way. There was no reason in the thing; but many momentous human actions have little to do with reason; and besides, Tom was not at this time in a condition of mind or body in which the dictates of reason are productive of much effect. He felt that he must go, and nothing should stand in his way.

When the ostler had affirmed that it was dark, he had said no more than the truth. The brown film which had begun to creep over the heavens before sunset, had increased and thickened, until it pervaded the heavens like a pall of smoke, shutting out the stars and blackening the landscape. It was neither cloud nor fog, but seemed rather a new quality in the air, depriving it of its transparency. Such mysterious darkenings have been not infrequent in the history of the English climate, and are called by various names and assigned to various causes, without being thereby greatly elucidated. Be the shadow what and why it might, Tom rode into the midst of it and put his horse to a gallop, though it was scarcely possible to see one side of the road from the other. He felt no anxiety about losing his way, any more than if he had been a planet with a foreordained and inevitable orbit. The silence through which he rode was as complete as the darkness; he seemed to be the only living and moving thing in the world. But the flurry of the dissipation he had been through, and the preoccupation of his purpose, made him feel so much alive that he felt no sense of loneliness.

It had been his intention to take the usual route through Kew and Richmond; but at Brentford Bridge he mistook his way, and crossing the river there, he was soon plunging through the obscurity that overhung the Isleworth side of the river. If he perceived his mistake, it did not disconcert him; all roads must lead to the Rome whither he was bound. Sometimes the leaves of low-lying branches brushed his face; sometimes his horse's hoofs resounded over the hollowness of a little bridge; once a bird, startled from its sleep in a wayside thicket, uttered a penetrating note before replacing its head beneath its wing. By-and-by the horse stumbled at some inequality of the road and nearly lost its footing. Tom reined him in sharply, and in the momentary pause and stillness that ensued, he fancied he distinguished a faint, intermittent noise along the road before him. He put his horse to a walk, pressed his hand over his breast, to make sure that the letter was safe in its place, and peered through the darkness ahead for the first glimpse of the approaching horseman, whom he made sure was near. But he was almost within reach of him before he was aware, and had turf been under foot instead of stony road, the two might have passed each other without knowing it.

"Hullo!" cried Tom.

"Hullo, there!" responded a voice, sharp but firm; "who are you?"

"I'm Tom Bendibow. You're Charles Grantley, ain't you?"

"You have good eyes, sir," answered the other, bringing his horse close alongside of Tom's, and bending over to look him in the face.

"It's ears and instinct with me to-night," was Tom's reply. "That's all right, then. I came out to meet you. I have a letter for you from your daughter."

"Do you ride on, Mr. Bendibow, or shall you return with me?" inquired the other, after a pause.

"I'll go with you," said Tom, and turning his horse, the two rode onward together side by side.

CHAPTER XX.

PHILIP LANCASTER had gone to bed early this night; he sat up all the night before, trying to compel unwilling rhymes to agree with one another, and was now resolved to discover what poetic virtue lay in sleep. But sleep proved as unaccommodating as rhyme. He could not discharge his brain of the crowd of importunate and unfruitful thoughts sufficiently to attain the calm necessary for repose. In fact, he had more than loose ends of poetry to disturb him; his relations with Marion had not been in tune since the mishap in Richmond Park, and she had, up to this time, avoided explanations with a feminine ingenuity that was not to be outmanœuvred. He understood, of course, that a lady who has allowed herself to betray special regard for a man may feel offended by the discovery that the man has had intimate relations with another lady; but, as between himself and Marion, matters had not gone so far as an explicit declaration, on her side at all events; and it was therefore peculiarly difficult to accomplish a reconciliation. Not less difficult was it, apparently, to begin over again at the beginning, and persuade her to love him on a new basis, as it were. Her position was this—that she would not yield as long as any ambiguity remained touching the past relations of himself and Perdita; and that her pride or perversity would not suffer her to let that ambiguity be cleared up. Possibly, moreover, Philip may have felt that, even were the opportunity given, the ambiguity in question might not be easily removed. In these circumstances his most prudent course, as a man of the world, would have been to renounce Marion altogether. She was not, indeed, from any worldly point of view, a desirable match. More than this she was chargeable with certain faults of temper and temperament—faults which she herself was at no pains to disguise. She was not even beautiful in the conventional sense: Philip had seen many women far more generally attractive. Finally, he could not so much as be certain that she had ever positively loved him; her regard for him may have been no more than a fancy, which no longer swayed her.... But, when all was said, Philip knew that there was something about Marion—something rare, tender and noble—which he had never found elsewhere, and which he would never find save in her. And that he had found this and recognized it, was to him reason for believing that Marion must also have perceived something worthy of love in him. Their hands, whose clasp had been severed once, would yet find one another again. Nevertheless, in more despondent moods, Philip would remind himself that love often ended in loss, and that we never reach the happiness we had imagined. It was into such a mood that he had fallen to-night.

At one time, as he lay on his bed, encompassed by darkness on which his weary mind could paint no cheerful image, he thought he heard light noises in the house, as if some one were still stirring. Had Mr. Grant returned home? No; his firm and precise step, ascending the stair, would have been unmistakable. It could not be Mrs. Lockhart, either; she was of a placid constitution, and reposed peacefully and long. Presumably, therefore, the author of the sounds was Marion, who was quite as apt to be awake at night as in the daytime, and who might have gone down stairs to get a book. A door down stairs seemed to open and shut softly, and a draft of air came up the staircase and rattled the latch of Philip's room. Could Marion have gone out? Philip was half inclined to get up and investigate. But the house was now quite still; and by-and-by, as he became more drowsy, he began to think that his imagination had probably played him a trick. There were always noises in old houses, at night, that made themselves. Philip was falling asleep.

But all at once he found himself wide awake, and sitting up in bed. Had he dreamed it, or was there really a knock and a voice at his door—a voice that went further into his heart than any other? There again—

"Philip Lancaster!"

He was on his feet in a moment. "Yes, Marion. What is it?"

"I want your help. Get ready and come quickly."

"Yes," he said, speaking low as she had done: and in a few minutes he had dressed himself and opened the door. She was standing there with bonnet and cloak.

"What has happened?" he asked in a whisper.

"Have you your pistol? We may need it."

"It is here," he said, stepping back to the wardrobe and taking the weapon from a drawer. At the same time he nerved himself as a man of courage who is called upon to face an unknown danger. For there was something in Marion's manner and in the silent influence emanating from her presence that impressed him more than any words could have done with a conviction of the nearness of peril, and of intense purpose on her part to meet and avert it. For a moment the suddenness of the summons and its mysterious import had sent the blood tremulously to Philip's heart. But as he crossed the threshold of his room Marion put out her hand and touched and clasped his own. Her touch was warm and firm, and immediately a great surge of energy and strength went through Philip's body, making him feel doubly himself and ready to face and conquer all the evil and wickedness of the world. The spiritual sympathy between Marion and himself, which had been in abeyance, was re-awakened by that touch and rendered deeper and more powerful than before. Their will and thought were in accord, vitalizing and confirming each other. And in the midst of his suspense and of the hardening of his nerves to confront an external demand he was conscious inwardly of a great softening and exaltation of his spirit, which, however, enhanced his external firmness instead of detracting from it. It was the secret might of love, which enters into all faculties of the mind and heart, purifying and enlarging them. Love is life, and is capable of imparting force to the sternest as well as to the tenderest thoughts and deeds.

Marion now led the way down stairs, and Philip followed her, treading lightly and wondering at what moment his strength and valor would be called upon. Marion opened the outer door, and when it closed behind them the strange blackness of the night pressed upon their eyes like a material substance. At the gate, however, appeared a small light, seemingly proceeding from a lantern, but it had very little power to disperse its rays. Nevertheless, Philip was able dimly to perceive a large white object outside the gate, which, by the aid of mother-wit, he contrived to identify as a horse. And the lantern in Marion's hand presently revealed that the horse was attached to a wagon. She hung the lantern on the side of the wagon and loosed the horse's rein.

"Get in after me," she said, "and then I'll tell you which way to drive."

"Well?" said Philip, when he had taken his place.

"When we get to the highway keep to the right and cross the bridge. After that I'll tell you more."

"How did the horse and wagon come here?" Philip inquired.

"I got them just now from Jebson, the baker. He is an obliging man, and I knew he would let me have them without asking what I wanted them for."

"Then 'twas you I heard go out awhile ago?"

"Yes. I've been feeling it coming all the afternoon. At last I could bear it no longer. If it had been anything else I would have done nothing. But to risk his life, merely for fear of being mistaken, was too much."

"Whose life, Marion?"

She made no answer at first, but, when he turned toward her and sought to read her face in the darkness, she said reluctantly:

"Mr. Grant's."

"His life in danger?" Philip exclaimed, greatly surprised. "How do you know?"

Again the girl was silent. But after a minute she said: "You remember Tom Bendibow's being here this afternoon.... You told him Mr. Grant was at Twickenham. He was coming home late. The road isn't safe on a night like this, and he carried no arms."

"Oh! then all you fear is that he may be attacked by footpads?" said Philip, feeling relieved. He had apprehended something more definite.

"I fear he will be attacked," was her reply.

"But, in that case," rejoined Philip, after a few moments' reflection, "we ought to turn to the left. The road from Twickenham lies through Richmond."

"We should not find him there," said Marion. "He will come through Isleworth."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No. I didn't know that he was going to Twickenham until you said so."

"Then why should you.... The Isleworth road is at least a mile longer."

"We shall find him there," she repeated, in a low voice. And presently she added, with a manifest effort, "I will tell you—something. You may as well know."

"You may trust me," said Philip, strangely moved. He could not conceive what secret there could be, connecting her with Grant, and indicating danger to the latter; and the thought that she should be involved in so sinister a mystery filled him with a tender poignancy of solicitude.

"You may not think it much—it is something about myself," she said, partly turning away her head as she spoke. "I've never said anything about it to any one; mother would not understand, and father—he would have understood, perhaps, but it would have troubled him. Indeed, I don't understand it myself—I only know it happens."

"It's something that keeps happening, then?" demanded Philip, more than ever perplexed.

As Marion was about to reply, the left side of the wagon lurched downwards, the horse having, in the darkness, taken them over the side of the road. Philip pulled his right rein violently, and it gave way, Mr. Jebson's harness being old and out of repair. Philip jumped down to investigate the damage by the aid of the lantern.

"If I can find a bit of string I can mend it," he reported to Marion.

"I'll give you my shoe-strings," she said, stooping to unfasten them. "They are of leather and will hold. But be quick, Philip, or we shall be too late!"

There was such urgency in her tone, that had Philip needed any stimulus, it would have been amply provided. He repaired the break with as much despatch as was consistent with security and then resumed his seat beside Marion.

"I fear we shall be too late," she repeated; "we should have started earlier. It's my fault; I waited too long."

"Are you so certain"—began Philip; but she interrupted him.

"Do you remember the time Mr. Grant came home before, when they tried to shoot him and he fell from his horse?"

"Yes; you went out and met him."

"Yes, because I knew he was coming; when we were standing there by the open window, and the flash of lightning came, I knew he was hurt. I would have gone then, only I tried to think it was my fancy; I was afraid to find I was mistaken. And when I think of it in one way—as other people would—it always seems as if it could not be true—until it happens. It has been so ever since I was a little girl."

"Oh, a presentiment!" murmured Philip, beginning to see light.

"The name makes no difference," returned Marion, seeming to shiver a little. "The day my father was killed, I saw him. I saw him, with the wound in his breast. I said to myself, if that turned out to be true, I should know always afterward that I must believe. When you came and told how you found him, you only told what I had seen. I could have corrected you, if you had made a mistake."

"You saw him!" echoed Philip.

"I saw him—something in me saw him; just as I saw Mr. Grant this evening. But it wasn't that he came to me—that he appeared before me like a ghost; but I was where he was, and saw the place as well as him. It is at the bend of the road, not far from the little brook that runs into the river."

"I have heard of such a power, but I never knew what to think of it," Philip said. "But, Marion, if this peril to Mr. Grant has not happened yet, you must have seen not merely what was beyond your sight, but what was in the future. How could that be?"

"I don't know; it's no use trying to know. It can't be reasoned about, unless you can tell what time and space are. When such things happen to me, there seems to be no future and no past; it is all the same—all one Now. And no good ever comes of my seeing; the things come to pass, and I cannot help it. It has been a curse to me: but if we could only save Mr. Grant, I would thank God!"

"We shall soon know about that," said Philip; "as near as I can make out in this blackness, we must be pretty near the place you spoke of, by this time."

Marion made no reply, save by a slight movement, as if she were drawing herself together, and they drove on in silence. Their conversation had been carried on in low tones, but with deep and tremulous emphasis on Marion's

part; she was aroused and moved in a way that Philip had never seen before; the activity of the singular power which she believed herself to possess had caused the veil which usually obscured her character to roll back; and Philip was conscious of the immediate contact, as it were, of a nature warm, deep, passionate, and intensely feminine. The heavy darkness and silence of night that enveloped him and her was made, in a sense, luminous by this revelation, and the anticipation of the adventure which lay so short a distance before them overcame the intellectual coldness which was the vice of his character, and kindled the latent energies of his soul. How incongruous sounded the regular and methodical footfall of the old white horse, duskily visible in the gloom as he plodded between the shafts.

A few minutes passed thus; and then a hard, abrupt noise rang out, ending flatly, without an echo. The distance from which it came seemed not more than a hundred yards. The horse threw up his head and partly halted, but immediately resumed his jog-trot. Philip, holding the reins in his left hand, grasped his pistol with his right, and cocked it. Marion rose to her feet, and sent forth her voice, with an astonishing volume of sound, leaping penetratingly into the night. Another shout answered hers more faintly from the blind region beyond. It was not repeated. The wagon jolted roughly over a narrow bridge that spanned a still-flowing brook. Then, like a sudden portentous birth out of sable chaos, sprang the scrambling speed of a horse's headlong gallop, and a dark mass hurtled by, with fiery sparks smitten from the flinty road by iron-shod hoofs. It passed them and was gone, plunging into invisibility with a sort of fury of haste, as of a lost spirit rushing at annihilation.

Philip had raised his weapon to fire, but a shade of doubt made him forbear to pull the trigger. This man might not be the guilty one, and to kill an innocent man would be worse than to let a guilty man escape. Marion, who was looking straight forward, had not seemed to notice the figure at all as it swept past. All her faculties were concentrated elsewhere. The old white horse, apparently startled out of his customary impassivity, lifted up his nose and rattled the wagon along at a surprising rate. But the journey was nearly at an end.

A little way beyond the bridge, the road, which had heretofore lain between hawthorn hedges, out of which, at intervals, grew large elm or lime trees, suddenly spread out to three or four times its general breadth, forming a sort of open place of oval shape, and about half an acre in area. The road passed along one side of this oval; the rest was turf, somewhat marshy toward the left. Philip stopped the horse and he and Marion got down. He took the lantern, and they went forward on foot. The narrow rays of the lantern, striking along the ground in front, rested flickeringly upon a dark object lying near the edge of the road, next the turf. They walked up to the object and Philip stooped to examine it, Marion standing by with her head turned away. But, at an exclamation from Philip, she started violently and began to tremble.

"There are two here!" he said.

Marion's teeth chattered. "Dead?" she said, in a thin voice.

"No. At least, one of them is not. His heart beats, and.... Yes, he's trying to say something." Philip stooped lower, and let all the light of the lantern fall on this man's face. "I don't recognize him—or—why, it's Bendibow!"

Marion caught her breath sharply. "Sir Francis?"

"No, no—Tom Bendibow."

Marion said nothing, but knelt down beside the other figure, which was lying prostrate, and turned it over, so that the face was revealed. It was Mr. Grant, and he was dead, shot through the heart. After a few moments she looked up at Philip and said huskily:

"You should have fired at him."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE dead man's horse had disappeared, and was probably trotting back to his stable in Twickenham. But Tom Bendibow's steed, which knew its master, could be heard cropping the herbage a few rods away, at the other end of the open place. This sound, and the struggling breathing of Tom himself, were distinctly audible in the stillness of the night.

Marion, after there was no longer any doubt as to Mr. Grant's being dead, sat for several minutes motionless and silent, his head resting on her lap. Philip meanwhile was examining Tom's injuries, which proved to be a crushing blow at the base of the head, behind the right ear, and two upper ribs on the same side broken, apparently by the stamp of a horse's hoof. It seemed hardly possible that he could live long.

"Shall I lift them into the wagon?" he asked Marion. "We should lose no time in getting home."

"If you take out the seat of the wagon, they can lie at full length," she said. "I will get in with them. You must ride Mr. Bendibow's horse and lead ours."

The plan was as good as the circumstances admitted; and Philip, assisted by Marion, succeeded in lifting the two lifeless weights into the bottom of the vehicle, in which had previously been placed a kind of pillow, improvised out of Philip's coat and Marion's shawl. Marion then got in and supported Tom in such a manner that the jolting might distress him as little as possible; and finally, Philip, having caught and mounted Tom's horse, grasped the reins of the baker's phlegmatic steed, and the party moved forward. The strange darkness, which had been at its densest at the moment of the catastrophe, now began to lighten; a star or two appeared toward the east, and gradually the heavy veil of obscurity was withdrawn in the direction of the west and south. The faces of the two victims were faintly revealed. Mr. Grant's countenance bore a serene and austere expression; but poor Tom's features were painful to contemplate—the heaviness of insensibility alternated there with the contractions of suffering. "Poor boy!" Marion murmured, more than once, but with an inward and musing tone, as if her compassion extended to something beyond his physical calamity. At other times this compassionate aspect gave place to an expression of stern severity; and this again was once or twice succeeded by a beautifully tender look, which deepened her eyes and made her lips move tremulously. Few words were exchanged between her and Philip during their sad journey, which seemed to both of them as long as a lifetime, and yet brief.

Brief or long, the journey ended at last, and in the paleness of early dawn, Philip, with the help of the astounded baker, who had been aroused for the purpose, carried Tom Bendibow and the body of Mr. Grant through the iron gate, and beneath the overspreading limbs of the cedar, and into the house where Mrs. Lockhart, horror-stricken and speechless, stood to receive them. Then the baker was sent for a physician; the dead man's body was laid on the bed in his chamber, and Philip did whatever was possible to make Bendibow comfortable in his own room. The latter had by this time begun to regain the use of his senses, and with these—though only feebly and at intervals—the power of speech.

"Did the ... fellow who did this ... get off?" was his first question. To which Philip replied in the affirmative.

After a pause Tom resumed: "Well, I'm done for!"

"Nothing of the sort; you will be all right in time," said Philip.

"No; I'm a dead man; and ... I'll tell you what, I'm ... glad of it!" He said this with all the emphasis at his command. By-and-by he added, "What about the ... old gentleman?"

"Shot through the heart."

Several minutes passed, and Philip thought that Tom was relapsing into unconsciousness, when he suddenly exclaimed: "Do you mean to say he's dead?"

"He died instantly."

"Give me ... some water," said Tom, with a ghastly expression; and after he had drunk, he continued, "I tried to help; but when I heard his voice" ... he broke off abruptly.

"Whose voice? Oh, you mean Marion's—Miss Lockhart."

"Very likely," said Tom. "I'd better tell you how it all came on: I shan't be of any use by the time the inquest begins. I rode over the river to meet him ... to give the letter, you know. Took the wrong road, but he'd taken it, too, so ... we rode along together, talking, first about Perdita: then he spoke of Miss Lockhart ... she was on his mind; he liked her, didn't he?"

"That's strange!" muttered Philip to himself.

"And we talked about ... well, no matter! Then my girths got loose and I got down to tighten 'em, and he rode on. Just as I was mounting I heard another horse coming along ... and there seemed to be some row.... I rode up. I heard him say, 'Hand it over, or....' "

"The highwayman said that?"

"Yes," replied Tom, after a long pause. "By that time I was almost on 'em. He fired; by the flash I saw his face.... Oh, my God!"

"You would know him again, then?"

"I shall never see him again," replied Tom, with a certain doggedness of tone. His bearing during this conversation had been so singular, and in some respects so unaccountable, that Philip was disposed to think his mind was affected. "You had better rest," he said kindly.

"I shall rest—till Judgment Day," replied the wounded youth; "and I shan't say much more before then. Oh, I have my wits about me ... more now than when that shot was fired! Just after that I heard a call somewhere down the road; I shouted back. Then he rode at me and hit me with the butt of his pistol. Well, he's a villain; but it's better for me to die than to hang him. I've had enough."

At this point Marion came to the door with a letter in her hand, and as Philip approached her, she said to him in a low voice: "I found this in Mr. Grant's pocket. It is addressed to Perdita Desmoines. What shall be done about it?"

Philip took the letter from her and looked at it. It was inclosed in a sealed packet of stout paper, and the address was in Mr. Grant's handwriting. Its appearance indicated that it had been kept for some time; the corners were dog-eared and the edges somewhat worn. Across the corner of the packet was the following indorsement:

"In case of my decease to be handed at once to the person to whom it is addressed, and on no account to be opened by any other person.

J. G."

"I can't leave here at present," said Lancaster, "and 'twould not be safe to trust it to a messenger. Let it wait till this evening or to-morrow."

"What's that about Perdita?" demanded Tom from the bed; for, with the abnormal acuteness of perception that sometimes characterizes the dying, he had caught her name. "A letter for her? Send for her, Miss Lockhart, please! I want to see her before I go. And she ought to be here besides. Tell her that he's dead and I'm dying and she'll come."

Philip questioned Marion's face with a look, and she responded by a look of assent. She had long ago divined the secret of poor Tom's love, and now the new birth in her own heart had quickened her sympathies toward all lovers. "I will write her a message and send it off immediately," she said, walking up to the bedside and touching the boy's hand softly with her own. "She will be here by the time the surgeon has dressed your wounds, and then you'll be feeling better. You are not to die, sir. Madame Desmoines and I will nurse you and make you well."

"That's all right," said Tom, closing his eyes with a sigh; and, yielding to his exhaustion, he sank into a semi-somnolent state which seemed likely to last some time.

"By-the-by," said Philip, when Marion had written her message to Perdita, "there's this boy's father; I forgot about him; he must be summoned instantly. I'll send word to him post-haste."

"Do you think he will come?" she answered, glancing at him for a moment and then looking away. But before Philip could reply to so singular a query, she responded to herself, "I suppose he would. And it would be worth while to have him here. Mr. Grant was his guest last night. He might help in finding the murderer."

"After what I've seen to-night," Philip remarked, "I should hardly like to ask you where the murderer is."

"This is different," she returned, "I know nothing. I see only people that I love. Don't think of me that way, Philip."

"You know how I think of you, Marion."

"If I did not, I could not bear this."

They were in the little sitting-room down stairs, standing by the window where they had so often stood before. Overhead was audible occasionally the soft footfall of Mrs. Lockhart, moving about in the room where Grant lay. The east was exquisite with the tints of approaching sunrise, and the calm and strength of nature made the morning sweet. The earth, which had wheeled through the light and darkness, the life and death of so many myriad years, still maintained her tireless pace no less freshly than on the first day. Could a human heart, also, turn as hopefully from the shadows of the past, and voyage onward through untraveled paths toward the source of light? or must the dust and gloom of weary years still cling to it and make its progress dreary? Love is truly life: deprived of it, body and soul alike stagnate and decline; but, gifted with its might, we breathe the air of heaven even in the chamber of death, and our faces are illuminated even in a dungeon.

It was in the air and light of this immortal morning that Marion and Philip now looked at each other, brightened thereby from within as the sunrise brightened them from without. The utterance of their hearts was visible in their eyes, and there was hardly need of words. But the love which has not avowed itself in words is incomplete.

"Will you be my wife, Marion?" said Philip.

"Have you known me long enough?" was her reply.

"I have known you all my life."

"But to have me will be more wearisome than to know me."

"Marion, I love you."

"I love you, Philip. Oh, Philip, can this be happiness that makes my heart ache so? If I did not know there was so much sorrow in the world, I could hardly live! Can Philip Lancaster belong to me, and I to him! I am afraid to have you know how much I love you. I am afraid to know myself. No! I will not be afraid. Take me, Philip! Kiss me." ...

It was with reverence that Philip kissed her first; but then love overcame him. There was no one like her in the world. He would be a hero and a saint for her sake.

.....

About nine o'clock in the morning, Perdita, Marquise Desmoines, drove up to the gate. She alighted and walked quickly up the path to the door. Her face was vivid, and her bearing alert and full of life. Philip met her at the entrance.

"Is Tom really dying?" was her first question.

"He seems to wish it, and the surgeon gives no encouragement. He is anxious to see you."

"Is it known who did this?"

"Nothing as yet. Tom Bendibow seemed to have something on his mind, but I think he wanders a little. He may speak more explicitly to you."

"Take me to him," said Perdita; and when they were at the door of the room she added: "I will see him alone." So Philip went away, thoughtfully.

Perdita closed the door and moved up to the bedside.

Tom's face was turned toward her: it had the pallor of coming death upon it, but her propinquity seemed to check the ebbing current of vitality, and to restore the poor youth in some measure to himself.

"Good morning, Perdita," he said, with a feeble echo of cheerfulness in his tone. "I told you yesterday I'd like to die for you, and here I am at it, you see!"

"Do anything but that, Tom. I want you to live."

"It can't be done, now. I don't believe even your marrying me would keep me alive now!" said Tom, though with an intonation as if the matter were open to question. "And it's just as well, you know. I had no notion till now how easy dying is. It doesn't hurt half so much as a licking at school. I rather like it."

"I wish I knew who struck you," said Perdita, with a frown in her eyes.

"Nobody shall ever know that: I've made up my mind!" said Tom gravely.

"Do you know, Tom?"

"Yes, I do know. I wanted to tell you that much, though I'll tell nothing more. And it's just as well I'm going, for I couldn't stand keeping such a secret long. Don't try to guess it, Perdita, please. Whoever he is, he's got worse than hanging already. Let's talk about other things. I found him—your father—and gave him the letter. He never read it; the night was like pitch. But we spoke about you. We've all of us made a mistake about him; he was true grit, I can tell you. Oh, here's a letter for you, that came out of his pocket! I'm glad of it, for it was an excuse for sending for you."

Perdita received the packet in her hand, but scarcely glanced at it. She leaned over the helpless figure of the last of the Bendibows, and stroked the hair on his forehead with a touch as light and soothing as the waft of a breeze. "My dear, dear Tom," she said, "I wish I could have made you happy. I am not happy myself."

"You do make me happy: and if ... I say, Perdita...."

"What, dear?"

"Do you remember when I left you yesterday I couldn't kiss your hand, because I felt ... I'd better not. But now, you know...."

"You shall kiss my lips, dear, if you care to," said Perdita, bending her lovely face near him.

"Oh.... But not yet, Perdita; not quite yet. Because I should like that to be the last thing ... the very last of all, you know. You go on and read your letter, and let me hold your hand; and when I'm ready I'll press it, so: and then ... will you?"

"Yes; anything you like, dear," she answered.

She broke the seal of the packet. It contained a second inclosure, also sealed. But there was also a loose fold of paper, on which was written the following:

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER: This will come to you when I am no more. It contains the explanation of the Past: why I left you; what manner of man I, your father, was. This information is comprised in letters written by myself and others twenty years ago. I have kept them by me ever since as a measure of defense against possible injury. After I am dead they will no longer serve this use, and I do not require you to peruse them. You may, if you see fit, burn them unread; but, if you feel a curiosity as to your father's real fate and character, I do not forbid you to read them. Act herein according to your own inclination and judgment, and I shall be content. But I request you in no case to act against any other person on the authority of what is contained here. What is past in our lives may be used to increase wisdom and charity, but should never be made the instrument of revenge.

"My dear daughter, I have loved you heartily all my life. I pray that God may bless you and make you noble and pure. Your father,

"CHARLES JOHN GRANTLEY."

After reading and re-reading this letter, Perdita sat for some time lost in thought. Should she open the other packet? Might it not be wiser to burn it?

Her hand had been lying in Tom's meanwhile, though she had almost forgotten it. On a sudden she felt a slight pressure; very slight, but it made her turn quickly and look at him. It was easy to read the tidings of that face; pinched, pallid, lacking in beauty and dignity; but the face of a man who loved her and who was at the point of death. She put her mouth to his and kissed him. His lips just responded and no more.

A carriage drove rapidly up to the gate and Sir Francis Bendibow's footman rapped loudly on the door.

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. LOCKHART met Sir Francis at the door; he greeted her in a voice louder than ordinary, but harsh, as if the conventional instinct in him had overstrained itself in the effort to hold its own. An analogous conflict between the shuddering emotion within and the social artifices to disguise it, was manifest in his face, which rigidly, and, as it were, violently performed the usual motions of smiling and elegantly composing itself when all the while these polite antics were betrayed and falsified by the grim reality of ghastly pallor and suspense. And there was no necessity for the baronet to maintain the customary elaboration of his fine manners. No one would have expected it of him under the present circumstances: on the contrary, it would have had a repugnant effect, even had he been actor enough to make the pretense seem genuine. But men like Sir Francis, who have trained their minor natural impulses to wear stays and turn out their toes (so to say), are liable to be thus embarrassed by the fearful summons of some real passion of the heart: they pitifully strive to clothe the giant in the pigmy's bag-wig and small-clothes, and are too much bewildered to perceive the measureless incongruity.

"Good morning, madam; charmed to see you looking so well," were the baronet's first words to poor Mrs. Lockhart, who immediately burst into tears, partly because she thought Sir Francis had gone mad, and partly because the contrast between her feelings and his observation was so grotesque. "Is—er—are all well, I hope?" he proceeded, while the questioning agony in his bloodless lips and staring eyes seemed to belong to another being than he who uttered the meaningless phrases.

"I only hope you may not have come too late, dear Sir Francis," she said, instinctively replying to his look instead of to his words. "Poor Mr. Grant—he was murdered outright, but your son ..." she faltered, and resumed her tears....

The baronet stood at the foot of the stairs, with his hat under his arm and one knee bent—a most unexceptionable attitude. He was dressed at least as fastidiously as usual, only that, in shaving, he had accidentally cut his cheek, and the blood had trickled down and stained his else immaculate white stock. This little mishap might fancifully be regarded as symbolical of his moral state at the moment. He awaited something further from Mrs. Lockhart; but at length, as she did not speak, he said carefully, "Grant murdered! I cannot believe it! He parted from me, not twelve hours ago, in such capital health and spirits." Then, after another pause, he bent forward and added in a grating whisper, as if confidentially, "The message that summoned me here mentioned the name of my son—Thomas. Pardon a father's anxiety—alluding to him at such a moment. But ... nothing wrong ... eh?"

"Oh, Sir Francis! the surgeon says he cannot live; but he was very brave: it was while he was trying to protect Mr. Grant that he was struck. Oh, how can any one be so wicked!"

A peculiar sound escaped from the baronet's throat, and his upper lip drew slowly back so as to reveal the teeth. It seemed to Mrs. Lockhart as if he were laughing; but only a madman could laugh at such a juncture, and she trembled with horror. It was immediately evident, however, that Sir Francis was simply in the grip of a horror vastly greater than hers, and that it had momentarily mastered him. Presently his eyes rolled, his head swayed forward, and, had he not grasped the balusters, he would have fallen. But calling up all his energies, he commanded himself a little, and, without attempting to speak, began the ascent of the stairs. Just then a door opened above, and Perdita's voice said in a hushed tone:

"Sir Francis, are you there?"

He stopped, and looked upward; then, still in silence, he mounted the remaining stairs with a labored movement, and arrived, tremulous and panting on the landing. Perdita was standing at the door of Philip's room. Her brows were drawn down, and her eyes, quick, dark and bright, scrutinized the baronet with a troubled expression.

"Is he there?" the latter inquired.

"Who?" said Perdita, reluctantly.

Sir Francis stared; then half lifted his hands and said: "I know about Grant; dead; can hardly believe it; left me last night in such health and spirits: but Tom ... as Tom's my son ... is he...?"

"You are too late," said Perdita, glancing away from him as she spoke. "Poor Tom; he deserved something better."

"Let me go to him," said Sir Francis, moving forward with a groping gesture, like one walking in the dark. He pushed past Perdita and entered the room. She remained for a moment on the threshold, following him with her eyes, and seeming inclined to retire and leave him; but she ended by stepping within and closing the door after her.

Sir Francis, however, was now unconscious of everything except that which lay on the bed before him. Tom's hands rested beside him on the coverlet; his father lifted one of them, and let it fall again. He then sat down on the side of the bed, raised the upper part of the body and supported it on his arm, bending his face close to that of the dead boy, and giving vent at intervals, below his breath, to a kind of groaning sound, the most piteous that had ever fallen on Perdita's ears. She remained leaning against the door, with an air of painful contemplation.

After what seemed a long time, and was undoubtedly long if measured by its spiritual effects, the baronet's moanings gradually subsided into silence; the veins in his forehead, which had become swollen and dark with the accumulation of blood to the brain, returned to their normal state, and the man sat erect, gazing into vacancy, with a demeanor of pallid and stony immobility. Thought seemed to be at a standstill within him, and even the susceptibility to suffering had become torpid. He sat thus so long that at length Perdita's restless temperament could endure the pause no more, and she spoke.

"Leave him now, Sir Francis. I wish to tell you something."

He betrayed no sign of having heard her. By-and-by she advanced to the bed, and stood directly in front of him.

"What do you wish me to do with this?" she demanded, holding up the sealed enclosure which had accompanied Grant's letter.

"These are not business hours," said Sir Francis, sluggishly. "Tom and I are taking a holiday. Our work is done."

"His work is done, but not yours: you cannot have the privileges of death until you die," Perdita answered.

"I know more about death than you imagine," responded the baronet, in the same halting tone. "You needn't grudge me the privileges: I have the rest."

"I am sorry for you—sorrrier than I should have thought I could be," said Perdita; "but there are some things

which must be said between us: for my father is dead as well as your son; and since I can no longer learn from him, you must hear and answer me. Come, Sir Francis; I have always had my way with you in the end."

"No one has any weapons against me now; they're all here!" said the baronet, laying his finger on Tom's shoulder with the word.

"I mean to know the truth, however," returned Perdita, with a resolution that sat strangely on her subtle and changeful beauty. "It was Tom himself who told me the man who called himself Grant was my father: the rest is contained in this enclosure; shall I read it, or will you speak?"

"How came you by that?" inquired the baronet, for the first time fixing his eyes upon the packet in her hand.

"It was found, addressed to me, in the pocket of Charles Grantley's coat. But first, listen to this letter, which accompanied it."

"Not here!" said the other, lifting his hand. "Would you dishonor me in my boy's presence?"

"He knew enough to make him suspect you before he died."

Sir Francis shrank as if he had been stung. "Don't tell me that!" he exclaimed. "You may call me a robber and a murderer, if you like, and tell the world of it; I may have failed in everything else, but I kept my boy's confidence—he never doubted me a moment ... did he?" At the last words his voice fell from passionate assertion to quavering entreaty.

"You are not much of a man," said Perdita coldly. "You should not be a villain if you fear to face the consequences and to stand alone. Tom was more manly than you; he despised you because you were afraid of Grantley, instead of crushing him, or, at least, defying him. And has no one suffered besides you?" she continued, with rising fire. "See what you have made of me! If my father had been with me, to love me, and for me to love and honor, I should not have been what I am. You parted us—as I now believe by a cowardly and slanderous falsehood. You brought me up to think the thoughts of a woman of the world and a libertine while I was still a child. You gave me nothing to care for but my own success—for money and power; and at last you married me to a worn-out formalist, whose very virtues made sin seem delightful. I have never had help or sympathy from a human soul, and that dead boy is the only creature who ever honestly loved me—and he would not have done it if he had known me! But, thanks to you, I can't even be sorry for my failings now; I know more than I feel! I know when I've been injured, though I can't feel the injury, and I mean to have what is due me. I have believed all my life that my father was an embezzler and a scoundrel, a man whose name and connection were a disgrace: a millstone round my neck; some one whom I was to remember only to forget and deny—and now, when it is too late to be of any good to me, because I am too old to change, and when he is dead, I am to find out that you and not he have been the villain! I have heard you whimpering over your boy, and I pitied you; but why should I pity you? Whom did you ever pity? If you had a glimmer of nobility left in you, you would be glad that he died before you were exposed and shamed. And you shall be exposed and shamed: I will do it! Here are your good name and prosperity, in this packet. Are you ready to see it published?" She held the packet at arm's length before his face; there was something almost appalling in the sparkle of her eyes and the bitter movement of her lips.

Sir Francis had listened to this harangue at first with a tremor of the nerves, as one who awaits the fall of a thunderbolt; then even the strength to fear seemed to lapse away, and he sat gazing at Perdita with a dull, unresponsive countenance, while she kindled more and more with the story of her wrongs and resolve to retaliate. When she ended with her fierce question he said heavily, "Do what you like, my dear. You don't know all. The letters are interesting—I'd have risked hanging to get 'em last night; but I don't care to raise my hand for 'em now. You don't know all. I've struck myself a deadlier blow than you can strike me, with all the world at your back. Do what you like, and then ... leave me alone with my boy. He and I may laugh over this some day—who knows!"

Perdita looked at him curiously. "Sir Francis," she said, "do you admit all these accusations? Remember, I haven't read these letters; they are sealed still; I have no sure grounds yet for my suspicions. For all I could prove, you may be innocent—unless these letters are the proof. Are they or not?"

"I suppose they are," was his reply, in the same tone as before. "I don't know what else they can be. Do what you like, my dear."

"Well, we shall see," said Perdita, after a pause. She turned and walked to the door and opened it. The door of Mr. Grant's room, on the other side of the landing, was ajar, and Marion was visible within. Perdita beckoned to her. Marion probably supposed that the Marquise was going to inform her of Tom's death, for she came forward at once with a face full of tender compassion and sympathy. The influences of the past night and morning had wrought an effect in Marion's nature and aspect like the blossoming-out of a flower, whose delicate freshness had heretofore been veiled within a rough calyx. Such changes are scarcely to be described in set terms, belonging, as they do, rather to the spirit than to the body; the outward signs seemed limited to a certain ennobling of the forms and movements of the face, a soft shining of the eyes, and an eloquent modulation of the voice. The imperious flush and angry preoccupation of Perdita's countenance, while they emphasized her beauty, put her on a level of attractiveness inferior to Marion's at this moment, despite the latter's comparative plainness.

"Can anything be done to help?" Marion asked as she came in. But as soon as she caught sight of Sir Francis she paused and murmured, "Ah, poor soul! I wish I could comfort him."

"He seems resigned," said Perdita, ungently. "Death alters us all, Marion, whether we die or survive. I am resigned, too; though my lover is dead in this room, and my father in that!"

"Mr. Grant..."

"Yes, Mr. Grant—Charles Grantley, my father; who was accused of high crimes and misdemeanors, and driven into exile, and who came back to England to see his daughter and be murdered by a footpad. You were fond of him, were you not?"

"Whoever he was, he committed no crime," said Marion loftily.

"Why, so I think. But up to this time it has been made to appear otherwise. If he was not guilty, he has been greatly wronged, has he not?"

Marion seemed about to answer impetuously; but her eyes fell upon Sir Francis, and she compressed her lips and was silent.

"He has been a by-word of contempt and dishonor for twenty years," Perdita continued, "and now he has died

with the stain still upon him. If he was innocent, that seems a pity, doesn't it? I am his daughter, and my honor is involved in his. You had a father: what would you have done in my place?"

"I would have found the proof of his innocence, if it was in the world."

"Well, and what then?"

"I should be content ... I hope."

"I am not content!" exclaimed Perdita. "What use is the proof, unless to give him back his honorable name, and to punish the man who betrayed him? I have some letters sealed up here that will do all that, I think; and Sir Francis Bendibow must be content to hear them read, and...."

"Do not do it, Perdita," interposed Marion, in a low but urgent voice. "His heart is broken already."

"What is that to me?" the other returned. "His broken heart will not mend my father's good name."

"Your father is dead," said Marion, "and you would kill him again if you do not let his spirit live in you. Why should you reveal the secret that he kept all his life? If he chose to suffer unjustly, it was because he was too noble to vindicate himself. He bequeathes his nobility to you; and you should spare his enemies, since he spared them."

"This is a practical world," Perdita remarked, with an odd smile; "I'm afraid it would misinterpret such refined generosity. However, your idea is interesting and original; I've a mind to adopt it. It would be amusing, for once, to mount a moral pedestal above one's friends. But I can't make an angel of myself in a moment: I shall give this packet to you to keep for me: if I were to read the contents I should never be able to hold my tongue. Here—take it quickly, before my pedestal crumbles! Well, Sir Francis, I wish you joy; you are an honest man again!"

"If I had not been sure your father was innocent, I should know it now," said Marion. "Wicked men do not have such daughters."

"Thank you, my dear; you must let me kiss you for that; though my virtue is not my own, but yours. Now take me into the other room; I wish to see my father before I go."

Marion accompanied her to the chamber where Charles Grantley lay, and would have left her at the threshold, but Perdita kept fast hold of her hand, and drew her in. They stood beside the bed and looked down at the quiet face.

"What are hardships?" said Perdita after awhile. "Are they what happen to us, or what we create in ourselves? He seems at peace. Hardships are hard hearts. Good-by, father. After all ... you might have kept your daughter with you!"

After giving some directions about the body, she departed. But Sir Francis still remained in Lancaster's chamber, with his son in his arms. Their holiday was not over.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN a man is dying, or just dead, it often seems, to those interested in the matter, that he is taken off prematurely; that he leaves his life incomplete; that his usefulness was not at an end; that he and those who were bound to him would have been the better had he survived. Death seems like a violence, a robbery, a wrong; and all the more wrongful a robbery, because we are powerless to resist it or to punish it. The mother who mourns her infant, the lover who looks on the dead face of his mistress, the child who feels a dim horror at the unresponsive coldness of the hand whose every touch was love, the friend who sees the horizon of his own life darken and his pathway narrow at the grave of his friend—to these it seems that an injury has been inflicted upon them, the traces of which no compensation can remove.

And yet, as the mind moves forward through the succession of moods and events that is called time, how speedily this wound of loss is healed! Not those who nurse their grief the longest are always the ones who loved most generously and whole-heartedly. Often there is more love of self than love of the departed in those who refuse to be comforted. By-and-by, as we journey on along the road of mortal existence, meeting at every step fresh scenery and new thoughts and demands for action, and knowing that for us there is no retreating, no pausing even; only, at most, a profitless glance backward at scenes and occurrences whose sole reality now is in the growth or decay which they have wrought in our own souls; by-and-by we begin to discover that the dead have not been left behind; that, in such measure as we truly loved them, in that measure are they with us still, walking hand in hand with us, or shining as guides of our forecasting thoughts, and strengthening our hearts in dreams and secret musings. Death, which seemed so arbitrary and reckless, is vindicated by our wiser and calmer judgment. The mortal life that seemed cut short, is seen to have lasted out its fitting span; more years would have been more evil and less good, more weariness and less use. Suddenness is predicable only of material things; in the processes and passions of the spirit there is at all times just proportion and equable movement. It is outside the domain of accidents and violence.

As regards Charles Grantley's death, there was not, it may be surmised, any wide necessity to preach resignation. His acquaintances were not many; his friends few indeed. To the majority even of those who knew him, his true name and antecedents were unknown. The mystery and ambiguity which had attached to him were scarcely likely to increase his popularity; and probably the only thing that could have drawn anything like general attention to his end was the fact of its being a murder. But murders and robberies were not so rare in the London environs then as they are now; at all events they excited less remark; a highwayman was still a difficulty to be reckoned with by belated travelers; and, moreover, men's minds had become more or less callous to the idea of bloodshed and violence, after so many years of wars and outrage. Accordingly, Mr. Grantley's funeral was but thinly attended, comprising few or none beyond the indispensable churchyard officials and the immediate personages of the present history. From the number of the latter, indeed, Sir Francis Bendibow must be subtracted. Another funeral took place on the same day, in which he may be supposed to have felt an even greater interest; and yet he was absent even from that. The fact is, the unfortunate baronet's mind had received a shock which prevented him from clearly apprehending the full extent of the calamity which had caused it. The notion that he and his son were enjoying a holiday together, and were not to be disturbed, seemed the most inveterate of his delusions, as it had been his first. Possibly it was not so much positive mania in him as the uncontrollable shrinking of his soul from the horror of the truth; analogous to the instinct which makes us turn away our eyes from a too-revolting spectacle. Feeling that to confront and realize the facts would overturn his reason, he abandoned reason in the effort to preserve it. But all the while, in some remote recess of his mind, veiled even from himself, must have lurked the fatal knowledge which he strove to escape. It was there, like a relentless and patient enemy, lying in wait for him, and sure to spring forth and throttle him at last. Else wherefore was there that furtive gleam of terror in the baronet's sunken and heavy-lidded eyes? Why did he sigh so deeply and so piteously? What was the reason of those long fits of musings, during which his face worked so strangely, and his lips grew so white and dry? Why did he so anxiously shun the sound of whatever might imply the truth? No; if this were madness, it was the madness of concealment, not of ignorance. Only a gleam of sanity could render him truly insane.

Be that as it may, it became known that the late events had compelled Sir Francis to retire temporarily from society, and from the conduct of his business; and much sympathy was expressed, on all sides, for the unhappy gentleman; and grave speculations were indulged in as to the probable future of the Bank, in case his retirement should be prolonged. Not readily were to be found business aptitudes and experience comparable to his. Moreover, the times were hard, just at present; and although the Bank's credit was now, as at all times, unexceptionable, yet even the Bank was but a human institution, and all human institutions partake of human perishableness. It was impossible to be too prudent, when, as now, empires might change hands or vanish at any moment. Finance is not a matter of sentiment; and though it is always agreeable to have business relations with a man who is at once aristocratic and charming, yet when the personage in question is represented only through his clerks, such considerations are in abeyance. Thus it happened that a good many clients of the famous Bank of Bendibow Brothers withdrew their deposits and placed them elsewhere; and the world went on.

Meanwhile the murderer of the old East Indian remained at large, the police being unable to form any trustworthy idea as to who or where he was. At the inquest, everybody who could be conceived to have any connection with the case (including the baker who lent Miss Lockhart his wagon, and the ostler of the "Plough and Harrow" who entertained Mr. Thomas Bendibow on the last evening of his life) were strictly examined; and though several of them proffered a vast deal of information, little or none of it had much to do with the matter to be elucidated. The last highwayman who had been known to infest the vicinity in which the murder took place, had been captured and safely hanged some time before; and this new aspirant for the slip-knot evidently meant to prolong his career for a while longer. His present venture must have been a disappointment to him; for it was shown that the deceased had not been robbed (doubtless on account of the unexpected arrival of succor); and, even had the succor not arrived, no robbery worthy of the name could have taken place, inasmuch as the deceased had little or no money in his pockets; nothing, in fact, but a packet of old letters, which were of no interest to anybody, and to a highwayman least of all. The jury returned a verdict of "met his death at the hands of some person or persons unknown;" and the world went on.

But the seed of that flower of love that had been planted in the soil of Charles Grantley's grave took root, and grew, and blossomed; and it bade fair to be as sweet and wholesome a flower as ever such seed produced. Marion

and Philip, looking into their future, could see nothing but brightness there, all the brighter by contrast with the tender shadow of sadness out of which they looked. Nothing but good, they believed, could come from a union begun at such a time, and with such a consecration. The influence of Grantley was with them, with almost the vividness, at times, of a spiritual presence; and they insensibly spoke and acted on a higher and purer plane than they would have done had he not lived and died. If his mourners were few, few men have been more tenderly mourned; and to Marion especially was his memory dear and reverend, by reason of the cloud that had overhung so large a portion of his life. That cloud, to her apprehension, had now become all illuminated with heavenly gold; and she felt as little need to confirm her faith by an examination of the packet left in her care, as to ask Philip for proof of her love for him. Marion was enthusiastic and imperious in her faiths even more than in her scepticisms. But, indeed, her whole nature was, for the time, sweetened, subdued, and yet ardently developed. The strangeness and harshness which had occasionally characterized her in the past, was now no longer noticeable; her moods were equal, her heart happy and active. It seemed as if nothing could obscure her serenity; and yet a woman in her condition is peculiarly liable to tragic or chilling accidents. The delicate and sensitive petals of the soul, expanding thus freely to the unaccustomed air, are never so susceptible as now to blight and injury, albeit it is from one source only that the harm can come. Let the lover walk heedfully at this period of his career, nor even grasp his treasure too firmly, lest unawares it vanish from his hand, or be transformed into something hostile.

The reading of Mr. Grantley's will was, for various reasons, postponed until about a week after his funeral. Merton Fillmore, who had charge of it, had sent a communication to the Marquis Desmoines to be present on the occasion; but she, after some delay, finally let it be known that she declined the invitation, observing that she had but the slightest acquaintance with the gentleman who called himself Grant, or Grantley, and that it was impossible to suppose that she could have any interest in the disposition of his property; from which it may be inferred that she had made up her mind to ignore, ostensibly if not also from conviction, his pretensions to relationship with her. Upon receiving her letter, Fillmore stroked his chin with a slight, ambiguous smile, and forthwith took measures to convene the meeting at Mrs. Lockhart's house on the following morning, at twelve o'clock.

Now, it so happened that Philip had, the evening previous, received a note from his publisher in the city, requesting his presence at the office betimes the next day. For Philip's labors during the last few months had resulted in the production of a poem, more ambitious in design and larger in scope than anything he had heretofore attempted. His earlier writings, indeed, had been chiefly lyrical in character, and had been rather indicative of poetical moods and temperament in the author than of those unmistakable gifts of seeing, feeling, and creating that belong to poets by divine right. He had made good his claims to be ranked among the aristocracy of genius—possibly among those whose place is near the throne; but he had as yet put forward no serious pretensions to wear the royal crown on his own brows. The present work, which bore the title of *Iduna*, seems to have been a semi-mystical composition, cast in a more or less dramatic form, and aiming to portray the conflict which is to some extent going on in every human heart, between the love that consults and indulges selfish interests or impulses, and that nobler and purer love which strikes through the mortal and temporary symbol to the divine and eternal reality. To illustrate this theme, Philip had imagined a wild, sea-beaten kingdom, situated somewhere in the unexplored ocean of time; a rocky vision of a royal castle, and living there a warrior-king, grim, whose beard drifts like the snow blown from a mountain-top across the sky. To him was born *Iduna*, glorious in beauty, untamable in spirit, dowered from her infancy with mysterious and half-supernatural gifts. For once, when little more than a baby, she had wandered alone from the castle, and down to the misty reaches of the wave-beaten shore. What happened to her there was never known; but round her neck was hung a broad necklace, wrought with more than human skill of workmanship, of unknown shells and precious stones and links of virgin gold. The necklace was endowed with talismanic attributes, conferring on the grim king's daughter miraculous powers and the lustre of a goddess; and it was whispered among the people that it was the gift of some mighty spirit of the sea, some ocean demi-god, who had met the little princess on the shore, and who, if she remained true to the sublimity of her fate, would one day claim her for his bride. But woe to her should the magic necklace be lost or yielded up! At these foolish fancies the grim king laughed and tossed his beard; but, as *Iduna* grew in stature and in the splendor of her beauty, men said that for such as she no merely human destiny was meet; and when, at certain seasons, the sea thundered more resoundingly along the coast, and the wreaths of foam were swept by the fierce breeze past the castle battlements, *Iduna* would mount her horse and ride forth, as if she heard the voice of her god-like lover calling to her in the gale, and saw his form moving towards her over the tumultuous crests of the ocean billows; though to other eyes than hers he would appear but as a pillar of gleaming mist, a stately phantom of the storm, half seen, half imagined. At these superstitions the grim king frowned, and swore by his beard that the girl should learn—and that ere long—the sufficient worth of a mortal bridegroom.

Of this earthly love; of the loss of the magic necklace, and with it the protection of the sea-god; of *Iduna's* imprisonment in the castle; of her final recovery of her talisman by the self-sacrificing agency of the mortal lover whose happiness depended upon withholding it from her; and of her escape from the castle: no more than a hint can be given. Seaward she rode, and the storm came up to meet her. But the tidings of her flight came to the king, and he mounted his war-horse and thundered with all his knights in pursuit. Wilder grew the storm; the heavens were darkened, and seemed to stoop to the earth; strange sounds, as of the fierce mutterings and laughter of viewless spirits, filled the air. Yet still the grim king rode on, and, filled with grisly forebodings, his knights pressed after him in silence. Then the blast shrieked madly in their ears; the earth rocked and shuddered; ghastly lights flickered along the blackness of the sky; and the sea, gathering itself together in a thunder-smitten battlement of toppling surges, swept forward on the land. Yet, ere it engulfed them forever, they saw by the glimmer of phantom fires, the form of *Iduna* flying far before them, her black hair floating backward on the hurricane, and the magic necklace flashing round her neck. And even as the waters smote them, a god-like apparition seemed to emerge resplendent and serene from the midmost heart of the tempest; toward him *Iduna* stretched her arms, and was folded to his breast.

When the sun rose again, castle and kingdom, knights and king had vanished, and the gray sea rolled its murmuring billows fathoms overhead. But tradition tells that in the night, after the princess had gone forth, the lover who had liberated her to his own dear cost mounted to the topmost turret and gazed seaward, and as the destroying wave came towering toward him through the roar and terror of the darkness, he saw, riding with it on its awful crest, two beings of superhuman beauty and grandeur. As they drew near him, he bowed his head, trembling; but his heart seemed to hear a voice that was like *Iduna's* murmuring his name, and her soft fingers touched his cheek. He seemed to be gathered up out of himself, and to move beside her; the tempest was still; they were together and

alone, and the morning broke.

Such, in bare prose, is the outline of the poem to the making of which Philip had brought his best talents and energies, and on the merits of which he had been fain to stake his fame. Being done, however, and in the printers' hands, he had lost heart about it; felt that it was cold and inadequate, and regretted that he had not been wise enough to have kept it for ten years, and then destroyed it. Accordingly his publisher's summons, coming as it did within a fortnight of the time the book appeared, failed to kindle in him any pleasurable anticipations; and on his way to the city he pretty well made up his mind to abandon poetry as a profession, and take to something else. It was all very well to amuse one's self with such vanities while one is a boy, but now that he was about to take to himself a wife, Philip felt that he ought to adopt some more remunerative calling. He presented himself at the office, with a very grave face, about ten o'clock.

The publisher bowed, and begged Mr. Lancaster to be seated. "I should have had the honor to wait upon you at your own residence, sir," he said, "but as it was desirable to have your signature to some receipts, and for other business reasons, I took the liberty—er—well! Now, Mr. Lancaster, I don't know what your expectations were; it was only natural that they should have been great; so were mine; but, to tell you the truth ... however, judge for yourself." And he handed him a paper, on which was a brief statement of accounts. "We have been on the market only ten days last Wednesday," added the publisher, "and I call the results thus far fair—fair! Sir, they deserved to be; but I doubt not we shall do better yet."

"What is this about?" inquired Philip, who had been staring at the paper. "What does this entry of eleven hundred and fifty pounds mean?"

"Your profits on the percentage as agreed upon," answered the publisher. "We published at ten and sixpence, you know."

"Oh ... I see!" said Philip, quietly. His heart heaved, and he knew not whether he were more likely to burst into a storm of tears or a shout of laughter. "That seems to me very good indeed," he compelled himself to add. "Didn't expect the half of it."

"Genius like yours, sir, may expect anything—and get it!" said the publisher sententiously. "There is no poet before you, Mr. Lancaster, to-day—not one! Do you care to take the check with you now, or...."

"I suppose I may as well," said Philip.

Some transactions were gone through with; Philip never remembered what they were. At last he found himself, as if by magic, at the door of the house in Hammersmith, with eleven hundred and fifty pounds in his pocket. He threw open the door of the sitting-room and strode in.

He had forgotten all about the reading of the will. There was Mr. Fillmore, with the document in his hand, just reading out the words—"I give and bequeath to Marion Lockhart"—and there was Marion, with a startled and troubled look in her eyes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE words which Philip had heard, and the shock of surprise which they gave him, combined with the unexpectedness of the whole scene in Mrs. Lockhart's little sitting-room, rendered obscure his perception of what immediately followed. By-and-by, however, two or three of the persons present took their departure, and then Philip found himself alone with Fillmore, Mrs. Lockhart and Marion. The latter had already received the congratulations of the company, to which she had replied little or nothing.

"My dear daughter," now exclaimed Mrs. Lockhart, with gentle fervor, "what a splendid surprise! To think I should have lived to see you a great heiress! Twenty thousand pounds did you say, Mr. Fillmore? To think of Mr. Grant's—Mr. Grantley's having been so rich! He was so quiet and simple. What a noble thing to do! But he was the son of Tom Grantley, you know, and Lady Edith Seabridge was his mother. And oh! Philip, how happy you and Marion will be now!"

"I think we should have been that at any rate," said Philip, smiling at Marion, and conscious of eleven hundred pounds of his own in his pocket.

"Yes; at least as happy," said Marion, in a low voice.

"I had not been aware," observed Fillmore, with a slight bow, "that Mr. Lancaster was to be congratulated as well as Miss Lockhart."

"You can bear witness that I was not a fortune-hunter," said Philip, laughing. "When was this will made, Mr. Fillmore?"

"Very recently," he replied, mentioning the date.

"Strange!" said Philip, musing. "He was as sound and healthy a man of his age as ever I saw. Had he any premonition of death?"

"Apparently he had not," the lawyer answered. "But, as you would have learned, had you been present throughout the reading of the document, the will provided for the probable contingency of his continuing to live. In that case, Miss Lockhart would have come into possession of ten thousand pounds on her next birthday and the remainder of the legacy hereafter. Mr. Grantley evidently intended her to reap the benefits of his wealth without having to wait for his decease."

"I wish he had told me!" murmured Marion, folding her hands on her lap and looking out of the window.

"Madame Desmoines was not here?" asked Philip.

"I have had some correspondence with her on the subject," said Fillmore. "As it happens, she was not named as a legatee in the will. But, had it been otherwise, I gathered that it was not her purpose to accept anything."

"Why so?" Philip asked.

"I was not informed; but it may be presumed that the will would have designated her as the testator's daughter, and she was perhaps not prepared to acknowledge the relationship."

"Oh, Mr. Fillmore, do you think Madame Desmoines could have any doubts of Mr. Grantley's honor?" exclaimed Mrs. Lockhart. "I'm sure she has too fine a character herself to think evil of others."

"I should not explain her action on that ground—were I to attempt to explain it," Fillmore answered. "The Marquise Desmoines is not an ordinary woman: she is very far from it. No direct proof, beyond the testator's confidential statement to certain persons, has ever been advanced as to his identity with the Charles Grantley who disappeared a score of years ago. Had the Marquise adopted that statement, it might have involved inconvenient or painful explanations with persons still living, which, under the circumstances, the Marquise would have been anxious to avoid. I mention no names, and need not do so. On the other hand, she is the owner of a property from her late husband which is in excess of her ordinary requirements. She desires no addition to it, and may have been unwilling to seem to interfere with the advantage of others."

"How could that be?" demanded Philip. "If Mr. Grantley had bequeathed money to her, it would have made no difference whether she acknowledged him or not."

"We cannot be certain of that," the lawyer replied. "It constantly happens that legacies are, for some reason or other, refused, or become in some manner inoperative; and in such cases there is generally an alternative—sometimes more than one—provided in codicils. There is no reason to suppose that Mr. Grantley would have failed to foresee such a contingency, and to provide against it; especially in view of the somewhat exceptional position that he was conscious of occupying."

"That is to say, if he had left his money to Madame Desmoines, and she had refused it, you think he would have provided beforehand that it should go to somebody else?" said Philip.

"I think we have no reason to suppose otherwise," returned the other, with the lawyer's prudence of phrase. "And it may have been in order to facilitate her refusal, had the alternative presented itself, that she acted in anticipation."

"I was sure she would do what she considered right," said Mrs. Lockhart, who had not in the least comprehended Fillmore's analysis, but had inferred from his tone and manner that he was in some way defending Perdita from an aspersion.

"She possesses many qualities not commonly found in women," remarked Fillmore, looking down at his hands meditatively. After a little he rose, as for departure. Philip was just then saying something to Mrs. Lockhart; and as Marion also rose, she and the lawyer were for a moment by themselves.

"Mr. Fillmore," she said, coloring as she spoke, and lowering her voice as if she intended her words for him only, "didn't you say that legatees often refused their legacies?"

"All sorts of strange things occur, in law as well as elsewhere, Miss Lockhart."

"Why should any one refuse a legacy?"

"For no very wise reason, perhaps," said he, smiling slightly. "From what are called conscientious motives, sometimes; or quite as often from enmity, or whim, or... But I dare say you can imagine as many reasons as I."

"Yes," said Marion absently; and then she added, "so that is why codicils are put in wills?"

"Such provisions are sometimes inserted in codicils," said Fillmore, after one of his characteristic pauses, and a

fixed glance at Marion.

"Are there any codicils in Mr. Grantley's will?" was her next question.

"A codicil, inserted to provide against the miscarriage of something in the body of the will, remains, of course, inoperative and therefore practically non-existent, if the miscarriage in question does not occur," replied he carelessly. Before she could answer he added, "I have over-stayed my time. Farewell, for the present, Miss Lockhart; I trust you may long enjoy the means of happiness and variety afforded you. Mrs. Lockhart, I wish you good-day; Mr. Lancaster, your obedient servant."

"I suppose this business won't be settled for some time to come," observed Marion, following him to the door. "I suppose I should have an opportunity of communicating with you beforehand, if I would wish it?"

"I shall always be at your disposal," returned Fillmore, bowing, and declining Mrs. Lockhart's invitation to remain to dinner, he left the house without further parley.

"Oh, my dear daughter," cried Mrs. Lockhart, in her overflowing way, when the three were again alone, "what do you think? Philip has his news, too; he is an heir, if you are an heiress; all our good fortune comes at once!"

"You, too? How?" said Marion, appearing to be much moved, and turning upon Philip with a face full of a sort of serious excitement.

"Not much in comparison with yours; we shall never be equals in that respect, I'm afraid," returned Philip, smiling. "But that poem of mine, which I wouldn't let you read, because I didn't think it good enough for you, seems to have been good enough for other people. My publisher has sold enough of it, at last accounts, to bring me in more than a thousand pounds of profit. If it would only go on at that rate, I should do very well."

Marion looked deeply delighted, and at the same time agitated. "Huzza! Philip, I knew you must be a genius!" she exclaimed. "Of course it will go on—how can you help writing better and better. That is much better than inheriting other people's money, which you don't deserve, and which doesn't really belong to you—not even so much as to other people. A thousand pounds in such a short time! We shall not need Mr. Grantley's money at all."

"Oh, you may find it useful to buy your bonnets and shawls with," said Philip, laughing.

But Marion seemed not to hear him. She paced about the room, stopping now and then and humming some air to herself; and, finally, she seated herself at the piano and began to improvise, striking melodious and changing chords, sometimes soft and tender, sometimes resonant and tumultuous. Philip, who was more stirred and influenced by music than by almost anything else, especially by the kind of irregular and mysterious music that Marion was given to producing, sat near her, with his head on his hands, letting the harmonies sway and kindle his thoughts. When, at length, the music ceased, and Philip raised his head, he perceived that he and she were alone; Mrs. Lockhart had gone out.

"I shall always be a poet, as long as I have you to play to me," said he. "Only, I shall never write such poetry as I think of while you play."

"It does not take much to make two people happy, does it?" she said.

"Very little. Only love, the rarest thing in the world; and music, the next rarest; and a few other trifling matters of that sort," returned he, with superb irony.

"Ah, my dear love, you know what I mean. All we need to be happy is each other, and what we can do for each other. Nothing else, except something to eat and drink, and a room to live in. I'm sure I've been happier in this house, with you, and with only money enough to keep alive on, than I ever was before, or expected to be."

"Well, I have a theory about that," said Philip, "though I've never worked it out. Love in a cottage is a good thing; and so is love in a palace. But love is not always of one quality; in fact, it never is the same in any two human beings. Sometimes it is simple and quiet and primitive; and then a cottage is the place for it; because, if we are to be at ease and content, what is outside of us ought to correspond to what is within, as the body to the spirit. But sometimes love is splendid, royal, full of every kind of spiritual richness and variety, continually rising to new heights of vision, plunging into new depths of insight, creating, increasing, living in wider and wider spheres of thought and feeling. And, for such love as that, a cottage is not the right environment. You must have a palace, a fortune, splendor and power; indeed, nothing can be too splendid, or splendid enough."

"And could not such a love be happy without all that splendor?"

"Well, no—according to the theory! But, as I said, I haven't completely worked it out yet. There is a certain kind of happiness, no doubt, in doing without what you know you ought to have; and, as a matter of fact, few or no people ever get just the surroundings they want, or ever are or expect to be entirely happy; and, perhaps, to be paradoxical, they wouldn't be happy if they were. Imagination is a great factor in the account, and hope. The material world is too rigid and heavy ever to obey the behests of those two magicians; and so their best work has always been done in cloudland and dreamland. Perhaps, in the next world, nature—this phantasmagory of earth, sea and sky—will not be fixed and unchangeable as here, but pliant and adaptable to one thought and will: so that the statue which I see in my mind shall at once clothe itself in spiritual marble before my eyes; and the rocky island, which I imagine in yonder azure sea, shall straightway rise from the waves in all its tropic beauty; and yet, all this be not a dream or a fancy, but a reality as real and immortal as my own mind—which, after all, is the only reality. Reality has nothing to do with fixedness. Your lips of flesh and blood, my beloved Marion, are not so real as the kisses I give them, or as the love that goes into the kisses. Well—what were we talking about?"

"About whether twenty thousand pounds were necessary to make us happy."

"Oh, was that it? Then we can take our time; for, as we have got the money—at least, since you've got it—we can settle the problem in the most satisfactory of all ways—by practical experiment! And that will take us a lifetime, at least."

"Then what if we found we had tried the wrong experiment, after all?"

"Well, I suppose all discoverers run that risk. Meanwhile, seems to me, 'tis better to have the money to lose than to win."

"I'm not sure about that," said Marion. "Money gives us power in the world, but 'tis only the money we earn that gives us a right to the power. Inheriting money is a sort of robbery. The power we have is not our own—we have usurped it. It brings a host of things crowding about us—things to be done, business to be attended to, claims to be considered: things that we do not care about, and that do us no good; that prevent us from feeling and thinking what

we really care about. If one is born rich, it may be different; but to become suddenly rich without any help of one's own cannot be good, Philip. It must take away more than it gives; and what it takes away must be better than what it gives."

"But some people must be rich," said Philip. "Providence has so decreed. And why should it not be just as much the will of Providence that you should inherit riches as that you should be born to them or earn them? At all events, you have got it, and must make the best of it. Besides, there have been bigger fortunes in the world than twenty thousand pounds, as well as people who needed it more."

"Do you love me any better than you did before you knew of this?"

"Knowing it has not made me love you more—if that's what you mean; but the longer I know you the more I love you, so I love you now more than I did an hour ago."

"Should you love me any less if this money turned out to belong to some one else?"

"No, foolish Marion; by this kiss, it wouldn't make an atom of difference."

"Oh, Philip, I hope it is so," said Marion, her bosom beginning to heave and her voice to falter. "I hate this money, and have been miserable ever since I had it! It does not belong to me, and I have made up my mind that I won't keep it."

"Not belong to you, Marion?"

"It belongs to Perdita; she was his daughter. Why should he have come back to England, unless because he hoped to find her, and to make her rich and happy? What have I to do with his fortune? I loved him almost like a father; and he used to say I was a daughter to him; but I am not his daughter as Perdita is, and the thought of having what she would have had is hateful! And it spoils my memory of him: I must think of him now as a man who left me a fortune—not as a dear friend who gave me all the treasure of his wisdom and gentleness. He should not have done it; he doubted himself whether to do it, for he said something to me once which I did not understand then, but now I know he was trying to find out whether I would consent to such a thing. It is all wrong; and the only thing to be done now is to give it back."

"To whom?" asked Philip, who was trying not to feel too much amazed.

"To Perdita; for I know that, when I refuse it, it will go to her. There is a codicil in the will that gives it to her. I am sure of it, Philip, for I spoke to Mr. Fillmore, and I could see in his face and in the way he spoke that there is a codicil; and the reason he didn't read it was that I had not yet refused the legacy."

"But even if there be a codicil, how do you know it is in favor of Perdita?"

"It will turn out to be so," said Marion, shutting her lips and paling. She was watching Philip's face with an anxiety that seemed to penetrate to his very soul; it was evidently of supreme importance to her which side his judgment turned. He felt it, and strove to be calm, but the silent strength of her desire flowed against him in a current more nearly irresistible than her words.

"Are you quite sure, Marion," he said, at length, "that you have told me all the reasons for your wishing to do this thing?"

Her cheeks slowly reddened as she replied in a whisper, "I have said all I can."

Their eyes met. "If you don't quite trust me now," said he, with a smile, half grave, half humorous, "perhaps you'll come to it when you've had your way. My darling, you may throw the money into the Thames, as far as I'm concerned. If you wish to be rid of it, 'tis right you should be. If it were left to me, I should probably resign myself to keeping it; as it is, 'tis better out of the way. I'll see if I can't write you a greater fortune than that. Meanwhile, you must kiss me!"

Philip had no cause, on that day at least, to regret his surrender. "You see, sir," said Marion mischievously, after some such fathomless spell of happiness as only lovers can feel, "if I had kept the twenty thousand pounds, you could not have had this!"

"I may be glad you had them to refuse, at any rate," responded Philip.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE most natural sequel to a mutual understanding, such as this between the two lovers, would be that they should get married with the least possible delay; and, as a matter of fact, that is what happened. The legacy having been handed back at Marion's instance and with Philip's consent, Marion would hardly be justified in opposing any unreasonable delay to the personal claims of so obedient a lover. It is not every man, however much in love he may be, who will surrender twenty thousand pounds without a murmur. But Philip, in the first place, was not of a specially avaricious disposition; and the unexpected success of his poem had impressed him with a belief in the pecuniary possibilities of a literary career, such as rendered him comparatively indifferent to extraneous resources. Beyond this, however, he had the insight to discern that the fundamental motive of Marion's action had not transpired in her arguments. What really moved her was some lurking tinge of jealousy with regard to the past relations between himself and Perdita. What basis there may have been for such jealousy, if there were any basis for it, Philip may have known; but he had always avoided any reference to it, and he probably did not care to risk the opening of the subject which would be likely to follow Marion's enforced acceptance of the legacy. Marion would never be happy under the persuasion that she was in possession of money which, in the natural course of things, should have gone to Perdita. Philip, therefore, capitulated with less parley than he might otherwise have attempted.

They were married in the course of three or four weeks, and went to spend their honeymoon on the Continent; the chief goal of their pilgrimage being the field of Waterloo, where Marion saw her father's grave. There was no drawback to the enjoyment of the journey; it was a period of serene and profound happiness on which it would be pleasant to dwell at more length. But happiness has few events, nor any apparent movement; it is like a chapter from eternity, which is the infinite development of the present moment. Time loses its semblance of reality, and the discovery that it does, nevertheless, continue to pass, comes as a surprise. The time arrived when Mr. and Mrs. Lancaster were constrained to set their faces homeward: but they did so with unshadowed hearts. Life had begun for them with the sweetest auspices, and there seemed no reason to anticipate that it would not proceed to still brighter issues.

The home of the newly-wedded couple was to be, for the present, in the old house in Hammersmith, which, with some alterations in the way of furniture, would be commodious enough, and which was endeared by association to Marion and her mother, and to Philip also, as being the place where he had first met his bride. It was now the "little season" in London; Parliament was to sit early, and the town was rapidly filling up. The excitement of war being over, every one was set upon getting the largest possible amount of excitement out of society, and the next few months promised to be brilliant ones. Among the literary celebrities of the day, no man's reputation stood higher at this moment than that of Philip Lancaster. He was mentioned in the same breath with Byron and Shelley, and there were not wanting persons who professed to find in him qualities quite equal to those of the latter poets. It was rumored, also, that his personal advantages were on a par with his mental ones; that he had married a great heiress; that he was the younger son of an earl; that his past career had been distinguished by many romantic and mysterious episodes, involving the reputation of more than a few personages of rank both in England and on the Continent; together with a score of other reports, true, half true and untrue, such as invariably herald the appearance in a prominent position of any one whom nobody ever heard of before.

It was the custom at this period for men and women who happened to have achieved distinction either by their brains or by some equally uncommon means, to be invited to social entertainments at the house of Lady Flanders. To be seen there conferred the insignia of a kind of nobility which had nothing to do with the peerage, but which was, perhaps, scarcely the less valued by the recipients of it. Accordingly it was not without satisfaction that Philip, a few days after his return to Hammersmith, received a communication from her ladyship, conveying her compliments, and an urgent desire to have the honor of welcoming the author of "Iduna" at her abode on the following Wednesday evening, at seven o'clock. Mrs. Lancaster was included in the invitation (not an invariable corollary in similar cases); and, indeed, her ladyship's carriage had left cards the day before Philip's return from abroad, as Mrs. Lockhart testified.

Of course, they could have no hesitation in availing themselves of this first social recognition, in the capital of the world, of Philip's genius; and Marion prepared herself for the occasion with a sentiment of wifely pride, at the thought that the world should so soon confirm that opinion of her husband, which she herself had more or less avowedly entertained ever since the first moment she beheld him. The young people attired themselves in a manner which would excite less remark in the present day than it might have done ten or twenty years ago, but which, at all events, at the period we write of, was altogether in the mode. Shortly before the carriage was announced, Marion, being ready, went down stairs, and saw lying on the hall table a letter addressed to Philip Lancaster, Esquire, in Mr. Fillmore's handwriting. Now Marion had a day or two before written to Fillmore, inquiring whether there were any formalities to be observed in relation to her rejection of the legacy; and she took it for granted that this letter, although addressed to her husband, was the answer to her question. She and Philip had not as yet had occasion to come to any understanding as to their liberty to open each other's letters; and, though Marion would probably, in an ordinary case, have let the letter alone, in this instance she had no hesitation in appropriating it. But at this juncture Mrs. Lockhart came into the hall and detected something about Marion's dress that needed readjustment. Marion put the letter in her pocket and forgot all about it.

They arrived safely at their destination, and were ushered into the presence of their hostess, an immensely tall old lady, with a turban, overhanging eyebrows and a prominent chin. She was of noble descent, and was now recognized as among the most eminent encouragers of literature and the liberal arts; but there were terrible stories told about her youth, when she was said to have traveled in Europe in male attire, to have fought a duel and killed her man, and to have lived several years in some part of Asia under circumstances known only to herself. At this stage of her career, however, she was a great card-player, sternly religious in the way of forms and etiquette, and reputed to have one of the wittiest and sharpest tongues in London. To Philip she contented herself with saying: "Young gentleman, I used to know your grand-uncle. He was not so handsome a man as you. 'Tis a dangerous thing, sir, to be handsome and to write poetry. People who see you will expect your poetry to be as well as you are, and, if they find it is not, they'll call you both humbugs. I haven't read your poem, Mr. Lancaster, but now that I have seen you I mean to, and then I shall tell you just what I think of it! Mrs. Lancaster, I like you better than your husband; he's not good enough for you, though he'll try and make you believe the contrary. Never let him print anything that

you don't like—else he'll make a failure. There—run along now and enjoy yourselves, and you may come here again as often as you like."

The rooms were full of people, many of whom one would be glad enough to see now-a-days, after seventy years' vicarious acquaintance with them, through books and tradition. There is no need of naming them here, nor were their appearance and casual conversation (temporary costumes and customs aside) any more remarkable than would be the case in a similar gathering in the London of our times. Philip, indeed, was quite as well worth noticing as any other person there; and he certainly was noticed to the full extent of his deserts. There were murmurs on every side of "That's he!"—"Which?"—"There—tall, short curling hair and white forehead."—"What splendid eyes!"—"Oh, did he write 'Iduna'?"—"Yes, madam: looks like his own hero, doesn't he?"—"Is he married?"—"No."—"Yes, I assure you: two hundred thousand pounds and a beauty."—"Is she like 'Iduna'?"—"She's sixty and a fright!"—"Have you read the poem?"—"Yes—very pretty: vastly entertaining, indeed."—"Here he comes!"—"Oh, pray introduce me!" Amidst such comments and exclamations the poet of the hour found himself adrift, with a tolerably calm and impassive exterior, and within, a voice, half sad, half comical, repeating, "This is fame!"

Meanwhile, Marion had been deployed in another direction, her heart and thoughts remaining with Philip; and in this condition she was able to pay but imperfect attention to the curly-haired and bright-eyed little gentleman who had just been presented to her, and whose name she had not caught. He spoke with a slight Irish brogue, and there was a kind of vivacious sentimentality in the tone of his remarks, which had a tendency, moreover, to become inconveniently high-flown and figurative. At length, to be rid of him, she got him to conduct her to a chair, and then sent him off to fetch her a glass of water. "Who's that girl Tom was talking to just now?" said one man to another, as she sat alone. "Don't know: nice fresh young creature; oh, let Tom alone for being first in the field with whatever's going: and in a week he'll have put her in the Irish melodies, and then the next man may take what is left!" This dialogue was so little to Marion's taste that she rose from her seat and established herself under the wing of an elderly dowager with whom she happened to have some acquaintance; and there, putting her hand in her pocket to find her smelling-salts, she felt the letter that she had forgotten: whereupon she drew it forth and opened it, and was actually absorbed in its contents at the very moment when the author of "Lallah Rookh" was searching for her everywhere with a glass of water in his hand.

The letter was not long, but Marion found it unexpectedly interesting, insomuch that she read it over three or four times, with a constantly expanding sense of its importance. It was not the answer to her own letter, nor had it any reference to that; it was addressed to Philip throughout, and treated of business which was as new as it was surprising. After having considered the written words from every point of view, Marion sat with the letter in her lap and her eyes gazing at nothing, in a state of mingled bewilderment and distress. She had contended against destiny, and had seemed at first to win; but now her flank was turned, and the day was against her.

Through the midst of her perplexity she presently became aware of a dapper little figure standing before her with a glass of water in its hand: she gazed at him uncomprehendingly. Just then, however, another face, which she immediately recognized, appeared amidst the crowd, and not only restored her self-possession, but set all her faculties on edge. She rose quickly, and eluding the astonished water-carrier, she reached Fillmore's side and touched him on the arm.

"Mr. Fillmore, will you please give me your arm? I have read your letter. I wish to talk to you. Take me somewhere where we can be uninterrupted for a few minutes." Fillmore complied without asking any questions, and without showing any particular symptoms of surprise.

Philip, the lion of the evening, was, in the meantime, getting on very agreeably. After running the gauntlet of numerous promiscuous admirers, who besought him to tell them whether Iduna was drowned, whether the sea-god were real or only a fancy of hers, whether she married her mortal lover, and whether the latter managed to get safe off on the wreck of the castle, and much more to the same effect—after he had been parrying such inquiries as these, with what ingenuity and good humor he might, for some time, he happened to raise his eyes, and saw the eyes of Perdita directed upon him from a little distance, with a beckoning expression. In a few minutes he succeeded in placing himself, with a feeling of genuine relief, by her side. And indeed he had no reason to be dissatisfied with his position. If there were, in that assembly, any woman more classically handsome than Perdita, there was certainly no one who could compare with her in brilliance and subtle attractiveness; nor any who knew so well how to say what a man would like to hear; nor any who, in the present instance, was better disposed to say it. She touched his shoulder lightly with her hand as he sat down, with an air and smile as if she were conferring upon him a well-earned knighthood.

"This is the hardest part, you know," she said. "Men who do great things are always beset by little people, with their discordant little adulations. It is like what you see on the stage; when Kean or Kemble has given a great passage, and your ears are ringing with it, there comes a flat racket of hand-clapping. That is the world's applause!"

"We must take the deed for the will," said Philip laughing, "and be glad to get it."

"And so you wish me to believe," pursued Perdita, "that love is a vision that cannot be realized in this world?"

"I don't know that I mean that," he replied; "and I don't want to undertake the responsibility of my own poetical morals. But love is like life, perhaps, never to be found by any dissection of mortal hearts or brains. It is above what can be seen or touched, though that may embody it. You see I am as great a fool as any of my readers. I don't know, any more than the young lady I just was talking with, whether Iduna was drowned or married. But neither do I care."

"There is more than one man in every real poet," remarked Perdita, looking at him intently for a moment, and then looking down; "and the one who appears in the flesh is not always, I suspect, the one best worth having. And yet he may be worth breaking one's heart for. What do you think?"

"I don't remember having made any experiments," said Philip, rather awkwardly.

"Well, it is hardly worth remembering," she rejoined with one of her ambiguous smiles. "If we remembered everything we should never do anything, probably; and that may be one reason why women do so little. And so you are married, Philip?"

"Yes," he said, a little reluctant to follow up this turn of the conversation.

"What a delightful thing a true marriage must be," she went on, "especially when a poet is the bridegroom. For he must know, better than any other man, what woman to choose. You have seen the world, my friend, and studied the human heart; and I congratulate you on having found the woman best suited to make you happy."

"I'm not so difficult as you seem to think," returned Philip; "but if I were ten times more so than I am, I should be more than content."

"I am sure of that," said Perdita, smiling again; "if all men were as fortunate as you, *mon ami*, the world would be the happier. Marion is a poet's wife. She comprehends you. She reverences your genius even more than you do, and she will do more than your genius to make you illustrious. She has the simplicity and the unsuspectingness that one finds only in the highest natures; she will never harass you with foolish doubts and questions: she will never do anything whimsical or arbitrary: she will never make you appear absurd. She makes me wish that I were like her."

Perdita uttered the last sentences in a low and serious tone. She was looking her loveliest; fit to be the consort of a king or the heroine of an epic. She was warm, exquisite, tinted like a flower and sparkling like the gems upon her bosom; she had all the grace of a woman, and more than a woman's substance and individuality, and she was telling Philip that she wished she were like his wife! Philip, though not exactly destitute of vanity or of liability to infatuation, was not readily to be deceived. He was quite able to believe that Perdita might be making game of him. And yet, hearing the tones of her voice and looking in her face, he did not believe it. Her words, indeed, could be taken with more than one signification; but there must be genuineness in them somewhere. She wished that she were like Philip's wife. Did that mean that she really considered Marion's qualities of mind and person were more desirable than her own? Or did she mean that there was some cause, unavowed but not unimaginable, why she should desire them more? Some cause not unimaginable: what? She had just expressed her conviction, in tones unusually earnest for an assemblage like Lady Flanders', that Marion's qualities were such as must command Philip's love. What then was the significance of her wishing they might be hers? It was plain enough; indeed it was its very plainness that was the strongest obstacle in the way of Philip's so understanding it. And yet, thorough as was his love for Marion, he recognized too clearly the wonderful charms and fascinations of Perdita to believe that she could compare herself with his wife to her own disadvantage. No: what she had said was, at least, an implicit censure of his blindness in having preferred Marion or any other woman to Perdita herself.

It is to Philip's credit that he did not allow himself to appear in the least conscious of the unavoidable inference in the matter; but only laughed, and said that he had no doubt any one would like his wife better than his poetry, if they could be afforded the opportunity. And before anything else could be said, who should appear before them but Marion herself, leaning on Merton Fillmore's arm, looking very pale, and with a peculiar satirical touch to her expression which Philip had not seen there since the early days of his acquaintance with her, and which made him a little uneasy. As for Fillmore, his demeanor was, as usual, admirably composed; but Philip fancied that there was something in the glance he bestowed upon him that seemed to say, "Can a honeymoon be eclipsed?"

"Good evening, Madame Desmoines," said Marion, lightly; "I hope I see you well in health? Do you like my husband?"

"His poetry has made me rather disappointed with himself; but he is all the better for having such a wife," returned the Marquise, with engaging courtesy.

"I am only afraid of his being too fortunate ... in some things!" Marion said laughingly; "so, to make the balance even, I am going to inflict on him the misfortune of taking me home. That is, if he will."

"That misfortune is the best of all his fortunes this evening," was Perdita's reply; "and I am enough his friend to be glad of it."

While these courtesies were passing between the ladies, Philip, who perceived that something serious was the matter, had risen and placed himself by Marion's side, and they now moved away together, while Fillmore appropriated Philip's vacated chair. When the young poet and his wife went to make their adieux to Lady Flanders, her ladyship said to Marion, "I saw your husband flirting with that little Marquise. Don't you let him do it! She's the most dangerous woman in this room, and the only one who is cleverer than I am. But I'm clever enough to see through her, and I hope you are!"

And with this benediction the young couple set out homewards.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE drive back to Hammersmith was not a particularly agreeable one. Philip began by maintaining a grave silence: he felt his dignity somewhat impaired by the almost peremptory summons to come home before the party was half over, without any reason given or time for consideration allowed; and he suspected that it might be due to some new jealousy on Marion's part toward Perdita, which made him prefer to leave the conduct of the conversation in her hands. Lady Flanders' parting observations had been peculiarly apt from this point of view, and Philip secretly owed her a grudge for them; the rather since, although his own conscience acquitted him well enough in the matter, there was no denying that Perdita's language had been open to the charge of ambiguity. Marion, however, could not have been aware of this, and her suspicions, if she had any, must have been aroused by some communication from a third person. Now it was manifestly undesirable that any third person should be permitted to come between husband and wife at all, much more that the interference should have any weight ascribed to it, except as an interference. Marion was in the wrong, therefore, to begin with, be her own grievance what it might; and Philip deemed it incumbent on his self-respect to let her bring forward her explanations without any motion on his side to anticipate them.

As for Marion, she was silent at first from excitement, which, from whatever cause arising, always had a perverse or contradictory effect upon her demeanor; causing her to laugh at what was serious, and to be reticent when volubility would have seemed more natural. Moreover, having so much to say, she did not know what to say first; and the matter in hand being, from her point of view, of great importance, she desired to make as few mistakes as possible, especially at the beginning. She saw, too, that Philip was not in an especially good humor, and she wished to mitigate his displeasure before unloading her heart to him. She had, up to this time, full confidence in his love for her; but she was conscious that what she had to propose would be somewhat trying to his generosity; and she desired to start with as prosperous a breeze as possible.

Accordingly, she pulled off her glove within her muff (which was large enough to have allowed of much more extensive evolutions) and slipped her warm hand into Philip's. He, however, had his gloves on, and was not expecting her demonstration; and between his unreadiness and his glove it did not succeed very well. To make matters worse, he said:

"Didn't you bring your gloves with you, my dear? 'Tis a very cold night."

"Oh, yes; but I didn't feel cold," she replied carelessly, returning her hand to her muff; and then, feeling that this was not a hopeful opening, she added: "It was too bad to take you away so early, Philip; but I thought you wouldn't mind when you knew."

Kensington roads were not so smoothly paved then as they are now, and the wheels rattling over the cobblestones prevented Philip from hearing what she said. He said, "What?" and she, with a sense of being rebuffed, only felt inclined to reply, "You seemed to be enjoying yourself so much, I was sorry to take you away."

"The enjoyment was nothing, one way or the other," he returned; "but it seemed rather absurd to make so sudden a retreat—don't you think so?"

"You would not think it absurd if you knew my reasons: I could not help it," said Marion quickly.

"Well, I am ready to hear them," rejoined Philip, with an air of judicial impartiality.

Marion had some resentful reply on the tip of her tongue, but she checked herself in time. "I think I would rather wait till we get home," she said at length. "We cannot talk comfortably in this noise."

Philip signified his assent to this arrangement by folding his arms and leaning back in his corner of the carriage; and very few words more were exchanged between the new husband and wife during the rest of the drive: so that by the time they arrived at the house, both felt as if they had in some intangible way been injured. But Marion had the more elastic temper of the two, and she reminded herself that Philip had, after all, some reason to be out of sorts; and when she turned to him at last, in the solitude of their room, it was with a face smiling, though pale.

"Now, my Philip, you are going to be astonished!" she said. "In the first place, I have been reading a letter written to you."

Philip looked a little blank, running through in his mind all the imaginable persons who might have written him letters which he would not have wished Marion to read; but he almost immediately replied, "Why didn't you speak of it before we left home?"

"I put it in my pocket and didn't read it till after we arrived: it was from Mr. Fillmore, Philip" (Philip's brow relaxed) "and the reason I opened it was that I was expecting one from him and thought this was it. But it was not. It was about something ... I should never have expected. I hope you will think about it as I do. Oh, how happy I should be then!"

"Sit down, my dear," said Philip. "What is the matter?"

"It is about that miserable legacy. It seems to haunt us like an evil spirit. What do you think, love—there was a codicil in the will, as I said, and the money is left in such a way that if I refuse it, it might come to you, unless you refuse it too. And I hope—"

"Come to me!" echoed Philip in amazement. "How is that?"

"It is the wording of the codicil that makes it so," said Marion. "It says, 'To my nearest acknowledged relative,' or something of that sort, and that might be you."

"It might be I, if it were not the Marquise Desmoines," returned Philip, with a short laugh. "You forget her."

"No, I didn't forget her; but Mr. Fillmore says that she will not acknowledge that she is his daughter at all. And you are the next nearest to her."

"I never in my life heard of twenty thousand pounds going begging in this fashion," said Philip, bringing his hands down on the arms of the chair. "Anybody would think it was poisoned. So she maintains she is not his daughter?"

"It is very strange of her: there must be some reason besides what she says," remarked Marion. "I remember when she stood by the bed where he was lying, poor dear, she called him 'father;' and though he could not hear her, I could."

"Well, that is not legal proof, after all."

"But the letters in the packet she gave me to keep—those would be legal."

"They might or they might not. There's no telling."

"I will send them to her, so that it may be known."

"No. She gave them to you to keep for her. You cannot return them with courtesy until she asks for them. And 'tis easy to understand why she should wish them to remain unread. If Mr. Grantley was really her father—"

"Philip, do you doubt it?"

"My belief is that he was everything that is honorable; but what I believe or not is nothing to the purpose. Of course, if he was her father, and an honest man, it follows that something must be very wrong with Sir Francis Bendibow—"

"I am sure of that!"

"Well, I know nothing about it; but what everybody does know is that Perdita is Bendibow's adopted daughter, and is under a certain obligation—"

"He did not treat her well: she says so herself."

"In society, Marion, there is a convention to take certain things for granted. The conventional supposition in this case is that she is under obligations to Bendibow. Why should she create a scandal about a matter that was settled, for good or evil, a score of years since? Who would gain by Bendibow's being shamed? Those letters either contain the evidence of his shame, or they do not; and, in either case, it is reasonable enough that she should wish to let them alone."

"I do not believe that that is her reason for refusing this legacy."

"What in heaven's name can it be then?"

"I think she.... But that is not what I want to say. Philip, do you mean to take this money?"

"If no one contests my right to it, I certainly shall," said Philip, with his chin in his hand.

Marion's heart beat hard. She had anticipated reluctance on her husband's part, but not opposition so determined as this. She hesitated what to do next. That Perdita did not really doubt Grantley to have been her father, Marion was of course convinced. The recollection of what had passed on that tragic morning, when the Marquise had called her in to witness Bendibow's exposure, and Marion herself had interposed, and with difficulty saved him, was only too distinct in her memory. Perdita had believed then, and there was no reason why she should doubt now. But on the other hand, Marion herself was responsible for Perdita's present attitude. Marion had asked her not to open the packet, and Perdita—certainly from a generous motive—had complied. In the exaltation of that moment, the two women had kissed each other. Which had maintained the more consistent course since then—Perdita or Marion? Logically, Perdita. She had agreed, for Bendibow's sake, and at Marion's request, outwardly to ignore the fact that she was Grantley's daughter: and how, on that understanding, could she act otherwise than she had done? There was no logical answer to this question; on the contrary, it was Marion who had receded from her position. And yet Marion could not admit herself unjust. Though Perdita had not altered her course, Marion was persuaded that she had changed her motives in pursuing it. It was no longer compassion for Sir Francis that swayed her, but designs upon Philip. It would be impossible to describe, or even to know, by precisely what means Marion had arrived at this conclusion. It is instinct, not reason, that warns a woman when to be jealous of another: and it seems as if she could perceive the purpose in the other's heart, even before it has declared itself in any overt act. In such circumstances, however, the injured woman can do nothing but affirm her conviction: by the magnetism whereof, and by no other means, can she hope to influence the man. But he can always out-argue her, if he chooses.

Though she felt the premonition of defeat, therefore, Marion resolved not to give up the contest: the spirit of her father was aroused in her, and she was strengthened by the thought that she was fighting not only for herself, but in behalf of Philip's higher self likewise.

"Don't you think there is something more than legal rights to be considered?" she said at last. "Would you condescend to accept favors from a woman like Madame Desmoines?"

"I know nothing of Madame Desmoines that puts her below the level of other people: but there is no favor in the matter. She is doing what pleases her best, without any reference to me: and I simply accept things as they are."

"She means to put you under an obligation to her, and to use the power that will give her. You say you can read the human heart, Philip: can't you read so easy a thing as that? That was the reason I would not take the money; and if I would not, much less should you."

"Was that your reason? It was not the one you gave, if I remember right."

"I believed, then, that you were generous enough to spare me the affront of such an explanation," said Marion haughtily. "But after all, it is more for your sake than mine ... it would look better for me to be obliged to her, than for you. And for you to accept what I refused is as much as to say that you disapproved what I did."

"Well, perhaps I did. It doesn't follow, because I let you have your way, that I thought you were acting sensibly. And 'tis certainly no reason why you should force me to make another such sacrifice on my own account. There's a limit to everything!"

"It is the same now as it was then. And if you agreed from love of me then, you must love me less now, since you refuse."

"This is too absurd, Marion. For some cause or other, or for no cause at all rather, you are jealous of Madame Desmoines. If I were to yield to you in this, it would be as much as to say that your jealousy had some foundation. It has none, and I won't do it. You have no right to say that I don't love you. If you were generous, you would not say it."

"I don't say that you care more for Madame Desmoines than you do for me, Philip; if I thought that, I would never trouble you again, in any way. But I know that she cares for you, and you might know it, too, if you would. I saw her face while she was talking with you at the party to-night. I could tell what was in her mind. Men never seem to see those things: though they get the benefit of them!"

" 'Tis no use talking with you till you get your senses back, Marion: and this is not what we set out to discuss, either."

Marion had something more to say about Madame Desmoines, but she managed to keep it back. She knew that

if her temper got the mastery of her, there would be an end, not only of this discussion, but of many other things also; of her love and, practically, of her life. She feared lest she might hate her husband; and she feared still more lest she might despise him. She resumed in a voice low and shaken by the struggle of emotions in her heart.

"Let all the rest go; and why should you take this money, Philip? Do we need it more than we did yesterday? But for this strange chance, you would never have thought of it again. We have more than enough already for two years to come, if we live with any sort of economy. Thousands of people marry every day on less money than you have at this moment, and without your means of making more, and they succeed and are happy. There is nothing that makes a husband and wife love each other more than to fight their way through the world together—triumphing together, and suffering together if need be; but to feel that we are in the least dependent will drive us more and more apart. Oh, I am sure this money will only be a misfortune and a misery to us! Good cannot come of it. And what if we are poor? I have been poor all my life, and yet you married me!"

Philip listened to all this with a secret feeling of relief. Marion had now taken the ground where he was strong and she was weak. In depth of passion and fire of temper, he was less than her equal; and had she carried on her attack with those weapons, she might have come out victorious; for he was not prepared to go such lengths as she would have gone, had she given herself rein. But women like Marion are seldom aware of their own most formidable powers, and hence are so often worsted by those who are really less strong, but more ingenious and adaptable than they.

Moreover, there was on Philip's side both human nature (as moral frailty is called in such connection) and a good deal of reason. In allowing Marion her will on the previous occasion, he had stretched abnegation to pretty nearly its limit in his case; and had so much the less at his disposal for the present emergency. If he had permitted himself to grumble his fill in the first instance, he would not have had so much stored discontent on hand for the second; and when he found Marion in the position of standing upon what she had gained and demanding as much again, he defined his objections as follows:

"There ought to be no question about our love for each other, Marion; we settled that once for all, before we were married. And your pride and prejudices are not involved, since it is to me and not to you that the legacy is now offered. I gave you leave to manage your own affairs as you judged best, and 'tis only fair you should give the same liberty to me. Now, it is quite plain that Grantley meant one or other of us to have this money; and if the wording of the codicil was made to apply also to Perdita, it was only lest the money, in the last resort, might not have to be thrown into the gutter. If I were to take the stand you wish me to, I should only be putting both you and myself in a childish and sentimental light. Everybody would laugh at us. Besides, there is the practical point of view. What right have we, in face of all the accidents and vicissitudes of life, to reject such a windfall? I might fall ill to-morrow, or my next poem might be a failure: we shall probably have children, and they must be provided for as well as ourselves. And 'tis a great thing, Marion, for a man who aspires to be a poet, to be put a little above the necessity of working for daily bread, and living from hand to mouth. Then again, 'tis my right as well as to my advantage to take a position in society suitable to the name I bear. A fortune, my dear, is something real and enduring; but sentimental scruples and prejudices pass away."

Philip's mind, during this harangue, was less comfortable than his language. Whatever reason might say, he felt that he was taking a lower level than Marion. He was too much of a poet not to be conscious of the unloveliness of the cause he was called on to defend. And now, at this last moment, there was the germ of a wish in his heart that Marion might somehow have her desire, and this load of self tumble away from both of them, and be forgotten.

But Marion, who had been sitting with her face averted, and her cheek leaning on her hand, now turned toward him with a look in which pain mingled with a curious smile.

"Don't say any more, Philip," she said, with a sort of dreary lightness. "I would rather do all you wish than hear any more reasons. Everything shall be as you please: I am your wife, and since you won't be what I want, I will be what you want, and there's an end of it! It will be easier for me, now the pinch is over, and I hope 'twill be pleasanter for you. It's better, I suppose, that we should understand each other now than later. Heigho! Well, I'm sleepy. To-morrow we'll begin to be rich; and let us see who does it best!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE Marquise Desmoines had, at the end of the summer, relinquished her abode in Red Lion Square and gone to live in more luxurious quarters further west. Apparently, her experiment of life in London had pleased her, and she meant to have some more of it. She had remained in town during the greater part of the dead season, giving the house furnishers and decorators the benefit of her personal supervision and suggestions. The lady had a genius for rendering her surroundings both comfortable and beautiful: even more, perhaps, than for enjoying the beauty and comfort when they were at her disposal. She appreciated the ease and ornament of life with one side of her nature; but another and dominant side of it was always craving action, employment and excitement, and, as a means to these ends, the companionship and collisions of human beings. Her imagination was vivid, and she was fond of giving it rein, though she seldom lost control of it; but it led her to form schemes and picture forth situations, in mere wantonness of spirit, which, sometimes, her sense of humor or love of adventure prompted her to realize. At the same time, she was very quick to comprehend the logic of facts, and to discriminate between what could and what could not be altered. But it was her belief that one of the most stubborn and operative of facts is the human will, especially the will of a woman like herself; and upon this persuasion much of her career was conditioned.

After her house was finished, and she established in it, and before the return from their wedding-trip of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lancaster, Perdita spent most of her time in retirement and apparent serenity. She rode on horseback a great deal, and saw very little company. Indoors, she occupied herself ostensibly in arranging flowers and in music. Old Madame Cabot, her respectable and dreary female companion, had seldom known her mistress to be so composed and unenterprising. All the Marquise seemed to want was to be let alone: she had developed a novel passion for meditation. What did she meditate about? To judge by her countenance, of nothing very melancholy. To be sure, although no one could express more by her countenance than the Marquise Desmoines, it was rash to make inferences from it to her mind. It might well be that, had she wished to indulge in lugubrious thoughts, she was not without means of doing so. She had been in contact with some tragic experiences of late: and her entrance upon the estate of widowhood had placed her at a turning point in the path of existence; a place where one must needs pause, to review what is past and to conjecture or to plan what may be to come. Such periods are seldom altogether cheerful to those who have passed the flush of their youth. It cannot be denied, moreover, that Perdita had undergone an unusual moral stimulus at the time when she and Marion met over the murdered body of Charles Grantley; and that stimulus had been followed by consequences. But did it mark a permanent new departure? For a character like Perdita's was anything permanent except the conflicting and powerful elements whereof the character itself was composed? Were evil and good anything more to her than different ways of keeping alive the interest of life? Whoever is virtuous, whoever is wicked in this world, still the balance of wickedness and virtue will remain broadly the same. The individual varies, the human race continues unaltered. We grow and act as nature and circumstances determine; and sometimes circumstances are the stronger, sometimes nature.

There were phases of Perdita's inward existence with which Madame Cabot was probably unacquainted. The Marquise wanted several things, and would not be at rest until she got them: and, by that time, new objects of desire would arise. It may be that she had not defined to herself exactly what she wanted, or that she merely wanted to achieve a certain mental or moral situation and sensation, and was indifferent by what methods she achieved it. The truth is, a woman like Perdita is as dangerous as fire—resembles fire in her capacities both for benefit and mischief. And if Madame Cabot could have beheld her at certain times, in the solitude of her room, pacing up and down the floor, with her hands behind her back; or cutting a sheet of paper into shreds with a sharp pair of scissors; or lying at full length upon the cushions of a lounge, with her hands clasped behind her head, her white throat exposed, and her dark eyes roving restlessly hither and thither; or springing up to examine herself minutely in the looking-glass; or talking to herself in a low, rapid tone, with interspersed smiles and frowns;—if Madame Cabot could have seen all this, she might have doubted whether, after all, the Marquise was going to settle down into an uneventful, humdrum existence.

The party at Lady Flanders' was Perdita's first prominent appearance in London society, and it seemed also to introduce a change in her mood. She was now less inclined to shut herself up alone, more talkative and vivacious than she had latterly been. She kept Madame Cabot in constant employment, though about nothing in particular, and addressed to her all manner of remarks and inquiries, of many of which the dreary old lady could not divine the drift, and almost fancied, at times, that the Marquise must imagine her to be some one else; especially as Perdita had more than once exclaimed, "But after all you are not a man!" One afternoon, when Perdita had been in exceptionally good spirits, the servant announced Mr. Merton Fillmore.

"Mr. Fillmore?" she repeated. "Well, ... let him be admitted."

He had already called upon her several times, always with more or less reference to business matters, and there was a fair degree of familiarity between them. Perdita had not been insensible to the keenness and virility of his mind and the cultivation of his taste; and for this and other reasons she was disposed to have a liking for him. As he entered the room she rose to receive him, with a smile that might have conferred distinction on a night-watchman. Fillmore, on his part, seemed also in a very genial frame of mind, and they began to chat together most pleasantly.

"Now, I hope you have not come about any business," said the Marquise, after they had touched upon Lady Flanders and kindred topics.

"You are not in a business humor?"

"I don't like business to be my rival."

"Do you regard as a rival the key that opens the door to you?"

"Sir, I disapprove of keys altogether. If my door is closed, no key can open it; and if it is open...." She made a gesture with her hand.

"I shall take you at your word," said Fillmore quietly, after he had looked at her for a moment. There was something in his tone that conveyed more than any amount of conventional thanks and compliments. "As for business," he continued, "you have already put that away from you by force and violence."

Perdita laughed. "I have behaved like a fool, haven't I?"

"That is what people would say."

"What do you say?"

"I think you were wise."

"Not even generous?"

"To be generous, one must sacrifice something."

"Well?"

"It is true you have sacrificed your curiosity."

Perdita laughed again. "And that is wise rather than generous, you think? But my curiosity might come to life again some day. By the way, have you any news of Sir Francis?"

"People say of him that 'he will never be himself again.' Perhaps that would not be a very hard saying for the best of us. But Bendibow is certainly suffering. He looks old and haggard, and his mind seems out of poise. He is living at his Twickenham place: I have seen him only twice. 'Tis impossible to lift him out of his mood: you cannot fix his attention. I wished to make him agree to the appointment of some capable man to take charge of the bank, but he would listen to nothing. The servants say he is constantly muttering to himself, when he fancies he is alone."

"Can Sir Francis Bendibow go mad because his son is dead?" interrupted Perdita, leaning back on the sofa and looking at Fillmore with eyes half closed.

"He was very fond of the boy," replied Fillmore, after a pause: "and possibly the circumstances may have been more disturbing than is generally supposed. 'Tis said that he manifests some peculiarities—" he checked himself.

"Go on!" said Perdita. "My imagination is worse than my curiosity."

"He disappears, for several hours at a time, generally after dark, without mentioning where he is going."

"So you consider me wise in not sending for the packet, and opening it?"

"Why should you?"

"If I should, some time, would you advise me?"

"I would rather not."

"By-the-way, talking of the packet, how are our friends the Lancasters getting on?"

"Rather brilliantly, I should judge. Mrs. Lancaster, especially, seems to accept her changed circumstances very cordially."

"I am glad to hear it," said Perdita, manifesting interest. "She was reluctant enough at first."

"She has a singular character; not easy to fathom. Mr. Grantley probably understood her better than most people. She may have been unwilling that her husband should appear to be dependent on her. At all events, they are making preparations for a fashionable appearance in society: Lancaster's success is assured already; and for aught I know, his wife may have it in her to make an even greater success than he."

"What are they doing?"

"I understand they have rented a house in a desirable quarter; some additions are to be built to it, and alterations made; and then it will be furnished as taste and Providence may permit. Meanwhile, as of course you are aware, 'Iduna' continues to sell new editions, and all the omens are propitious."

"What do you think of 'Iduna'?" asked Perdita carelessly.

"It is strong—too strong, I should fancy, for a bridegroom."

"More knowledge of love than a bachelor had a right to have—is that what you mean?" inquired Perdita, arching her brows.

"There is such a thing as understanding a passion too clearly to feel it," Fillmore answered. "You may take up a matter either intellectually or emotionally, but you will seldom be equally strong in both directions."

"But the pleasure of emotion is only in feeling. It is blind. Intellect is sight. Sight often makes sensation more pleasurable."

"A man who is in love, madame, wishes to do something more than to enjoy his own sensations; he wishes to have them shared by the lady of his choice. To insure that he must, at least, love with all his strength. And, as a matter of experience, there is little evidence to show that the best poets of love have also been the best lovers. They filter their hearts through their heads, so to speak; they imagine more than they can personally realize. There is Byron, for instance—"

"Yes; I saw him in Italy: he is an actor, who always plays one rôle—Byron! But he is not like others. A poet of love ... if he is not a good lover, it may be because he never happens to meet a woman lovable enough. But when he does meet her ... it would be heaven for them both!" The Marquise seldom spoke with so much fervor and earnestness.

Fillmore looked at her intently, and his ordinarily unimpassioned face slowly reddened. He pressed one clenched hand strongly into the palm of the other.

"I have one argument," he said, "to prove that poets are not the best lovers."

"Arguments don't always convince me. What is it?"

"I am no poet myself."

"Is that your argument?" demanded Perdita after a moment.

"Yes."

"How would you apply it?"

Fillmore, for once, hesitated. A great deal depended, for him, on what he might say next. Perdita was looking extremely lovely, yet she had not precisely the kind of expression that he would have wished her to have at this moment. But the man had made up his mind, long ago, as to what he intended to do, and he reflected that the mood of the moment would not make much difference in the long run. Success in his project was either possible, or it was not: but at all events, a temporary rebuff, should that happen, was not going to discourage him. So he manned himself, and said, quietly and firmly:

"Though I am no poet, no poet could love you more than I do."

Perdita was perfectly still for a moment; not a nerve vibrated. She was instantly aware that she would on no account accept Fillmore's offer; but it had been entirely unexpected, and she wished to give the surprise an

opportunity to define its quality. It seemed to her not altogether disagreeable, simply as a betrayal of Fillmore's state of mind toward her. She was pleased to have won the love of a man of his calibre; and she had the good sense, or discernment, to perceive that he loved her for herself, and not for any extrinsic advantage that the possession of her might afford him. She also saw that he was intensely in earnest. A less self-confident and victorious woman might have felt some consternation at the prospect of conflict which the situation contained: but Perdita, on the contrary, felt only exhilaration.

"When we first met," she said at length, "you remarked that I would make a good lawyer. You understood me better than than you seem to do now."

Fillmore shook his head.

"I might make a good lawyer," Perdita continued, "but I should make a very bad lawyer's wife."

"I am a man, as well as a lawyer," said Fillmore, bending a strong look upon her.

"And a gentleman, as well as a man," she added with a gracious smile. "In fact, sir, if you were less agreeable, I might love you; but as it is, I like you and enjoy your society much too well for that. I would rather hate you than love you: and as for marrying you—pardon me for being the first to speak the word, but widows have privileges—I would rather love you and have you jilt me!"

There was a certain delicate comicality in Perdita's way of saying this, which, though it implied no slight to Fillmore, was more disheartening than the most emphatic and serious "No" would have been.

"I had been flattering myself with the idea that you looked upon me more as if I were a man than a woman," she continued. "Any one can fall in love with a pretty woman; and there is less distinction in being loved by a man like you, than in having you treat me as a friend and an equal—if you would do that!"

"You are the only woman who has ever been a woman for me," replied Fillmore, with passion. "The love both of my youth and of my manhood is yours. I will do anything to win you, I will never give you up."

"Oh, I can easily make you give me up," said Perdita with a sigh.

"How?"

"By letting you know me better."

"You do not know me!" he exclaimed.

"I shall always love some one else better than you."

"Who?" demanded he, turning pale.

"Myself!" said Perdita with a laugh.

"You can be my wife, nevertheless."

"That I never will," she said, looking him in the face.

He rose from his chair. "I will never give you up," he repeated. "I will go now. You will let me come again?"

"As often as you like: I am not afraid of you," was her answer.

Fillmore bowed and turned away. She had had the advantage so far. But he loved her thrice as much as he had done before, and he had never suffered defeat in anything he had undertaken. She neither loved him nor feared him?—But she could be his wife, nevertheless; and he would do anything to win her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CERTAIN change was no doubt observable in Marion. It might have been supposed that a life so secluded and reserved as hers had been thus far, would not have encountered the novel conditions of wealth and fashion without some awkwardness and bewilderment. But it was not so. She met the Goddess of Fortune half-way, and seemed in no respect at a loss how to greet her. In fact, the only sign she betrayed of being unaccustomed to abundant worldly resources was the activity and despatch she showed in taking advantage of them; as if life offered nothing but a variety of diversions, and it was incumbent upon one who appreciated life at its true value to canvass that variety in the shortest space possible. Whether she held, further, that the variety was to be inexhaustible, or the life short, did not appear. Philip was at first pleased with her alacrity; afterwards, his pleasure was less, and his surprise greater. He had promised himself some gratification in introducing his wife to the greater society, and initiating her into its splendors and amusements: but he found, not only that his leadership was unnecessary, but that he would have to exert himself to be the leader at all. Marion was fully equal to her position and opportunities. She faced the sun unshrinkingly, and, indeed, with a smile almost as of half-contemptuous familiarity. When she referred to the simplicity and difficulty of her previous experience, it was generally to expose the humorous aspect of the contrast with the present.

"What a beautiful thing wealth is!" she exclaimed one day to her husband.

"Glad you think so," the latter replied, cautiously: for he seldom could be sure, nowadays, whether Marion's observations would turn out serious or cynical.

"'Tis the best missionary in the world," she continued; "it Christianizes even tradesmen, and makes them self-sacrificing. And the curious part is, that 'tis not their being wealthy themselves, but their knowing us to be, that makes them so magnanimous. When mother and I were poor—pardon my mentioning such a thing, but 'tis only between ourselves—our tradesmen not only permitted us to pay our bills, but insisted on our doing so promptly: and if we got behindhand, they growled about bailiffs. But now—la! bless you, the mention of a bill hurts their feelings, and to pay one would break their hearts. It's a blessed change of heart in them; and would have been more blessed still if it had only happened to come before our change of pocket, instead of after."

"If we go on at our present rate, both they and we may relapse," said Philip, laughing. "Twenty thousand pounds capital is not twenty thousand a year."

"It is, for one year; and who knows what may happen after that? We might count on two years, even: the faith of the tradesmen would hold out so long at least."

"They don't ask us to pay now only because they know their money is safe," said Mrs. Lockhart, with her pathetic literalness. "And they don't lose anything, because our orders are larger, and their prices are higher. And you should be just as careful not to run in debt, my dear, when you are rich as when you are poor."

Marion looked at her mother with an odd smile. "I wish you'd let me forget you," she said at length. "You've been encouraging me all my life to be a woman of fashion, and now you turn against me. But I'm determined not to be baulked!"

And in truth, Marion had made a good beginning. The old house in Hammersmith had been shut up (it was her desire that it should be neither let nor sold) and they had gone into the new and improved mansion whereof Fillmore had spoken to Perdita. They kept a carriage and horses, half-a-dozen servants, and an excellent table; gave parties and routs to their fashionable acquaintance, and accepted the like civilities from them. It was the thing in society at that moment to go to the Lancasters: Philip was a genius, besides being nearly related to Lord Seabridge; Marion was charming, witty, and fully up to her position; her father, it was understood, had been a distinguished officer and a personal friend of the Iron Duke. Among the most notable of their new friends was old Lady Flanders, who not only honored their drawing-room with her presence when the rest of the world was there, but quite often took the trouble to drop in on them informally. She had once or twice met Mrs. Lockhart in London and at the Baths, when the latter was lovely Fanny Pell, forty years or so ago, and she now came ostensibly to renew her acquaintance with that lady, and to talk over the old times. But in the midst of these amiable reminiscences, it was observable that she gave a good deal of attention to young Mrs. Lancaster, who seemed to have a peculiar interest for her.

"You like having money, Mrs. Lancaster," her ladyship remarked one day, after examining critically a new dress which Marion had on.

"I cannot deny it, Lady Flanders."

"Nonsense! A woman like you can deny anything. But you're quite in the right not to deny it. We hear a great deal from silly people about the dignity of poverty. That is just what poverty is not: poverty is not dignified! 'Tis hard enough to hold up one's head at the best of times—such arrant knaves and humbugs as we all are, and all of us except the fools know it: but on an empty pocket 'tis impossible! I recollect when I was in Egypt, about thirty years ago, meeting a Bedouin Arab who, I thought for a while, was an exception to the rule. He hadn't a rag on him, except a greasy turban and a yard of ragged cloak dangling down his back; he was as dirty as a stable floor; but he had the bearing of a prince—though not of a good many princes I could name, neither. That man (said I) is an incarnation of dignity and a type of poverty, both in one: and if he'd have me, I'd marry him to-night! What were we talking about?"

"That poverty could not be dignified."

"Aye: very true. So, just to prove my rule by this exception, said I, 'My friend, I'll give you fourpence to go up to the top of that pyramid and be back here again in five minutes.' He dropped his dignity—it was about all he had to drop, as I told you—and scuttled up that pyramid like a squirrel. He earned his fourpence, and I married his lordship." Here Lady Flanders took snuff, and added, "You may live to find out, Mr. Lancaster, that you've been too avaricious. You weren't satisfied with a wife; you must have a fortune into the bargain. Look out you don't find yourself without both some fine morning."

"Your ladyship is kind to forewarn me," said Philip, who was always rubbed the wrong way by Lady Flanders.

"You don't believe me: but you are a poet and a philosopher, and you comprehend the structure of the universe too clearly to see into your own domestic business. You don't know, at this moment, what to make of your wife's extravagance and ambition. She used to be quite different, didn't she? And you understood her character so well, you were sure prosperity couldn't spoil her.—They are all like that, my dear," she continued, turning to Marion; "they load us down to the water's edge, or below it, and expect us to dance about and mind the helm just as prettily as

when we were unburdened. They don't know our weapons; they can feel them in their hearts, or in their purses, or in what they call their honor; but they can never see what strikes them, or how they are struck. I don't blame you, my dear: give him all he deserves: but I have a regard for you, and shouldn't like to see you crippling yourself in the process. But you have a head to see your way, as well as a heart to feel his impositions. I shall look for you to give a good account of him a year hence. 'Tis a pity he hasn't a title. But we may be able to get him one: I'll see about it. I have found such things very useful."

It was difficult to say what Lady Flanders meant by this kind of diatribes, which, indeed, were never more embarrassing than when she took it for granted that her interlocutor was sagacious enough to understand her. It was plain, nevertheless, that this awful old aristocrat possessed an uncomfortable keenness of insight; and that she generally put the worst construction on whatever she saw. Philip perceived that she enjoyed opposition, as giving her an opportunity for repartee, in which she was fatally proficient; and therefore he seldom entered into a discussion with her. But what she said about Marion, and her general tone regarding her, appealed to a certain obscure misgiving in Philip's own mind, and made him feel more ill at ease than he would have liked to confess. He smiled as complacently as he could; but the smile was painfully superficial.

From Marion herself, meanwhile, he could obtain little or no satisfaction. He did not like to speak to her "seriously" on the subject, partly because he could not exactly define to himself what the subject was, and partly, perhaps, because he feared to discover that the subject, be it what it might, would turn out more serious than might be agreeable.

"You deserve credit for being so civil to that hideous old woman," he would sometimes say.

"Not at all!" Marion would reply laughingly. "Lady Flanders represents the world. I am going to be a woman of the world, and so I pay court to her. She tells me a great many things 'tis necessary I should know. The objection is on my side."

"You are going to be a woman of the world, are you?"

"La! of course. What would you have me do? I used to be very busy washing clothes and getting the dinner, in the old times; but now I have a laundress and a cook and a housekeeper, and nothing to attend to except inviting our guests and making myself agreeable to them. When we were in Hammersmith I was what I had to be; now I can be what I please; and it pleases me to be like ... other fine ladies."

"Could you not make yourself agreeable to your guests and to me at the same time?"

"To you? Why, you are my husband!"

"Very true, Mrs. Lancaster."

"What can be more agreeable to you than to see your wife popular in Society?"

"We thought of something better than that when ... we first fell in love with each other," said Philip, fixing his eyes upon her.

"Something different: but was it better? or so wise? Are not a hundred people more amusing than one? At all events, we must take the evil with the good of our position. Love in a cottage is one thing, you know, and love in a palace another."

"No love at all, perhaps you mean?"

"No such love, that's all."

"Well, if you're content, I've no more to say."

"Content! How should I not? My ambition isn't satisfied, though. I mean to be spoken of as 'the beautiful Mrs. Lancaster' one of these days. Oh, it will come to pass, I assure you! The first thing one generally says, when one is shown a fashionable beauty, is, 'What! that homely creature!'—'tis all a matter of dress and effrontery. I shall do very well. What do you think of my gown?"

"Very fine. But what about the effrontery?"

"At all events, that costs no money," said Marion, with a laugh.

Marion's social success was undeniably great. She possessed both tact and courage—two qualities not always found in company; and she had more intelligence than most of the women she came in contact with. Her figure and movement were fine, her dress always in good taste; her voice agreeable; her face had a poignancy and variety of expression that produced the effect of beauty without being beautiful. At her presentation at Court, the Prince of Wales, who had complimented her mother more than a generation before, informed Marion that she made him wish he was young again, begad! She speedily found herself surrounded by a circle of gentlemen who were only too ready to express their admiration for her; prominent among whom was the little Irish poet, Thomas Moore, who was not disheartened by the unceremonious treatment she had given him at their first interview: and she completed her conquest of him by singing a song which he vowed he had composed in her praise. Young Mrs. Lancaster was in demand everywhere: her box at the theatre and the opera was always crowded; when she rode or drove in the Row, she was attended by a retinue of cavaliers: she played cards, danced, talked politics, and, in short, ignored the inside and celebrated the outside of life. Lady Flanders looked on at it all, grinned horribly beneath her shaggy eyebrows, and neglected no opportunity of congratulating Philip on being the husband of so brilliant a woman. "You must look out for your laurels, Mr. Lancaster," she would add: "'Iduna' was well enough for the idyllic period, but you must give us something better now; make the lady elope with the Lord Chamberlain, and leave the Sea-God in the lurch." Mrs. Lockhart, on the other hand, whose nature it was always to enjoy what was good in the world, and not to see or believe in the bad, was placidly happy in the conviction that her daughter was as prosperous as she deserved to be, and as merry as she seemed. Marion was uniformly careful not to disturb the maternal serenity, though once she startled the poor lady by exclaiming "Oh, I wish Mr. Grant were alive!" with a passionate moan in her voice like the outcry of a soul in despair.

Was anything the matter, then? Marion had no confidants, except solitude, which tells no tales. But it may be conjectured that, when she yielded to her husband on the question of the legacy, she gave up, once for all, her view of right, and set herself to adopt his own. "If Philip wants wealth," she might have said to herself, "it must be to reap the worldly advantages of it. These are necessary to his happiness: and 'tis my duty, therefore, to help him, as a wife should, to be happy in his own way. I take my law from him; I will have no half measures: and he shall have just the fashionable, dashing, rattling wife that he wants."

Having laid down this general principle, it would be characteristic of Marion to act upon it fervently. No doubt she was far from being incapable of appreciating the charm that lies in social dissipation; but she would perhaps have thrown herself into it with less of recklessness and abandon, had she gained access to it by some less humiliating path. There was a pride and nobility in her that had the effect of making her give more energy and prominence to conduct which opposed her conscience than to that which was approved by it. She startled and perplexed Philip, and fascinated him also; he found in her a vigor and activity superior to his own. She out-Heroded Herod; he had not suspected all this latent power; and yet he felt that something tender and sweet and infinitely valuable, was missing. There were between them no more silent sympathies and intuitive agreements. What was to be done and said, not thought and felt, was now the subject of their intercourse. Their communication was more lively but less satisfying than of yore.

What was Marion's idea and intention in this? Did she really believe that it was what her husband wanted? Logically, perhaps, she did so; but scarcely in her heart. Women, when they are logical, generally are so in an extreme and illogical way; as if to demonstrate how contemptible logic is. More than half her vivacity may have been assumed in order to provoke Philip into finding fault with it; and yet, if he did find fault with it, she would profess herself at a loss to know what on earth would please him. If he suggested moderation, she would say "No: I must be one thing or the other." If he replied "Be the other, then," she would answer, "Too late, now I have learnt how pleasant dissipation is." And if he asked her whether dissipation were the true end of marriage? she would laugh and reply that one cannot have everything in this world.

Thus, by degrees, were these two married lovers, who had begun their career under such fair auspices, drawing away from each other: what was best in each of them was starving for lack of nourishment; but Marion, at least, was proud enough to starve to death rather than confess to suffering. As a matter of course, since they could not meet in the only way worth meeting, they looked away from each other as much as possible. Philip tried to find consolation in his poetry: but the faculty of happy concentration and abstraction no longer came to him as formerly. The loving and confidential talks which he and Marion had been wont to have, about what he was writing, or purposing to write, were hardly practicable now; but, if he found the craving for intellectual sympathy too strong in him, there was always one place where he was sure to find it, and that was in the private boudoir of the Marquise Desmoines. She always welcomed him with loveliness and delightful words: she looked him in the eye and spoke to the point: he felt the immediate contact of her mind and nature, and experienced from it a secret sense of luxury and consolation. At first, Perdita used to inquire courteously after Marion; but after a time these inquiries became rarer, and finally ceased. Nor did Philip happen to mention these visits to his wife: what would it matter to her where he went or what he found to converse about? She probably had her own interests and occupations, of which he was ignorant. She would only laugh, and say that he was fulfilling Lady Flanders' predictions.

Once in a while, in the midst of all this gayety and resonance, Marion's laugh would suddenly end in a long, shuddering sigh, and her eyes would grow hot and dry. But she would laugh again, and utter some witty, extravagant speech, if she thought her husband was observing her. And once, at night, Philip chanced to awake, and fancied that Marion was weeping, and the bed was shaken by her smothered sobs. But, when he spoke to her, she started, and declared, after a moment, that she had been asleep, and had a nightmare. "I dreamt Lady Flanders had grown young and beautiful," she said, "and wore a dress handsomer than mine: and it broke my heart!" Whereupon Philip said no more.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THERE was in Perdita a strong element of adventurousness and Bohemianism, which had not as yet been so fully gratified as to lose its poignancy. A longing came over her, occasionally, to behold phases of life that would not, in the ordinary course of things, come under her observation. At such times she would regret that she had not been born a gypsy—in oblivion of the fact that although, being a marquise, she might play at vagabondage, it would not be as easy for a vagabond to experience the sensations of a marquise. The latter has the best of it.

At this epoch of our history it so happened that Perdita fell a victim to one of the periodical attacks in question. She wanted to do or see something a little beyond the boundaries of conventional propriety. What should it be? She passed in mental review all the resources of the town. There was plenty of impropriety to be had for the taking,—that was speedily evident; but perhaps it was the very wealth of the opportunities that rendered the Marquise hard to suit. Her motive being curiosity, not desperation, she did not wish to involve herself in anything that would lay her open to social obloquy; she would not risk her escapade being discovered by people she knew. Furthermore, there were many aspects of the shady side of life which she had no disposition to investigate. Between these two stools the fair explorer was in some danger of coming to the ground: when, all at once, she made up her mind that her requirements would be well enough satisfied by a visit to Vauxhall.

"If enjoyment be your motto," observes Corinthian Tom to his country friend in the green coat and leather gaiters, "go to Vauxhall." The record of the many moving exploits of those three classic worthies had not as yet been compiled; but Vauxhall was in its glory, nevertheless. Nor could it properly be described as an improper place: improper people were to be found there, no doubt, doing improper things; but there are few places, good or bad, in this world, of which the same might not be said. The trail of the serpent is everywhere; but, this being admitted, all that respectable persons have to do is to ignore it. At all events, numbers of the most respectable people visited Vauxhall, and were none the less respected for doing so; but in this, as in other matters, everything depended upon the way the thing was done. The Marquise Desmoines, for example, might, under suitable male escort, have spent all her evenings at Vauxhall with impunity: and that was one reason why she had never yet been there. What she could not so safely do was to go there alone; and it was no less an achievement than that, consequently, that she had in view. She would wear a veil, of course, and a thick one; and she would be attended by Madame Cabot, not so much for protection as for convenience. But she would go to Vauxhall independent of the support of the sterner sex; and it was only reasonable to suppose that she would see something worth seeing before the night was out. She made her preparations accordingly, and gave no further explanation of her purpose to Madame Cabot than to tell her that she would require her company that evening. Madame Cabot was not aware that such a place as Vauxhall existed; and it was conceivable that the good lady might never realize, even after her return, how perilous an enterprise she had accomplished.

The evening was a fine one, and Perdita, having driven to a point near the entrance of the Gardens, and given orders to the coachman to remain there until her return, entered the grounds with Madame Cabot. The place was brilliant with innumerable lamps, and crowded with people. There was a sound of music in various directions, proceeding not from German brass bands, nor from Italian organ-grinders, but from the slim-legged fiddlers in cocked hats, who flourished their bows and wagged their heads beneath fan-shaped sounding-boards resplendent with gilding. Dancing was going on in some places, the participants being ranged in long rows facing one another, while two or more of their number manœuvred, capered, skimmed hand-in-hand down the middle, or dodged behind the lines, pursued by the rest in tumultuous procession. Elsewhere professional tumblers and gymnasts performed their feats in the centre of noisy crowds, and a meagre young lady in wrinkled tights and short gauze skirt appeared in mid-air above the heads of the spectators, pursuing her teetering way upon a rope depending between two thick posts. Another person of the same sex, in a nondescript costume, remarkable chiefly for its spangles, was causing wonder by her affectionate familiarities with a gaunt beast which seemed to have entered natural history on its sole responsibility, though it was only a black bear with its hair shaved off. For those whose ambition prompted them to draw aside the veil of futurity, there was provided a long-bearded soothsayer in a glittering hermitage, who had spent his leisure in committing the history of coming ages to scraps of paper, which he disposed of at from a shilling to half-a-crown each. Around and between these various centres of interest the crowd twisted, shifted, elbowed, and threaded itself in and out, talking, shouting, whispering, laughing and staring. Representatives of all classes were there: the country squire in green coat, white corduroys and drab gaiters: young bloods in dark blue coats, red-striped waiscoats, buckskins, hessians, and neckcloths: others in beruffled opera dress, with black silk tights and cocked hats: bruisers in loose brown jockeys and white-topped boots: theatrical characters, clean-shaven, with white lamb's-wool stockings and blue-and-bird's-eye kerchiefs: sharpers in rakish but threadbare attire, their legs encased in tight pantaloons tied at the ankles, thin shoes, and with rouge on their lank cheeks: women in bonnets like funnels, or huge hats and feathers, with short-waisted gowns and long gloves, stout and thin, tall and short, coquettish and timid, pretty and ugly: a mixed and parti-colored assemblage, all come ostensibly to enjoy themselves, and few knowing whether they were doing so or not; altogether a comical, melancholy, absurd, pathetic, restless, aimless, anomalous mass of human beings, illustrating the fact that between frank barbarism, and civilization out for a holiday, the difference, such as it is, is not in favor of the latter.

After wandering about the place, and meeting with a number of trifling adventures, such as receiving proffers of gallantry from fashionable gentlemen, one or two of whom she was acquainted with, little as they suspected whose dark eyes were glancing at them behind the blue silk veil; or being swept away unexpectedly into the whirl of a country dance, in the course of which Madame Cabot's bonnet became badly demoralized; or being pressingly invited to drink beer by a hilarious party of young men and women, whose recommendations were evidently the outcome of experience;—after sundry vicissitudes of this kind, all of which greatly amused the Marquise and made her laugh heartily—the two ladies became weary of keeping their feet amidst so much jostle and uproar, and sought out a spot where they might sit down and contemplate the spectacle at their leisure. With this purpose they made their way to a range of boxes or cabinets, facing upon a large open space, and connected behind with an establishment for the supply of rack-punch and ham sandwiches. Having rented the right of sole occupancy of one of these boxes for the evening, they made themselves as comfortable in it as the narrow and angular fashion of the chairs permitted. The lamps flaring on the front of the box, left the interior in comparative shadow; and the seclusion could be increased by drawing some flimsy red curtains, which dangled from a brass rod across the entrance. Other parties were in the adjoining boxes on either side, and their conversation was indistinctly audible on the background

of the prevailing hubbub.

Perdita moved her chair into the right-hand corner, in order that she might eke out the accommodation of her chair by leaning against the partition. After she had remained for some time in this position, her eyes wandering over the multiform elements of the unorganized drama before her, she became aware that some one was speaking on the other side of the thin boarding that separated her from the next cabinet. Words, and parts of sentences, were here and there distinguishable: but these would have had no interest for Perdita, had she not suddenly made the discovery that the voice was one which she knew. Several moments passed, however, before she was able to connect the voice, in her mind, with the person to whom it belonged. It was a woman's voice, rather low, but with a penetrative quality in it: a peculiar voice, both in timbre and intonation. Whose was it? It was, of course, impossible for Perdita to see the speaker, unless she had gone outside for the purpose. Possibly her curiosity might ultimately have led her to do this: but she was saved the trouble by presently recollecting that the speaker in question was none other than Marion Lancaster.

At first, though it surprised her, the discovery did not especially startle the Marquise. There was nothing wonderful in Philip's taking his wife to see Vauxhall, although it might not be the place which a newly-married couple of their rank and disposition would most naturally visit. At this point, however, it occurred to Perdita, with the thrill of a genuine sensation, that Philip could not be there. He was out of town, having taken the coach that afternoon to St. Albans' to meet the Earl of Seabridge, who had written to make the appointment on a matter of business. This Perdita happened to know, because Philip had stopped at her house in the morning to present her with an illustrated edition of "Iduna," which had just come out; and had then mentioned that he was on his way northward, and would not return before the evening of the following day. It was the first night that he had been separated from his wife since their marriage. That Marion should have chosen that very night to go to Vauxhall was, therefore, fairly remarkable. For what purpose could she have come? Was Mrs. Lockhart with her? Could Philip have been aware of her intention?

Though the solution of these problems was none of Perdita's business, she nevertheless listened very intently in the hope of hearing something that might elucidate them. It was impossible to make out anything consecutive, the rather since what Marion said was in detached sentences, and the replies of her companion, who was apparently a female servant, were of a like character. The following bits of dialogue, however, seemed to detach themselves from the medley:

"I fear he has not come," said Marion.

" 'Tis early yet, ma'am," replied the other. "Maybe he ... " The rest was inaudible.

"Be sure you tell me if you see any one I know," Marion said after awhile: "it must never be known...."

"No one 'ud know you, ma'am ... so you can be easy on that score."

"...cannot stay here much longer. If he does not appear soon ... it might come to the knowledge of my husband, and...."

Here the fragmentary sentences ceased altogether to be distinguishable, Marion having apparently removed to another part of her box. But Perdita had heard enough to convince her that something out of the common was going on. Marion had come secretly to Vauxhall, taking advantage of her husband's absence, in order to meet some gentleman who had not yet made his appearance. So much was evident, and it was enough to place Marion in a light which, to say the best of it, was ambiguous. Perdita knew not what to make of it. Though not prone to be over-charitable in her judgments on her own sex, the Marquise was too keen a reader of character ever to have supposed that Marion was capable of an immoral intrigue. Yet here was certainly an intrigue, and it was difficult to see how it could be an altogether innocent one. Perdita, in fact, made no special effort in this direction; what puzzled her was that a woman of Marion's intelligence should have chosen Vauxhall, of all places in the world, to meet a lover in. True, there is a certain kind of safety in a crowd; and there might be particular circumstances rendering Vauxhall a desirable trysting-place in this instance: and, in short, there is never any accounting for affairs of this kind on logical grounds: they are controlled by too many unknown and unknowable conditions. A more interesting matter of speculation regarded the identity of the man whom Marion had favored with her preference. He could not well be handsomer than Philip, Perdita thought, or cleverer, or, in a general way, more attractive. But, of course, Marion must be of a different opinion. Who, then, was to her mind the superior person? The Marquise rapidly reviewed the names and characters of the various gentlemen with whom Marion was likely to be on confidential terms; but one seemed about as likely as another, and none of them, to say the truth, seemed likely at all. In the midst of her perplexity, Marion and her attendant were heard to rise, and a minute later they came out of their box and walked away slowly, looking about them. It was Marion, beyond a doubt, and the attendant was a middle-aged woman in whom Perdita fancied she recognized Mrs. Lancaster's private maid, who had been formerly a servant of Mrs. Lockhart.

For a moment, Perdita had an impulse to issue forth and follow them, and see the end of the adventure. But a regard for her own dignity, as well as a sentiment of respect for another woman's secret, combined to restrain her. It was enough to know that Marion had a mystery of this kind to conceal; and possibly (such is the waywardness of the moral sense) the revelation of that fact raised, rather than lowered, Marion in Perdita's esteem. That a woman of Marion's apparently passionate candor and simplicity should all the time be hiding so hazardous a secret, evinced a force and depth of character that Perdita had not been prepared for. She was a woman to be reckoned with: and the Marquise admitted to herself with a curious smile that, with all her own keenness and knowledge of the world, she had been totally mistaken in her judgment of her.

And yet, after all, might not the mistake be in supposing herself to have been mistaken? Might not Marion be the innocent victim of appearances? Could her presence there be merely the result of a thoughtless frolic, as was the case with Perdita herself? But against this view was to be set the conclusive testimony of the passages of conversation she had overheard. She had not overheard much, to be sure; but much or little, it had been conclusive so far as it went; it had proved that Marion came to Vauxhall to meet some man. What man? Was there any man whom she could meet innocently? Perdita could think of none—stay! Might it not be Merton Fillmore?

It was to the last degree improbable, and contrary to reason: but it might nevertheless be Fillmore, and if so, the occasion of their meeting must be business and not love: for Perdita was tolerably convinced that she knew where Merton Fillmore's heart was. But what business, that could not be better discussed in Fillmore's office, or in Marion's house, could there be between them? or what likelihood was there that a man like Fillmore would go to

Vauxhall on any consideration? There was no likelihood of it. It could not be Fillmore, and yet it must be Fillmore: Perdita wished it to be Fillmore: though whether she wished it because of Fillmore, or because of Marion, or because of herself, she could not perhaps have told.

This episode, be the significance and upshot of it what they might, had loomed so large as to obscure whatever other grotesque entertainment Vauxhall may have contained for the Marquise Desmoines; and, moreover, the sight of Marion's rashness had impelled her seriously to reflect upon her own. She resolved to go home without delay; and having tied her veil more closely about her face, and roused Madame Cabot, who had dropped asleep in her corner of the box, with her snuff-box open on her lap, she took that lady's bony arm, and they went forth into the assemblage.

Their progress was not so rapid as they could have wished. The rack-punch and other drinkables had made the crowd more noisy and boisterous, while the numbers had certainly not diminished. Perdita had need of all her wits and courage to avoid getting into trouble, while Madame Cabot was thoroughly frightened, and gave frequent vent to dismal little shrieks and moans, which had the effect of attracting the attention which Perdita was so anxious to avoid. All at once, in the midst of the general turmoil, some loud cries were heard, and there was a rush in the direction whence they proceeded. "A fight! a fight!" cried one gentleman, pressing forward enthusiastically. "A fight? —'tis a murder!" returned another. " 'Tis naught but a fellow in a fit," said a third, who had mounted on a lamp-post. "He's drunk! put him out, stifle me!" exclaimed another, with the righteous indignation of inebriety. "Come along, Jack—'tis no business of ours," remarked a gorgeously-attired female, seizing her companion by the arm. Meanwhile Perdita and Madame Cabot were taking advantage of the rush of the crowd in one direction to push their way in the other, which was comparatively deserted. By a roundabout route they were approaching the entrance, and had just passed a guardian of the peace, who was thoughtfully proceeding in a direction at right angles to the scene of the disturbance, when Perdita suddenly stopped short, much to Madame Cabot's distress, and fixed her eyes upon a group that was also hastening toward the gate from another part of the grounds.

It consisted of a man and two women. The former was fashionably dressed, had rather a dandified air, and a handsome, bright, good-humored countenance. The lady on his arm was tall, and of a fine figure; her face, which was uncovered, had a flush of excitement upon it, and her eyes sparkled. Close behind the couple followed a woman who was evidently a domestic. Perdita had no difficulty in recognizing Marion, and that elegant poet and fascinating man of the world, Mr. Thomas Moore. As they passed her, she gave another of her odd little smiles.

"So much for my charity!" she murmured to herself. "Poor Philip!—allons, madame!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE next day, London awoke to a sensation. As early as ten o'clock in the morning, it was known that something astounding had happened; though the general public still lacked information as to what it was. Had Bonaparte escaped from St. Helena, and landed at Gravesend? Was his Majesty George Third dead at last? Had the Pope been proclaimed Spiritual and Temporal ruler of Great Britain? Or had another Gunpowder Plot been discovered? City men, meeting one another on their way to their shops and offices, asked each other such questions, half jocosely, half in earnest. The people on the street caught up echoes of these dialogues, and spread them about with amplifications and variations. Up till noon, only a handful of persons knew the truth: but before sunset it was familiar in the mouths of millions. The great banking house of Bendibow Brothers had failed.

Yes, after a career of almost unparalleled success and splendor, the mighty structure, founded, nearly a century ago, by grim Abraham Bendibow, had fallen with a crash, and thousands of hapless people were involved in the ruins. Financial England was shaken to its foundations by that catastrophe; on the Continent, the news created only less dismay; but in London itself the destruction wrought by it was terribly wide-spread and apparent. By order of the Government, which received early information of what had happened, a company of soldiers was sent down to guard the bank,—a wise precaution, as the threatening crowd that soon began to gather in front of it proved. A very ugly and turbulent crowd it was, as London mobs are apt to be: and in this case its passions were inflamed by the presence in the midst of it of numbers of luckless depositors, who had lost all they possessed, and were shrieking for vengeance. Was such enormous robbery to be perpetrated, and the guilty not to suffer? A scape-goat was wanted, and must be had. And who was the thief? Who, but Sir Francis Bendibow? Where was Sir Francis Bendibow? Where was the man who had made himself rich and fat on the life-blood of thousands of honest men and women? Was he in the bank? The captain of the soldiers assured the questioners that he was not; that the bank contained nothing but money, and very little of that; and this, in due time, would be fairly divided among those who could show a claim to it. For the rest, he had orders to fire should any act of violence be attempted; and he was ready to obey his orders. Hereupon the mob laughed, as if the defiance pleased them; but it was evident that a few score of soldiers would not be a mouthful for such a roaring multitude, should they choose to attack. At this juncture, however, a fresh suggestion was disseminated, none knew how: but it was caught up at once. Sir Francis Bendibow owned a town mansion, only a mile or two distant. Why not look for him there? That was a more likely place to find him; and if he were gone, at all events the house and its contents would remain, and be at the mob's disposal. Away, then, to the Bendibow mansion! There were no naked bayonets and loaded musket-barrels there; but there were valuables of all kinds to smash or to purloin, and possibly there were provisions in the larder, and wines in the cellar. So off to Sir Francis Bendibow's!

In a surprisingly short time the vast mass of men had begun to move in the direction of their new object, sweeping everything before them, and gaining new recruits at every street corner. Along the Strand they poured, a seething and howling torrent of lawless humanity, swollen continually by confluents streaming down the narrow streets from the north; more than half of them, no doubt, ignorant whither they were bound, or wherefore they were gathered together, but all alike ready for mischief and exulting in disorder. Meantime the warning of their approach preceded them, and shop-keepers hurriedly put up their shutters, and householders barred their doors. Westward they roared along, appalling to see and hear, and yet grotesquely fascinating, insomuch that law-abiding and respectable citizens, beholding them, were seized with a strange longing to cast themselves into that irresistible current, to imbibe its purpose and join in its achievements. Alas for Francis Bendibow, should he fall into the clutches of these his fellow-creatures!

As the front of the mob entered the street in which the Bendibow mansion stood, a hackney carriage was being driven rapidly out of it in the opposite direction. Before it could turn the corner, a stone, flung at random, struck the driver on the head, and knocked him off the box. At this mishap the mob set up a jeering howl, and a number of them rushed forward to see what game they had brought down. But hereupon the door of the carriage opened, and a man got out, wearing a heavy caped cloak; an elderly man, but stout and broad-shouldered. The collar of his cloak was turned up, and the brim of his hat drawn down over his forehead, so that little of his face was visible. This man, after casting a glance toward the crowd, mounted quickly on the vacant box, and gathering up the reins with a practiced hand, laid the whip sharply across the horse's back. A ragged scarecrow sprang at the animal's bit with outstretched hand, but the lash of the whip smote him across the eyes, and he staggered back with a shriek of agony. The vehicle was now at the street corner; but before turning it, the man on the box, taking the reins in his left hand, passed his right beneath his cloak, and drew forth a long pistol. He leveled it at the thick of the crowd, which was now swarming before the doomed house, and fired. The ball passed through the neck of a gigantic ruffian, who had just smashed one of the front windows of the mansion, and buried itself in the heart of a pallid stripling a couple of yards further on, who had been swept along in the rush, against his own will, and without the least notion of what all the uproar was about. Both the stricken men fell; and the hackney carriage and its driver disappeared.

All this had passed so rapidly that few were aware it had occurred, or knew whence the shots came, or what damage they had done; and all eyes and thoughts being now centered on the house, no pursuit of the fugitive was attempted. The house, of course, had never been designed to stand a siege, nor did there seem to be any garrison to defend it: the doors and windows were speedily battered in, and the mob, meeting with no resistance and seeing no adversaries, crowded in pell-mell, and the work of sack and destruction began. It was speedily apparent, however, that the amount of the spoil was altogether out of proportion with the number of the spoilers,—so much so that at least nine-tenths of the latter must needs come off, not only empty-handed, but without even the gratification of having destroyed anything. In half an hour the lately splendid residence of the proprietor of the greatest private banking-house in London was gutted from cellar to ridge-pole, and such of its contents as could profitably be stolen had passed through the hands of hundreds of temporary possessors, one snatching from another, until everything had vanished, it was impossible to say where, and nobody—save those who had been crushed, beaten, trampled, or torn within an inch of their lives or less—were in the slightest degree satisfied. In this predicament, a very obvious resource presented itself. If Sir Francis Bendibow's house could not fill the mob's pockets, there were in London plenty of similar houses which might, in the aggregate, realize the desired end: a good beginning had been made here; why not go on and sack all Belgravia? The suggestion had only to be made to be acted upon; and in a few minutes more the whole vast crowd was in full cry toward Pall Mall. Here, however, an unexpected and chilling obstacle presented itself. The Duke of Wellington, who happened to have come over from Paris for a few days, and

had received information of the disturbance, had shortly before despatched a battery of artillery in that direction: and as the mob swept round the corner of the Haymarket, they found themselves almost on the gaping muzzles of half-a-dozen big cannon, the same that had mowed down the French at Waterloo, and which seemed cordially disposed to do as much for the cockney roughs in Pall Mall. An amazing scene of confusion followed, those behind being as yet ignorant of the passionate desire of those in front to get out of the way; and the confusion was kindled into a wild panic when the tramp of horses was heard on the left, and the black plumes and glancing breastplates of a hundred heavy dragoons were seen charging at a brisk trot upon the flank of the rioters. This charge, and the accompanying arrest of many of the ringleaders, dispersed the mob even more quickly than it had been assembled; it plunged headlong wherever an opening presented itself, and its wicked old mother, London, swallowed it up; as Spenser's monster swallowed her filthy offspring, at the attack of the Red Cross Knight. All mobs are cowardly: but the London mob is the most cowardly of all, because it is the least excitable, and is without convictions.

While these matters were in progress, the hackney-carriage had gone on its way unmolested, and having reached Oxford street, turned eastward, and rattled along swiftly toward the city. It was now nearly four o'clock, and the early London dusk had begun to settle over the dingy streets. The driver sat erect and square on the box, turning his head neither to the right nor left, but occasionally touching the horse smartly with the whip. To look at him, one would have supposed him to be absorbed in a gloomy revery: he scarcely seemed to notice where he was going. Presently, however, he turned down a street to the right; and in ten minutes more drew up in front of the office of Mr. Merton Fillmore, Solicitor, in the neighborhood of Cornhill. Throwing the reins on the tired animal's back, he got leisurely down from his seat, and with his hat-brim still pulled down over his brows, he entered the doorway and went up stairs.

He was about to lay his hand on the handle of the office door, when it was opened from within, and Fillmore, with his hat and top coat on, stepped across the threshold, but stopped short on seeing his visitor. For a moment he stood silent and motionless: then he grasped the other by the arm and drew him into the office, where the clerks were locking up their desks, and across it into the inner room, closing the door behind them.

"Well, Bendibow, I'm glad you have escaped," he said. "I sent after you to the bank and to your house this forenoon, but you were at neither place. Where did you spend the night?"

"At an inn in Pimlico."

"Your house is probably in ruins by this time."

The baronet took a pistol from beneath his cloak, and showed Fillmore that it had been discharged. "I just came from there," he remarked. "I gave an account of two or three of 'em, first."

"Of course you know your life is in danger?"

"I'm dangerous myself," replied the other, with a short laugh.

"You had better lose no time in getting out of London."

"Not I! I'm satisfied. I shall give myself up."

"That may be the best thing you can do. Did you know this was coming on?"

"I suppose so. It had to come some time. I haven't known much, one way or another, lately. If Tom had been alive, I should have tried to stave it off. It's all one to me now, damn 'em! I wish I could have ruined all England."

"You have done enough, Bendibow. What was the cause of this?"

The baronet laughed again. "The cause of it? Ask the historians of the eighteenth century. If Abraham Bendibow had never succeeded, I never should have failed. It was bound to happen, from the beginning. Have you got anything to drink, Fillmore?"

The lawyer shook his head. "And you had better let brandy alone for the present," he said. "Your head has not been right, as it is, for the last four months."

"My head will last my time," said Sir Francis, carelessly. "I can bring my wits together when there's need for it. Four months, is it? Should have thought it was four days—or a century! Tom is dead ... did you know that? You don't know what killed him, though! Well, give me something to eat, then: I'm hungry."

Fillmore opened the door, and ordered the clerk to bring some bread and meat from the neighboring tavern. Sir Francis sat heavily down at the table, and supported his head between his hands. He was greatly changed from the courtly and fastidious baronet of last summer. There was something coarse and reckless about him. The germ of it had always been there, perhaps; but it had been kept out of sight till now. Fillmore leaned in thought against the mantelpiece, with his arms folded. After a while the clerk came in, with the bread and meat. He put it down before Sir Francis, who roused himself, and began to eat ravenously. When he had finished, he leaned back in his chair, and fixed his eyes upon the solicitor.

"You're a good fellow, after all, Fillmore," he said. "I'll tell you all about it: 'twill be known soon enough, without my telling. Ever hear of Rackett's?"

"The gambling house in Jermyn street?"

"That's it. Well, that was Bendibow Brothers—that was the real place. It brought me in hundreds per cent., where the bank brought me in tens. We should have gone down long ago if it hadn't been for Rackett's. But the devil was in it all."

"I knew you had something of the sort going on; but you never chose to explain, and I didn't care to make inquiries. But I never thought of Rackett's. 'Tis the most scandalous place in London."

"'Tis nothing now, but four walls and a bailiff. Scandalous, eh? Well, so it was! I've had there, in one night, the Prince of Wales, Brummel, Fox, Rivers, Aubrey, and Dennis O'Kelly. Dick England—do you remember him? He was a great pal of mine a score of years ago. Tippoo Smith—he was another. Egad, I had 'em all! They never knew where their money went to—except those who were in the secret: never suspected Frank Bendibow of having any connection with such scandalous doings! We had Lady Kendall of Ross there once; and we made his lordship pay one hundred thousand pounds down, to save my lady's reputation. Dear at the price, wasn't it?"

"Aye, you were a clever man, Bendibow, ill as your cleverness has served you in the end. And in nothing more clever than in the way you kept your connection with this business concealed. Something was always suspected, but nothing was known."

"No, nothing was known. Do you know the reason? 'Twas because I knew how to choose men, and how to make

them work for me. Frank Bendibow was a Napoleon, in his own way; but he's had his Waterloo! The only one who ever found me out was that jade Perdita; and she forced me to pay her ten thousand pounds for it, when I could easier have spared her as many drops of my heart's blood. I was a fool not to have taken her into partnership ten years ago, instead of marrying her to that French imbecile. She is worth more than the best dozen men I ever came across, begad!"

"She is worth too much ever to have mixed herself up in any such thievish business," said Fillmore sternly.

"Maybe she is: 'tis all over now," returned the other carelessly. "I'm glad to be at the end of it. They've been bothering me for weeks past, curse 'em! bringing me their fears and complaints, and asking me what they should do. I bade 'em go to the devil: I had other things to think about. If Tom had been alive ... well, no matter! I believe that scoundrel, Catnip, that I took out of the street, damme, and had in my own office, and made a prosperous man of—I believe he was the one who betrayed us. You call me a swindler, Merton Fillmore; but if every man had been as square as I've been, I wouldn't be here now."

"You are what I would have been, under the same conditions," said Fillmore. "I neither condemn nor praise any man. Had you warning of the crash, yesterday?"

"At ten o'clock last night, at Vauxhall."

"At Vauxhall?"

"That surprises you, eh? 'Twas our trysting-place, where we met to concoct our nefarious schemes, as they say in the play: and the safest one we could have chosen. Well, I thought I was ready for anything; but when they told me that, I called out, and struck the fellow down, and I don't know what happened for a while after that. Here's a queer thing: I had a notion I saw that Lockhart girl—the one that married Lancaster—just before I dropped; and again, at the inn, I thought I heard her voice. At the inn I awoke this morning, and that's all I know about it. Faces and voices sometimes come before a man that way, when he's a bit beside himself. But what made me think of her, eh?" He arose as he spoke, and began to button up his cloak.

"Is that all you have to tell me?" asked Fillmore.

"All? No. That's all at present. The words in which I tell you all—you, or any one else—will be the last words that Frank Bendibow speaks. What do you care? What does anybody care? Let 'em find out, if they can. I shall be there: I am not going to run away, as Grantley did."

"You must come home and spend the night with me."

"No: my board and lodging will be at the expense of the government from this day on. Say what you like of Rackett's, there was virtue enough in it to secure me that, at any rate. Thank you all the same, Fillmore: you're the last man I shall ever give thanks to. Well, I'm off. Good day to you."

"Where are you going?"

Bendibow named the station at which he proposed to surrender himself.

"If you are resolved to go, I will drive you there," said Fillmore. "But you had better accept my invitation, for one night at least."

The baronet shook his head. "My liabilities are heavy enough already; I am not going to risk being the cause of your house being used as mine has been. I'm poison: but I can prevent your taking me."

And with this jest, he led the way out of the office.

CHAPTER XXXI.

It had been Fillmore's intention to call on Perdita the next morning, and acquaint her with the details of what had happened. She was, theoretically at all events, nearly interested in the matter. She was Bendibow's adopted daughter, and his credit or disgrace must more or less affect her. She might desire to take some action about the affair, and, as Bendibow was already in the hands of the authorities, and seemed inclined to be somewhat outspoken, there was no time to be lost. Whatever defense of the unfortunate baronet was to be attempted would naturally be entrusted to Fillmore; and it was necessary that he should be acquainted with the views and wishes of all concerned. Perdita, moreover, was capable not only of having desires, but of suggesting ingenious and practical methods of accomplishing them: and though Fillmore was not accustomed to ask advice from his clients, or to accept it when offered, he was ready to make an exception in Perdita's case. She had brains, sound judgment, and quickness of wit superior to Fillmore's own—more elastic and adaptable. Furthermore, the lawyer was in love with the lady, and was not the man to forego any opportunity of strengthening his relations with her. He had resolved never to give her up, and in order to carry out that resolve, it was indispensable, in the case of a woman like Perdita, to use every advantage at his disposal.

He had arranged to make his call as early as ten o'clock, which, after all, was not so early seventy years ago as it is now. But fortune, who often leads men to destruction by simply improving the grade of the path they are already inclined to travel, so arranged events that Fillmore received, while he was yet at breakfast, a short note from the Marquise herself, dispatched to him from her bed-chamber by special messenger, requesting his speedy presence at her house. "You will know, without my telling you, why I want to speak to you," she wrote: "and I send to you thus early so that you may be able to come before you go to the city. I shall be expecting you by nine o'clock. Pardon my haste and informality, *mon ami*: I have confidence in you."

This communication no doubt improved the lawyer's appetite, and imparted a more exquisite flavor to the coffee that he quaffed from the delicate cup of painted Meissen porcelain. He allowed the little note to remain open on the table beside him; he scrutinized its curious chirography, at once rounded and sharp, bold, characteristic, and yet difficult to read. A faint, very faint perfume emanated from it, reminding him of the writer; her lovely hand had rested upon this paper; her breath had touched it. The lawyer bent down, perhaps to examine it more closely.... At that moment the servant entered, to inquire when Mr. Fillmore wanted his carriage. Mr. Fillmore raised his head quickly, hemmed, pulled up his collar, and replied that fifteen minutes before nine would be time enough. The servant withdrew, and Fillmore, glancing at the mirror opposite, detected an unmistakable blush on his ordinarily pale cheeks. He bit his lip; then, catching up the letter, he kissed it and put it in his pocket.

At five minutes past nine he arrived at the Marquise's house and was immediately ushered into a charming ante-room adjoining the lady's chamber. In a few moments the door of the latter opened, and the Marquise appeared. She had on a flowing dressing-gown of white cachemire lined with quilted satin and bordered with flowers worked in gold thread. Her bright reddish hair was drawn up to the top of her head, revealing the beautiful line and pose of her white neck; and her slender feet, encased in bronze slippers and open-work silk stockings, peeped out beneath the embroidered hem of her petticoat. She was fresh and rosy from her bath, and had all the fragrance and loveliness of a sweet-petaled flower.

She put her warm hand in the lawyer's cool, firm clasp, smiled upon him, and bade him be seated. "You are very good to come to me so promptly," she said, "and to show my appreciation of your courtesy, I will proceed to business at once, and give you your liberty as soon as possible. You have not been able to see Sir Francis, I suppose? I know that he has been arrested."

"He gave himself up voluntarily," said Fillmore. "He had ample opportunity to escape, if he had wished it. I offered to help him off; but he refused."

"You...? You did see him, then?"

"He came to my office in the midst of the disturbance."

Perdita's dark, sparkling eyes fixed themselves steadfastly upon the lawyer. "In that case," she said slowly, "he probably told you.... Will you tell me all that passed?"

Fillmore complied, and Perdita listened to his story with close attention. After it was told, she sat for a while with her forefinger against her chin, meditating.

"I don't know whether to be pleased or displeased," she remarked at length. "'Tis rather exciting, at all events. I knew about Rackett's, and all that: I knew more than he ever suspected. But I thought he was clever enough to secure himself. I'm not sure but I might have helped him, if he had applied to me."

"Even if your means would have sufficed, he was past helping."

"I should have done it for my own sake, not for his," said Perdita, with a smile of cynical candor. "I care for what happens to him only as it may affect me. You won't be obliged, sir, to remodel your estimate of my character on the idea that I am given to self-sacrifice. And I should certainly not begin with Sir Francis. On the contrary!"

"I understand. You think his disgrace may affect you?"

"I only fear that he may not be disgraced enough."

"I don't understand so well as I thought."

"You do your understanding injustice. If Sir Francis was a villain from the beginning, I am comfortable. If that old story about him and my father should turn out to my father's credit, then I should be the daughter of an honest man, who was wickedly abused; and that will be to my advantage. If this man who was lately murdered proves to have been really my father, all the better. The opposite alternatives would be what I should not like. Now, as Sir Francis has given himself up, 'tis likely he means to make a full confession: and meanwhile I'm in suspense. What is your opinion about him?"

"I have been on friendly terms with him for a good many years."

"And you mean to stick by him, right or wrong?"

"As against people in general—yes."

"Does that mean that you are going to sacrifice your conscience only in special cases?"

"I could do anything to serve you," said Fillmore, with measured emphasis.

"And I am to consider it a compliment if you betray an old friend to please a new acquaintance? You are severe, Mr. Fillmore!"

She said this smilingly but the lawyer could not tell whether she were offended, or were only teasing him. If he had needed any assurance that she was not a woman to be easily duped by flattery, he had it now. He had intended merely to indicate that he would not lightly be false to a trust, but she had contrived to make him imply nearly the reverse. His real sentiments in the matter were, in fact, honorable enough, though he was sensible of a fatal fascination about Perdita, stronger than the attractions of virtue. For a moment he hesitated, undecided whether to draw back now and finally, or to go on.

"Do you give me up?" asked Perdita, with a little laugh.

"Never!" said he, with a feeling that he was pledging himself rather for the possibilities of the future than for anything in the present. "Not that there is anything in this affair to impair the most sensitive principles," he added, smiling. "Professional etiquette is the most I have to consider, and that is not involved in the present question. As I was saying, I have been in the way of knowing a good deal about Bendibow, and my opinion is that the more complete his confession is, the less cause you will have for anxiety. At the same time, from something he let fall, I doubt whether his confession will be entirely without reserve."

"What will he hold back?"

"I know of nothing in particular."

"Anything about the murder of my father, for instance?"

"Do you suspect him of knowing anything about that?" demanded Fillmore, feeling astonished.

"One cannot help seeing that if the robber had been able to rifle his victim's pockets, and had taken away that packet among other things, it would have been convenient for Sir Francis."

"But if the contents of the packet were compromising to any one, the thief would have demanded a ransom—"

"Which the person compromised would have paid,—if he had not already paid it in advance," said Perdita composedly.

"I don't think Bendibow had it in him to go such lengths," said Fillmore, after a long pause. "Besides, the fact that his son was killed at the same time...."

"It was a dark night," remarked Perdita. "However, I don't really believe it, either. But I've made up my mind that I want that packet. Sir Francis' confession may agree with it; or—'tis just possible—he may try to tell a different story, in which event the packet might be useful."

"Very true. The packet is still in Mrs. Lancaster's possession, is it not?"

"I gave it to her, for fear of my own curiosity. But 'tis another thing now. I must know what is in it. And soon!"

"Shall I get it for you?"

"If you will be so kind.... No, on the whole, I think you had better not. Under the circumstances, Mrs. Lancaster would probably prefer to have me apply to her directly. But when I've got it, I shall want to consult with you about it."

"You may command me at any time, madame."

Perdita rose, and the lawyer, though he would gladly have stayed longer, had no choice but to rise also. "Sir," said the Marquise, after contemplating him a moment, "I wish you would be consistent!"

Fillmore bowed, somewhat apprehensively: for although Perdita had given him to know that she was not afraid of him, he was beginning to be a little afraid of her. Perceiving that he did not catch her drift, she explained herself.

"You are one of the most agreeable and sensible men I ever met, on all points but one," she said. "Be sensible on that too!"

"You might as well ask me not to be sensible to hunger, or to fire," he replied, drawing a deep breath and looking upon her with a sort of sullen ardor.

"I have kept a part of my promise to you," continued the Marquise; "I have showed you something of what I really am. There is nothing to love here,"—she laid her finger on her breast—"for beauty alone is not lovable, to a man like you. And you have intellect enough: you need something besides intellect in a wife: and that something is just what I can never give."

"You have it to give," interrupted Fillmore, "whether you give it to me or not."

"And what most annoys me," she went on, "is that unless you come to your senses soon, I shall cease to like you, and therefore to be able to make use of you. So, if you really care for me, you must not love me any more."

"It is no use," said Fillmore, with a slow movement of his head: and, without awaiting any further argument, he took his leave.

"And now for you, master Philip!" said the Marquise to herself, when she was alone. What she intended by such an exclamation there was nothing to indicate: but she called her maid, and having disembarrassed herself of her dressing-gown, she proceeded rapidly to complete her toilet, and gave orders for her carriage to be at the door at half-past ten. A few minutes later she was being driven in the direction of the Lancasters' house.

At this juncture, however, fortune again interposed to hasten matters, by bringing Philip to the corner of Hanover Square just as the Marquise's carriage was entering it. He recognized the livery, and paused, raising his hat; but she had already caught sight of him, and the carriage drew up to the sidewalk. Philip appeared at the door, wearing a rather grave face. Perdita greeted him with radiant composure. His dejection recovered a little under this tonic; and when she followed it up by inviting him to take a seat beside her, he felt better, and complied. By a flash of memory, Perdita recollected a former occasion, on which she had entreated him to do the same thing, and he had refused; although then he had been a single man, whereas now he was married: this recollection made the Marquise smile secretly. Meanwhile Philip took his seat in total unsuspectingness of what was passing in her mind.

"Tell me where you want to go," she said, "and I'll drive you there."

"I was going to call on you."

"How charmingly attentive of you! In that case ... suppose we carry out my original intention of—driving round the Park."

"It would give me great pleasure," he answered: whereupon she gave the direction to the coachman.

"Have you a new poem to read to me?" she asked.

"I haven't written a line for six weeks. I was coming about this Bendibow affair. Of course you've heard of it?"

"That his house was ransacked, and he arrested—yes."

"Well: my wife ... we thought you might want those papers that you left with my wife. There's no knowing what may happen, you know."

"You haven't got them with you?"

"Here they are," he answered, producing the packet.

"They may be needed; there's no telling, as you say. It was very kind of your wife—of you, that is, to think of it. You are all well and happy—that goes without saying?"

"Oh, yes: Marion is not very well this morning, though."

"Indeed! What ails her?"

"A headache, I believe. I don't know. I was away for a day or two and she has not been quite herself since I came back."

"Surely that's only what might be expected, after being deprived of you so long!"

"Perhaps so," said Philip, laconically.

"We poor women, you know, are not permitted to amuse ourselves when our lords are away. We can only stay at home until they come back."

"That's the principle: but not always the practice," said Philip, with a grim look.

"You have not found it out?" exclaimed the Marquise in a startled tone; and then, as if perceiving that she had committed herself, she hurriedly added, "Of course, principle and practice must always differ more or less. Human beings aren't made by rule of thumb."

Philip at first made no reply, but a painful expression passed over his face, leaving it gloomier than before. At length he said, "I'm not a man who lets himself be blindfolded to save trouble. You and I have known each other some time, Perdita. Will you answer me truly—will you tell me what you know? for I see you do know something."

"I'm not likely to forget the past," answered the beautiful Marquise: "I shall remember it at least as long as this scar lasts,"—and as she spoke she placed her hand on the upper part of her bosom. "But it is never true friendship to interfere between husband and wife. If you see anything that troubles you, give it the best interpretation possible, and forget it. Very likely—most likely—there is no harm in it. One must not expect, or wish, to know all the secrets even of the person they have married. Does Marion know all yours?"

"I thank you for your advice," said Philip, in a tone that intimated he did not mean to follow it. "It seems you are aware that my wife spent a night away from home. Probably you also know where, and with whom. I shall know that in time; but I would rather learn it from you than from any one else."

"I could tell you nothing that would really enlighten you, Philip. Your best security for your wife's conduct is the good you know of her. Be satisfied with that. It was enough to make you marry her. It should be enough to make you happy in your marriage."

"Yes, I know all that!" said Philip, impatiently. After a short silence, he added, turning toward her, "You are a true friend, Perdita. May I come and talk to you, some time? The world is a lonely place!"

"If I can make it less lonely for you—come!" she answered.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MEANWHILE the inscrutable Providence, whose apparent neglect of the affairs of men is only less remarkable than its seeming interference with them, had decreed that these affairs with which we are at present occupied should be dignified by the participation in them of Lady Flanders. For, at about the hour when Philip and Perdita were driving in the Park, and discussing the former's domestic situation, Mr. Thomas Moore was calling upon the elderly aristocrat, and the conversation between them was taking a similar direction.

Precisely what passed on this occasion, it is unnecessary at this moment to inquire; but the reader may be reminded that Mr. Moore was a gentleman, and incapable of wantonly betraying any lady's confidence; and he may further be informed that the genial poet's acquaintance with Lady Flanders was intimate and of old standing. Her attitude toward him was, indeed, of a quasi-maternal character: and in the present instance his communications, whatever they were, were prompted in great measure by his recognition of her great social influence, and by the fact that her declared opinion, favorable or unfavorable, of any person, was apt to go a long way toward making or marring that person's social reputation. When Mr. Moore left her ladyship's presence, she patted him on the shoulder and called him a good boy; and he issued from her door with the light of conscious virtue glistening on his ingenuous forehead.

Next morning Lady Flanders arose early, and in the course of her toilet preparations she fell into chat, as her custom was, with her maid Christine, an attractive young person of German extraction, deft of hand and soothing of voice, who could design and elevate a headdress in a manner to please the most exacting elderly aristocrat imaginable. Christine was a great favorite with her mistress, and was the only human being of either sex to whom that lady was uniformly indulgent and good-humored. Christine, for her part, was much attached to Lady Flanders; but, with the perversity and short-sightedness of persons in her enviable condition of life, she had lately taken it into her head to lose her heart; and the individual who had won it was a Mr. Catnip, whose name has been once or twice mentioned in this history, as a servant of Sir Francis Bendibow. It would appear that Christine and her cavalier had met to enjoy each other's society the evening previous; and Mr. Catnip had at that time confided to Christine a curious circumstance which had happened to come under his observation the day before at Vauxhall. After Christine had repeated to her mistress the main points of Mr. Catnip's story, her ladyship interrupted her.

"Of course you understand, Christine," she said, "that I am convinced to begin with that your Catnip has been telling you a pack of lies, and that there's not a word of truth in the tale from beginning to end. 'Tis very foolish of you to have anything at all to say to such a fellow, and my advice to you is to drop him at once. Is he willing to make affidavit that 'twas really the Marquise Desmoines he saw there?"

"Oh, yiss, madame! He stand close by de box on which Madame la Marquise sit, and he recognize de ring on her finger, and her tone as she speak with her companion. They sit on de box next to Madame Lancaster."

"Could she and Mrs. Lancaster see each other?"

"Not whiles dey sit so; but soon Madame Lancaster get up and go out in front, and den Madame la Marquise...."

"Aye, aye: a mighty pretty story! And so then Sir Francis fainted away, did he, and Mrs. Lancaster got a carriage, and Catnip followed it?... Upon my word, Christine, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to listen to such trash: much more to repeat it to me. Take care you never open your mouth about it to any one else, that's all."

"Oh, not in de least, madame."

"There, that'll do. Now go and tell Withers that I shall want the carriage immediately after breakfast. And, Christine ... put in order the bed-room and the sitting-room on the second floor: I'm expecting some one to spend the night. Don't forget."

"I shall take care of it, madame."

Lady Flanders went down to breakfast, ate with a good appetite, and having put on her bonnet and cloak, she got into her carriage and was driven to the Marquise Desmoines'. The latter received her august visitor with some surprise, for Lady Flanders had not hitherto shown much disposition to cultivate intimate relations with the beautiful widow. But her ladyship was notorious for indulging in whims of which no one but herself could divine the reason: and in the present instance she was evidently laying herself out to be exceptionally polite and entertaining. After ten minutes' desultory chat on things in general, the name of Philip Lancaster happened to fall, quite by accident, from Lady Flanders' lips, and after a moment's pause she said:

"By-the-by, my dear, I was quite upset yesterday. I don't know whether to believe it or not. I've taken such a fancy to the young gentleman, I should be sorry to see his domestic felicity destroyed. I have always disapproved of man's marrying beneath him ... the girl may be very attractive in some ways, but such persons lack training, and a proper realization of their social duties. Bless you, I don't expect women to be saints—that would put an end to society in six weeks—but there is everything in *savoir-faire*, tact, the way a thing is managed. Let a woman do anything but make a vulgar exhibition of herself. And that is just what this unfortunate creature seems to have done—that is, if the story is to be believed: and I have it on pretty good authority. What do you think about it?"

Perdita had been on her guard from the beginning of Lady Flanders' speech. She was startled (more perhaps, than distressed) to find that her visitor knew anything about the matter; and anxious to discover why the old lady should suppose that she had any information. For there was one reason why Perdita had need to be cautious here; and that was, lest it should transpire that she herself had been at Vauxhall. That was the weak point in her position; but for that, she had nothing to apprehend. She was quite certain that no one among those whom she had recognized there, had recognized her: as for Catnip,—well as he knew her,—she scarcely knew that such a person existed, she being, herein, at the disadvantage in which all persons of higher rank are liable to stand toward those in the lower. Lady Flanders, therefore, (she argued) could have no knowledge of her own presence at Vauxhall: and admitting that, it was impossible to suppose that her ladyship should, of her own motion, conjure up the imagination of so wildly improbable a thing. No; she must have been influenced by some other idea; and it was at this juncture that the Marquise bethought herself, with a feeling of relief, that it would be natural for Lady Flanders to infer that Philip himself had been her informant. In fact, it was Philip who had first introduced the subject. Her apprehensions thus relieved, Perdita no longer saw in Lady Flanders anything more than an old scandal-monger greedy for the last new scrap of her favorite wares; and she consequently felt it necessary to observe no more than ordinary discretion.

"You have not yet told me," she remarked, "what it is you refer to."

"Dear me! sure enough!" exclaimed the other innocently. "Well, I'm glad to see it has not been more talked about. Why, you must know, my dear, that our friend Mrs. Lancaster, who seemed so precious straight-forward and artless, has been guilty of the most outrageous rashness—not to call it by a worse name! She has been...." and here Lady Flanders lowered her voice, and told the story which Perdita already knew, with much vivacity, and in a way to put Marion's conduct in a most ungainly light. "'Tis impossible to be sorry for her," she continued; "such a brazen creature puts herself outside the pale of pity; but one can't help being sincerely concerned for that poor boy, Philip Lancaster. It will be a terrible blow for him; and knowing the friendly interest you have shown in him, I thought it likely he might have sought your advice on the subject."

"Since you have spoken on the subject, my dear Lady Flanders," said Perdita, gravely, "I may follow your example, though otherwise I should have kept silence. Mr. Lancaster has opened his mind to me, to some extent; and I counseled him to put the best construction possible on his wife's conduct, and rather to secure her safety in the future than inquire too curiously into the past. She is young and inexperienced, and will no doubt reform her behavior when she realizes its true character."

"Aye, aye, you little serpent!" said Lady Flanders to herself, "'tis just as I thought, you and master Philip have been feathering your own nest with what you've plucked from my poor little Marion's reputation. I'll catch you yet—see if I don't!" Aloud she added, "Indeed, my dear, your advice was most sensible, and you're a deal more charitable than I should have been in your place. Well, and how did your advice affect him? I hope he won't lose his head and make a disturbance!"

"He does not yet know, and I hope never may know, the name of the gentleman implicated in the affair," said Perdita. "As you say, it could only make bad worse to have a public outbreak; and I don't think Philip will go so far as that until he has seen me again...."

Perdita paused, doubting the prudence of this last sentence, which, in fact, had vastly delighted the cynical and Machiavellian old lady. The latter was convinced that the relations between Perdita and Philip would not bear inspection, and that they were making Marion's predicament a pretext for prosecuting their own intrigue. She was determined to bring their nefarious doings to light, and had already partly outlined to herself a plan of operations, having that end in view. For the present, she was satisfied at having attained the object of her visit, which was simply to ascertain that Perdita and Philip were on a confidential footing upon a matter so nearly affecting the latter's honor, and that their intimacy was such as it was expedient for them to disguise. The rest would be revealed in due time. Meanwhile she hastened to declare that it was a fortunate thing for Philip to have secured the friendly interest of a woman of the world like Perdita; and that she trusted he would show his appreciation of it.

"I was going to say," remarked Perdita, who had her wits about her, and was by no means prone to believe in the sincerity of her visitor's cordiality, "that the whole story, so far as I am aware, is mere hearsay, and may be untrue. It would not surprise me were it to turn out so. So that any premature allusion to it, as your ladyship yourself suggested, might do a great deal of harm."

"Aye, to be sure," returned Lady Flanders, admiring the cleverness of this stroke; and for a moment she hesitated whether or not to give her authorities. She decided not to do so; turned the conversation into a review of the Bendibow affair, and soon after took her leave, charmed with the prospect of finally getting the better of the only woman in London whom she acknowledged as her equal in subtlety and intrigue.

We will now return to Philip Lancaster. He came home late after his interview with Perdita, and Marion having already gone to her room, he resolved to postpone whatever he might have to say to her until the next day. Indeed, he needed time to turn the matter over in his mind. Before speaking to Perdita, he had not regarded it in a really serious light. All he knew was that Marion had spent the greater part of a night away from home; that her mother had only accidentally discovered her absence; and that Marion had given no satisfactory account of where she had been. When he had asked her about it, she had merely laughed, in her strange, perverse way, had affected to treat it lightly, and had remarked that he would know by-and-by without her telling him. He had confined himself, at the time, to some moderate expression of displeasure; he was not prepared to believe in anything worse than an imprudent freak, especially while he was under the influence of Marion's presence. She had presently begun to speak of Bendibow's arrest, and had expressed a strong desire to know the details of any confession he might make; and she had suggested that Philip should take the packet and return it to Perdita without delay. He agreed to do this; and with that their conversation terminated. But when Philip was alone, his reflections became more and more uncomfortable; Marion's refusal to explain her escapade seemed very strange; and her sudden anxiety to hear about Bendibow's confession looked like a pretext for changing the subject. Even this errand to Perdita might be a device to get him out of the way. When, therefore, he and Perdita met, he was in a fit mood to receive the intelligence she had ready for him: he learnt from her, for the first time, where it was that Marion had gone, and what she had been seen to do there; for although Perdita neither told him that she herself had been the witness whose testimony she cited, nor mentioned Moore's name, she made it sufficiently evident to her auditor that it was not any ordinary freak he had to deal with here, but a matter involving all that is of most vital importance to a husband. And yet, though his mind was persuaded, his heart was not so: did he not know Marion? and was it credible that she could do such wrong? It was necessary, however, that his mind and his heart should be put in accord, one way or the other; and he spent the greater part of the night in trying to summon up all his wits and energies for the interview on the morrow. The natural consequence was, that when the morrow came he was so nervous and discomposed as with difficulty to control even his voice. The interview, which took place in the breakfast-room, which Marion entered just as Philip was ready to leave it, did not last long, though its results did.

"Well," said Marion, as she entered, "did Madame Desmoines accept the packet? And did you see what was in it?"

"She did not open it in my presence," he answered. "We found other things to talk about."

"Oh, no doubt," said Marion laughingly.

"There was nothing amusing in it, as you seem to suppose," he continued, hardly controlling his indignation. "I am going to ask you a serious question, Marion: and you must answer it."

"Must?"

"Yes—must!"

"That depends ... upon my own pleasure, Mr. Philip!" she returned, with a nervous smile.

"You have taken your pleasure too much into your own hands already. I must know where you were the other night, and with whom."

"La! is your curiosity awake again so early? Ask me some other time. I'm not ready to tell you just yet."

"No other time will do. I must tell you, since you seem ignorant of it, that your reputation as an honest woman is at stake. Bah! don't try to escape me with subterfuges, Marion. I know that you were at Vauxhall Gardens; and that your companion was a man who—"

"Has he ... has any one been so base as to tell—"

"Any one!" thundered Philip, his eyes blazing. "Who?"

Marion lifted her head high, but she trembled all over, and her face was white. She met Philip's fiery glance with a scornful look; but beneath the scorn there were unfathomable depths of pain, humiliation, appeal. Philip saw only the scorn; he was in no mood for insight. Thus the husband and wife confronted each other for several moments, while the air still seemed to echo with Philip's angry shout.

"Philip," said Marion at length, in a thin voice, which sustained itself with difficulty, "I have done you no wrong; and I should have been willing, some time, to tell you all you ask. But until you go down on your knees at my feet, and crave my pardon, I will not speak to you again!"

"Then we have exchanged our last words together," said he.

Marion bent her head as if in assent, and moved to one side, so that her husband might leave the room. He paused at the door, and said:

"I give you one more chance. Will you confess? I might forgive you, then; but if you compel me to bring home to you your ... what you have done, on any other evidence, by God, I never will forgive you!—Oh, Marion! will you?"

His voice faltered; tears of misery and entreaty were in his eyes. Marion made a half-step toward him: but, by another impulse, she drew back again, covering her eyes with one hand, while with the other she motioned him away. Neither would yield; and so they parted.

Philip went forth, not knowing whither he was going. His world was turned upside down, and his life looked like a desert. He walked along the streets with wide-open but unseeing eyes—or with eyes that saw only Marion, as she stood with her hand over her face, waving him away. Sometimes he thought it must have been a dream: but he could not awake. He went down to the river-bank, near Chelsea, and sat for several hours on a bench, looking at the muddy current as it swirled by. The sky was cloudy and the wind cold, but he did not seem aware of it. It was already late in the afternoon when he arose, and returned towards the north. But where should he go? Home? There was no such place.

For a couple of hours we leave Philip to himself, to meet with what adventures destiny may provide.

.....

At six o'clock in the evening we come up with him again. He is hurrying along the street with a new light in his face—of anxiety, of suspense, of hope! Hope is unmistakably there—the dawn of a belief in the possibility of better things. The infrequent lamps that dimly light the street intermittently reveal the expression of his haggard and eager features. Arrived at the door of his house, he paused for a moment, biting his lips and clenching his hands: then he ran up the steps and rang the bell. The door seemed never to be going to open, and in his impatience he rang again. It opened at last. He strode across the threshold.

"Mrs. Lancaster up stairs?"

"No, sir," said the servant. "She went out this afternoon in a carriage: not your carriage, sir. She left a note she said was to be given to you, sir. 'Tis there on the 'all table, sir."

A singular quietness came over Philip, as he opened the letter, and deliberately read its contents. He seemed to himself to have known that this was coming. He put the letter in his pocket.

"That's all right," he said to the servant. "I had forgotten ... I shall probably not be back to-night." He waited an instant or two, looking down at the ground: then, without saying anything more, he descended the steps and walked away. The door closed behind him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PERDITA had planned to attend the opera that evening, and afterwards she meant to look in at Lord Croftus' party, which had more or less of a political significance. Her carriage was waiting at the door, and she herself, in full raiment of festivity, was in the act of coming down stairs, with a soft silken shawl thrown round her neck and shoulders to keep out the chill, when she heard the door-bell ring sharply, and some one was admitted to the hall below. Then the sound of a voice that was familiar to her came to her ears. Hearing it, the Marquise paused on the upper landing, holding the folds of her shawl together with her left hand, and gazing expectantly downward.

"Philip, again!" she murmured. "Something must have happened. Well, let us see."

Philip mounted the stairs slowly and heavily, with his hand on the banisters, and his head bent down. Only when he reached the landing where Perdita stood did he look up. When she saw the expression on his face, she took him by the hand without a word, and led him up to the next floor, and into her boudoir. Some wine was sparkling in a decanter on the cabinet between the windows. She poured out a glass of this, and held it to his lips. He had been glancing round the room in an apprehensive but intent way, and then into her face, as if suspecting the presence of some one or of something which did not appear. After a few moments' pause he drank the wine, and put the glass down.

"If she is here, tell me at once," he said.

"No one is here but ourselves. Whom do you mean?"

"You know nothing about it?"

"No. What is it?"

"Have you seen my wife lately?"

"Lately? Three or four days ago—a week."

"Then ... she's lost!"

"Marion—your wife? Why, Philip ... lost!"

"I thought she might have come here. No, I didn't think it: I hoped—I couldn't believe all at once that she was gone. One tries to dodge such things as long as possible." He fetched a deep breath, and took off his hat, which, up to this moment, he had forgotten to remove. "I beg your pardon," he said vaguely, drawing his brows together as if to collect his wits: "Thank you. You're going out. I won't detain you."

"Sit down, Philip," said the Marquise, guiding him to a chair as if he had been a child, or an infirm person. "I am not going out—I am going to stay here with you. See! I am dressed to receive you," she added, throwing off her wrap and smiling. "Now, Philip, we are friends, you know, and you have confidence in me. Let me help you. At any rate, tell me!"

"I am ashamed to tell it," said he heavily. "I have been to blame: but I never thought of this. It doesn't seem possible in her!"

"Has your wife left you—has she run away?" asked Perdita, putting into words, with her accustomed strength of nerve, what Philip shrank from formulating even in his thought. He did not reply, save by an assenting silence, and she presently went on: "Are you sure there is no mistake? She can't have been gone long; she may come back."

"She will never come back: she left a letter, to say she thought it best we should not meet again, after ... some words we had this morning. But that is a pretext! I had a right to ask her to explain. She must have made up her mind before; and when she found I knew what—what you told me—"

"Did you tell her it was I?"

"No: she thought it was the fellow himself who had spoken—she betrayed herself in thinking he had betrayed her. Oh, what a miserable, pitiable thing! 'Tis as if she were another woman—she seemed so noble and so pure! And even Lady Flanders had just been telling me that it was all nonsense—my imagination."

"Lady Flanders?"

"I met her in the street an hour ago. She said my suspicions were an outrage on the truest and purest woman alive; but that I deserved to suffer the misfortune I imagined, and that if she were Marion, she would give me my deserts. And when I told her what I knew, she laughed, and said she knew all that and much more, and that Marion was as innocent as an angel in spite of it. I didn't know what to think: but I came home, ready to kneel down and ask her pardon, if it were true. But she had taken her opportunity, and gone."

This story was a surprise for Perdita, and she could not understand it. It seemed entirely improbable that Lady Flanders could have been sincere in what she had said; but, then, what could have been her object in saying it? Was she secretly aiding Moore in his schemes? That was conceivable, and her ladyship was quite wicked enough: and yet it was not a characteristic kind of wickedness in her. Moreover, what help would it give the fugitive couple to make Philip believe for a few minutes that his wife was innocent? On the other hand, however, what interest could she have had in making a woman appear innocent of whose guilt she was persuaded? It was perplexing either way, and caused Perdita some uneasiness: she regretted having spoken to the old plotter even so frankly as she had done. But she would get to the bottom of that matter later: Philip engaged her attention now. The crisis of his trouble had come on much sooner than she expected, and she was inclined to share (though with a different feeling) his amazement at his wife's action. Perdita felt that she had undervalued Marion's audacity and resolution, not to speak of her unscrupulousness. She had been startled to see her at Vauxhall; but this sudden culmination of the intrigue showed a spirit stronger and more thoroughgoing than that of the ordinary intriguer.

"And to think of her doing it for a dapper little tom-tit like Tom Moore!" said the Marquise to herself. "Well! 'tisn't he I would have done it for!" Here she glanced at Philip, who sat relaxed and nerveless, his chin resting upon his broad chest, his great eyes, haggard and sad, gazing out beneath the dark level of his brows; his noble figure, revealed beneath the close-buttoned coat and small-clothes, sunk in a posture of unconscious grace; his hessians stained with the mire of the weary miles he had traversed: here was a man to whom, indeed, a woman might yield her heart, and for whose sake she might imperil her renown. But what woman in her senses—especially when they were senses so keen as Marion's appeared to be—would abandon such a man as this for...? It roused the Marquise's indignation.

"She has gone, then, Philip: let her go!" she said, fixing upon him her sparkling eyes. "I can forgive a woman for

anything but being a fool! I am a woman, and I know—or can imagine—what it is to love. But she has thrown herself away for nothing. What you loved was something that never was in her, though you fancied otherwise. You can forget her: and you will! What is she to you?"

"I won't forget her yet!" Philip said, lifting his face with a grim look. "I'll find her first," he continued, suddenly rising to his feet, and tossing back his black tangled hair, "and the man who is with her! I need occupation, and that will suit me."

"I believe in revenge as much as anybody," observed the beautiful Marquise, tapping her white fingers on the arm of her chair; "but what you are thinking of is vulgar. Any poor forsaken husband can run after his wife, and risk losing his life as well as her. There are finer things to do than that, Philip. Why should you pay them the compliment of hunting them down? Let them punish each other: they'll do it soon enough, and more cruelly than you would!"

"I want the fellow's blood," said Philip savagely. "I won't fight him—I'll kill him. I don't want finer kinds of revenge: they wouldn't satisfy what I feel here!" As he spoke, he put his clenched hand over his heart.

"And after the killing—what? Suicide, to prevent hanging. It mustn't be, Philip. Feel that you are well rid of her; and let her know it!"

He shook his head. "How could that be done?"

Perdita waited until his eyes encountered hers. It would be no slight feat to make a man in Philip's condition forget his disgrace and wretchedness by dint of the sheer potency of her personal charm. But Perdita's spirit was equal to the attempt, and she was conscious that she had never been better equipped for success. And if she did succeed so far, she might safely leave the rest to him. It was a crisis for herself as well as for him. The craving for adventure, the defiance of laws, the passion of the heart, which she had been all her life approaching, might be realized now: if not now, then not at all. Perdita had a powerful heart, full of courage for any emergency, and with capacity for trenchant emotion both of love and hate. She had been lonely and self-poised from her girlhood; she had fenced herself with the armor of an alert and penetrating mind, and had made good her defense; but, to a woman, victories like these are little better than defeat. She had fought to gain that which she would rather lose. She longed to yield; to give up her sword and shield, and taste the sweetness of submission. The laws of God and man were against her; but she perceived that it was only by disregarding these laws that she could gain her desire; and she had never been taught to love the one, or to respect the other. She had wished to conquer Philip; to bring him to her feet, as she had brought other men, and then to draw back, herself uncompromised and unharmed. But now she found that no such cold triumph would content her. She was ready to take the further step that separates the thousand prudent coquettes of the social world from the few who are daring enough to surrender. All would be lost but love: but was not that worth all?

These thoughts were stirring in the depths of the look which she bent upon Philip; and the fire of them searched through the thick clouds of despondency and wrath that brooded over his mind. An answering fire began to kindle in his own eyes. For when the fierce emotions of the soul have been aroused, their sinister heat permeates the blood, and makes the impulses plastic; so that adultery goes hand-in-hand with murder.

"There is more than one woman in the world, mon ami," said Perdita. "What you have lost by one, you might perhaps more than regain by another."

"Ah, Perdita!" muttered Philip, in an inward tone. He drew two or three deep breaths, and sat down beside her. "Was this destined to be the end of the story?" he continued. "Why did we not know it long ago? Shall we revenge each other on those who have injured us?" He took her hand, which responded to the pressure he gave it. "So this is what was destined!" he repeated, "and I was a fool to leave you after all!"

"We were neither of us ready then, perhaps," she said, in the same low tone in which he had spoken. Speech came slowly to both of them, there was so much to say. "You gave me a scar which I vowed to requite you for," she added with a smile.

"The seal of blood upon our union," he responded, smiling also. "I have bled too. How well I remember all that. It was symbolic. You challenged me to it, and handed me the swords, to make my choice. In the second pass my foot slipped, and my point touched your breast. You seemed not to try to parry."

"If it had passed through my heart, I shouldn't have minded, then."

"Were you so unhappy?"

"I was weary. But new life came to me with that wound. You were very tender ... and very timid!" she said, laughing. "Was I the first woman whose heart you had endangered?"

"Well, I had my scruples. Your husband was my friend. I'm not sorry that I did so, now. I should have felt remorse. But that is all past. No remorse any more! No one can blame us, Perdita. When did you begin to ... think of me?"

"I have never asked my heart many questions, nor let myself listen when it tried to speak. Perhaps I never cared for you until this moment. But I wanted you to care for me from the first. It seems so strange, Philip, to be talking to you without a disguise. I don't believe I have ever done that to any one. I wonder how soon I shall get used to it!"

"You will forget that it was strange, soon."

"And shall we begin to get tired of each other then?"

"God forbid that should ever happen!" exclaimed Philip with a sombre look.

"Yes; one cannot expect to succeed in this sort of experiment more than once," returned Perdita, with a smile. "We should have to try another fencing match then, and you would have to push your rapier a little further." After a pause she continued, "Were you really in love with your wife, Philip?"

"We must not speak about that."

"There must be no closed subjects between us, sir!" she said, lifting her finger playfully. "We don't belong to society any more, remember: we have nothing but each other to comfort ourselves with. There is no intimacy like this intimacy, Philip. A husband and wife represent the world: but we—what do we represent?"

"Then let us make a new beginning here, and build a wall between us and the past. We are no longer what we have been: why should we recall the deeds and thoughts of persons who were not what we are?"

"We have only one thing to be afraid of," said the Marquise, looking at him thoughtfully, "and that is fear! Unless you can take your courage in your hands, mon ami, the time will come when you will need it, and find it

wanting. It is best to think of these things while there is yet time. If you fear Marion, or your memories of her, do not come near me! I cannot help you there. In all else I would be as true as steel to you. But you must be true to me. The worldly honor that we abandon must make our honor toward each other doubly strong."

Again Philip rose suddenly to his feet: but instead of standing in one place he began to pace up and down the room. Perdita, after watching him keenly for a few moments, leaned back in her chair and remained quite without movement, save that the changing glitter of the necklace on her bosom showed that she breathed. Almost any other woman would have betrayed signs of nervousness or agitation under such circumstances; but there was in Perdita, notwithstanding her subtlety and superficial fickleness, a certain strong elemental simplicity of character, that enabled her, after entering upon a given course, to pursue it with as much steadiness and singleness of purpose as if no other course were possible. She was one of those who can sleep soundly on the eve of execution, or play their last stake and lose it with a smile. And now, when, as she divined from Philip's manner, and the changing expressions that passed across his face, all was once more in doubt between them, and the issue beyond prophecy, it was not only possible but natural for her to sit composed and silent, and await what must be to her the final good or evil of the future. She knew that there were ways in which she might influence Philip; but with that strange feminine pride that never avouches itself more strongly than at the moment when all pride seems to have been surrendered, she would not avail herself of them. Had she tried to move him at all, it would have been on the other side. At last he stopped in his walk, and halted before her. She looked up at him with a smile.

"Well, monsieur, have you thought it all out? Have you realized the folly of it? Sit down here and tell me your opinion."

"I am going to play the most ungainly part that can fall to a man," he said, in a husky and obstructed voice, which he did not attempt to make smooth. "Let us part, Perdita. The only thing that gives me resolution to say this, is that I find it hard to say. But I know myself too well! I am small and incomplete of nature: hitherto I have deluded myself, and perhaps others, by a play of intellect which drew attention from my real feebleness and narrowness, and made me seem to be as broad and as deep as the reach of my thoughts and imagination. It is all delusion: I can chatter and contrive, but what I do and feel is petty and cold. There have been moments when I fancied I had overcome that torpid chill of the heart, and should be single, at last, in thought and feeling; but the chill has always come back, and the horizon been blotted out again by the shadow of my own carcass. Even now it is of myself that I am talking, instead of about you!"

"That is why you interest me, my friend."

"Yes; and I might as well stop there. I am not going to hang such a lump of emptiness as myself round your neck. Even your overflow of life would not suffice long to vivify me. A man whose wife has been forced to desert him six months after marriage—a man who, merely by being himself, could change an innocent and high-spirited girl into a miserable outcast—such a fellow as that has neither the power nor the right to claim the love of a woman like you. Perdita, I am not fit even to commit a genuine sin! May God help me to the decency of keeping henceforth to myself! What would be, at least, generosity and courage in you, would be selfish and dastardly in me. It amazes me that I can feel even the shame and self-contempt that I am trying to give utterance to. But probably I shall have forgotten that too by to-morrow!"

"All that is very extravagant and impolite," said Perdita pleasantly. "You should know better than to abuse a gentleman whom I esteem, and ... who cannot defend himself! Seriously, Philip, if I am angry with you, it is because you are quite right. I will not compliment you on your virtue, because you don't seem to think of that so much as to be afraid of becoming a burden on my hands. No—I perceive, underneath your disguise, a courteous desire to save me from the consequences of my own rashness. It is the act of a true gentleman, and ... I shall never forgive it! I must, like you, have some occupation, and since you will not let me love you, you shall give employment to my hate. It will be just as amusing, and a great deal more *comme il faut!* And then, some day—who knows?—your lost Marion may turn up again, neither better nor worse than other men's wives, and with her curiosity as to the world gratified. And then you will be happier than ever. Will you drink another glass of wine?"

"Yes!" said Philip, pouring it out, and taking the glass in his hand. "I drink to your new occupation, Perdita. May it bring you satisfaction: and may you long enjoy it!"

"Stay!" exclaimed she: "let me drink too. But my toast shall be different. May the day on which I forgive you be the last day I live!"

They drank, and set down their glasses; and exchanged a final look. Was it hate that he saw in her eyes, or love? Often afterwards that question recurred to Philip's mind, and never found a certain answer. But he always remembered Perdita as she stood there, erect and bright, with a smile on her beautiful face, and her red lips wet with the red wine.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SIR FRANCIS BENDIBOW, the last of his race, and once held to be the greatest and most successful banker in England, was meanwhile lying on a bed in a small room, in a house not his own, and with no traces of luxury about him. The bed, indeed, was an easy bed enough, though it was not made of mahogany, nor draped with damask curtains: and the room was by no means a dungeon, though the furniture and fittings were of the plainest and most economical description, and Sir Francis would not have been at liberty to open the door and go out, had he wished to do so. It is not probable, however, that he wished to do anything of the kind: nor, had he been as free as the sparrow that was twittering on the eaves outside the narrow window, could he have found strength to rise from his bed and walk across the room. His physical resources were at an end: and the physician who had felt his pulse that morning had admitted (in response to the urgent demand of the baronet) that the chances were against his surviving many hours longer. Sentence of death, come it how it may, generally produces a notable impression on the recipient. Sir Francis said nothing: he fixed his eyes curiously upon the doctor's face for a few moments; then let his gaze wander slowly round the room, taking note of every object in it. Finally, he settled himself comfortably in the bed, and appeared to give himself up to his meditations, in the midst of which the doctor left him, feeling some surprise at the baronet's sang-froid and equanimity. "Must have a tolerable clean conscience, after all," he remarked to Fillmore, outside the door. "Dare say others were more to blame for the smash than he. Seems always to have been unlucky in his friends."

Sir Francis, in fact, appeared rather cheerful than otherwise. The symptoms of harassment, suspense, and irritation which had beset him for several months past, were no longer visible. He lay there as one who composedly awaits some agreeable event, and, meanwhile, occupies himself with passing in review before his mind the incidents of a pleasant and successful career. After an hour or so of this, however, he signed to Fillmore to approach the bedside, and spoke to him earnestly, though in a low tone, for several moments. After a little discussion, the lawyer left the room. He did not return for five or six hours, during which time Sir Francis lay quite alone, save for an occasional momentary visit from the attendant on duty. At last there was another step in the passage: the door opened and Fillmore came in.

"She has come," he said, walking up to the bed, and looking keenly down at the other. "Are you still of the same mind?"

The baronet nodded, and said: "Lose no time."

Fillmore went back to the door, and immediately returned with Marion Lancaster on his arm. He led her to the bedside, and the baronet greeted her with a movement of the hand and arm, and a slight bend of the head, which, feeble though they were, somehow recalled the grand obeisances that Sir Francis Bendibow was wont to make in the days of his prosperity and renown.

"Sit down, my dear," he said, indicating the chair at his side. "Very kind of you to come. You look fatigued."

So indeed she did, with a fatigue that was more than bodily. "I am well enough," she said looking at him gravely; and she sat down.

"Fillmore," said the baronet, "will you remain outside a bit? Mrs. Lancaster and I are going to have a little private chat together."

When the lawyer had withdrawn, Sir Francis altered his position so as to face Marion more fully, and said, "I had an odd impression the other day. I was at a place—Vauxhall, in fact—on business; and something happened there that upset me. I was senseless for a while, or nearly so: but I had an impression that I saw your face, and heard your voice. And afterwards, for a time, I fancied I heard and saw you again at intervals. It was in a room at an inn, somewhere, at last. That must have been all a fancy of mine—eh?"

"No, I was with you," Marion replied. "I saw you when you fell: and I got a carriage and took you to an inn. I should have taken you to your own house: but a gentleman whom I happened to meet, and who assisted me, seemed to think it best not to do that."

"Quite right of him, whoever he was," said the baronet; "though, as things are to-day, it doesn't make much difference, either. So 'twas really you? The gentleman was your husband, of course?"

"No: my husband knew nothing of my going there. I went there to meet you, Sir Francis."

The baronet looked surprised.

"I never thought to have the opportunity to tell you this," Marion continued. "I wanted to ask you something, which nobody but you could tell me. I heard you were living in Twickenham, but, when I went there, they told me you would see no one. But, as I was going away, one of your servants said that you would be, at a certain hour, at Vauxhall."

"Catnip, for a thousand pounds!" interjected the dying man, with some animation.

"I think that was his name," said Marion. "My husband happened to be away from home that night, so I made up my mind to go. But for a long time I could not find you anywhere. At last, just as I was going away, there was a disturbance in the crowd, and I saw you. But you were not able to speak then."

"Upon my soul!" said the baronet, with a feeble grimace, "I should have felt honored, madame, had I been aware.... Well, I'm rather far gone for gallantry, now. But what could I have told you, eh?"

"I wanted to know about Mr. Grant. Whether he were really your friend Grantley."

"Aye? What did you want to know that for?"

"Because he had bequeathed some money to his nearest of kin. If he were Mr. Grantley, the money would have come to my husband: but not so, if he were some one else. And no one could tell me but you."

"Ha! Well, twenty thousand pounds is worth running some risk for," said the baronet; "and 'twas some risk to run, begad, going alone to Vauxhall at midnight, my dear! But who withholds the bequest from you? And why didn't you send your husband or your lawyer to make the inquiry?"

"Because there were reasons why I did not wish my husband to receive the legacy; and there was no way to prevent it, except to know that Mr. Grant was not the person he was supposed to be."

Sir Francis seemed not to understand this explanation: it was hardly to be expected he should do so; but, with the indifference to minor inconsistencies natural to his condition, he passed it over; and, after a short pause, he said,

reverting to his former idea, "The legacy is safe enough, my dear. Grant was Grantley—that is all the matter with him. If he'd been any one else, I'd not be lying here to-day. Your husband may keep his twenty thousand pounds, and much good may it do him! There's not much worth having in this world, but money's the best worth having of what there is." He stopped for a few moments. "It just happens," he continued, "that 'twas about this same Grantley I wanted to speak to you. 'Tis not worth while, perhaps; but when a man's going to die, a secret is of no good to him—all the more if it's a secret that has been bothering him all his life. I've been the slave of more secrets than one, and they've never shown me any mercy: but 'tis my turn now; for I can reveal 'em, and they can do me no harm! I can laugh at 'em, begad! and not be a penny the worse for it. But for all that, my dear, I wouldn't have told 'em to any one but you. There's something about you—always was—different from any other creature I ever met. Your husband's a lucky fellow; and if he's not the happiest fellow, and the best, that ever breathed, then stifle me if he isn't a fool and a villain!"

"You misjudge me and him," said Marion, speaking between her set teeth. "I am ready to hear about Mr. Grant, Sir Francis." But at this point her self-command gave way, and she burst into a passion of tears—the first she had shed since her quarrel with Philip the morning before. The baronet, who could not suppose that anything he had said had given occasion for this outbreak, allowed himself the flattery of believing that it was compassion for his own state that moved her—a delusion that did neither of them any harm; and possibly it was not so entirely a delusion that some such sentiment may not have added itself to Marion's deeper causes of unhappiness. At all events, by the time she had regained control of herself, the feeling between the two had become gentler and more sympathetic.

"'Tis somewhat late in the day to find a friend who can be sorry for me," remarked the baronet ruefully: "and there have been times when I might have looked for it more than I do now. Grantley and I were friends; but affairs turned out so, that one or other of us had to give up everything: and he was the one to do it. It looks pretty bad, in one way; but the amount of it was that I cared more for myself than I did for him; and there's not many men who might not confess to as much as that. Besides, I had more to lose than he had: I was the head of the house, and the name and the existence of the business would go with me. But 'twas a damned gentlemanly thing of him to do what he did, and I'm free to confess I wouldn't have done it in his place. 'Tis bad enough to suffer for your own fault, but it must be a hard business to go down for the fault of another man—though that's what often happens in this world, whether we want it or not. You see, my dear, there was always a bit of the gambler in me, and I used to have wonderful luck. When I was quite a young fellow, I used to sit up night after night at the clubs, and it struck me that since where one fortune was made and kept, ten to a score were lost, it would be a good plan to arrange matters so that what so many lost, one should win—and I that one. One thing led to another, and the end of it was that I set up a place called Raffett's—though only two or three men knew that I had anything to do with it; and all I need say about it now is, that more money came to us by that quiet little place, than by the bank itself: aye, a good deal more, begad!"

"A hundred times I might have sold out for enough to buy half Old Jewry with: but I liked the fun of the thing, and there seemed no chance of losing. We did lose, at last, though, and by wholesale, too. There was no accounting for it: 'twas more like a special miracle than anything I ever knew of. I knew the luck must change some time, so I kept putting in to fill up the hole, until I put in all of my own that I had in the world. Then I took from the bank: hadn't any business to do it, of course; but it was sure to come all right in the end, if nobody found it out. That was the weak point: somebody did find it out; and Grantley was the man. He came straight to me, and asked me what I was about. I tried to stop him off; but it wouldn't do. He forced me to own up: and then the question came, What was to happen next? I was a ruined man, and the bank was as good as gone, if the truth came out. Grantley was a careful fellow, and he had saved a vast deal of money; and I asked him to help me out of the scrape. We looked into the thing—he cared a great deal for me in those days, and as much, maybe, for the credit of the bank—and found that it would take all he'd got to make good only what was gone from the bank, not to speak of the rest of it; and to make it worse, there was no way of putting the money back without betraying that it had been taken out irregularly.

"But at last he got an idea, and I give him credit for it. 'It must become known, Frank,' he said to me, 'that the bank has been robbed by somebody. You are the bank, and it stands or falls with you. It won't make so much difference about me. You may have what I've got, and I'll leave the country. Let 'em think I took it, and that you replaced it. I can make my own way, somewhere else, under another name; and the concern will be saved. Take care of my wife and child: it won't do to take them with me, but maybe I can send for them after a bit. And do you let gambling alone for the future.'

"It was a good offer, and I took it, as most men would have done in my place. I'm not sure, now, but I might as well have let it alone. At any rate, off he went, and that was the last I heard from him for twenty years, except when I sent him word, a little while after, that his wife had died. He wrote back asking me to educate the child, and do the best I could for her: where he was, was no place for her. Meanwhile, I was contriving to keep along, but no more: we never had any luck after he left. That confounded Raffett's kept draining me: I had ceased to be the owner of the place, as I had promised him; but the other men had a hold on me, by threatening to expose me if I didn't let 'em have what they wanted; and they wanted more than I could find of my own to give 'em. So, what with one thing and another, when he came back under his assumed name last year, he found things pretty nearly in as bad a way as when he went off.

"I may have been mistaken," continued the baronet, speaking in a more uncertain tone; "but I had been worried so much, and had so much underhand fighting to do, that I thought Grantley meant me no good. He had in his possession some papers—letters that had passed between us, and other things—that enabled him, if he chose, to turn me out of house and home and into jail at a day's notice. I might have stood it for myself; but there was my boy Tom: and I felt that I could sooner kill Grantley than let Tom know I hadn't been what they call an honest man. There was Perdita, too: he would be sure to make himself known to his own daughter if to nobody else; and he wouldn't be likely to do that without letting her know that he was not the man who robbed the bank. And if Perdita knew it, all London would know it, for she never was a friend of mine, and would jump at a chance to ruin me."

"You are wrong," said Marion, who was sitting with her hands tightly clasped in her lap, and her eyes fixed with a sad sternness upon the narrator: "Madame Desmoines has had the papers within her reach for six months, and has never opened them until, perhaps, yesterday."

"Well, right or wrong makes no difference now. I tried to make Grantley give me back the papers, by fair means: and when he refused, I was more than ever persuaded he meant mischief; so I resolved to get them in spite of him. I

found he always carried them about with him: and then I thought there was no way for it but to hire a footpad to rob him. But it was too risky a job to trust to any one....”

Marion rose, and stood, with one trembling hand grasping the back of her chair. She could bear it no longer.

“Don’t tell me any more!” she exclaimed, in a low, almost threatening voice. “I know the rest. You did it yourself, Sir Francis. You killed him—you murdered him in the dark: and he was the noblest, sweetest, most generous of men, and never harmed a human being! Can nothing make you feel that you have been wicked? And you tried to kill him once before—yes! that night of the thunderstorm. A man like you has no right to die! You ought to live forever, and have no rest!”

“Well, my dear,” said the baronet, not seeming to feel much emotion, “Providence is more merciful than you are, though not so just, I dare say: it doesn’t give a man earthly immortality on account of his sins. You see, I can’t feel as shocked at myself as you do; I’ve known myself so long, I’ve got used to it. And if you would think over my crimes, quietly, for the next twenty years or so, maybe you’d not be so anxious to have me damned. We are what we are, and some of us have bad luck into the bargain. That’s all! I’m glad you found me out, however you did it; for I don’t believe I should have had the pluck to confess I killed him, when it came to the point. It was a dirty piece of business; and if it hadn’t been for ... one thing, I was just as likely to put the bullet into my own heart as his. But,” continued the dying man, by a great effort raising himself in his bed, and lifting his arms, while the blood rushed to his face, making it dark and lurid, “but when I knew that in taking his life I had been led on to take the life of my own darling boy—that I loved a thousand times more than I hated anybody else—by the living God, I could have murdered Grantley over again, out of revenge!”

These are the last words known to have been uttered by Sir Francis Bendibow. He became unconscious soon after, and died the same afternoon. They were terrible words; and yet, when Marion recalled them long afterwards, it seemed to her that there might be, perhaps, something in them indicative of a moral state less abjectly depraved than was suggested by his previous half-complacent apathy.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE morning after Bendibow's death, Merton Fillmore sent word to the Marquise Desmoines that he would call upon her that evening, if she found it convenient to receive him. She returned answer that she would expect him.

Ever since her parting with Philip Lancaster, the Marquise had kept herself secluded. After such an experience, even she needed time to draw her breath and look about her. It was more like defeat than anything else that had ever happened to her. It was defeat in fact, if not altogether in form. She had, whether consciously or unconsciously, shaped all her course and purpose to the end of being loved by Philip; and he did not love her. Nothing could disguise that truth: and it was additionally embittered by the discovery, almost unexpected to herself, that she not only preferred him to other men, but that she loved him, and that he was the only man she ever had loved. She had allowed him to perceive this, and the perception had failed to kindle in him a response. No doubt, she had assumed on the instant the semblance of cool indifference; she had divined her failure almost before she had made it; she had listened to his reply with a smile, and had dismissed him with defiance; but, after all, she knew in her inmost heart that she had been worsted; and whether Philip were as intimately conscious of it, or were conscious of it at all, made little difference. She had offered him more than any woman can offer with impunity, and he had professed himself unable to accept it.

After he left her, she was for a time supported by the ardor of defiant anger, which made her feel as if she had never been conquered,—had scarcely begun to fight, indeed: and had illimitable reserves of strength still to draw upon. But when this mood had flamed itself out, she began to realize how little her strength and resources could avail her. She had no longer any object to contend for. She had lost the day, and, no matter what her vigor and courage might be, the day in which she might redeem herself would never dawn. Philip was, to all intents and purposes, exanimate; and she might as hopefully strive, by dint of her beauty and brilliance, to restore life to a corpse from the hospital, as to stimulate Philip to feel even so much emotion toward her as would make him care whether she loved him or hated him. The shock of Marion's loss, and the self-revelation it had wrought in him, had put him above or below the reach of other feelings. He had collapsed; and it was this collapse which had rendered him indomitable even by the Marquise Desmoines.

What was left to her? The injury was too deep not to demand requital. But how could she avenge herself on Philip? What could she make him suffer that he was not already suffering? His life was broken up: he had lost his wife and his place in the world,—for she knew Philip well enough to be aware that it would be a long while (if ever) before a man of his organization would be able to renew his relations with society. Surely hatred itself could not pursue him further. There was nothing to be done.

And yet to do nothing was intolerable to Perdita: she could have borne anything else better. Inaction gnawed her heart and made her existence bitter. But what could she do? Should she kill him? No: life could hardly be so dear to him as to make that worth while. Should she kill herself? That, indeed, was as likely as anything else to put an end to her unrest: but should she allow Philip to imagine that she had died for love of him? She laughed, and shook her head. It was while she was in this mood that Fillmore's letter came, mentioning Bendibow's death. The news interested her, for she fancied it might in some way bear upon the subject that possessed her thoughts. She awaited his arrival with impatience.

He came punctually, as usual; but his face and demeanor, as he entered the room, were singularly reserved and sombre. The Marquise, if she noticed this at all (and it would be hard to say what a woman like her does not notice), laid it to the account of the death-scene at which he had been present. As for herself, she felt no regret, and was not in the vein to express what she did not feel. She greeted the lawyer coolly and briefly, and went at once to the subject.

"Sir Francis has died in good time, and with good taste. I had not given him credit for so much consideration."

"Yes, madame," replied Fillmore, bowing. "He has solved many difficulties. Possibly it was only the struggle against misfortune that kept him in life so long. The death of his son was his death-blow. His ruin was a relief to him."

"Fortune and misfortune are in our feeling, not in our circumstances: that is an old story," observed Perdita. "Well, did he die repentant?"

"He was unconscious for several hours before his death, and I was not present when his last words were spoken."

"'Tis a pity he should have been alone. He might have said something worth hearing. A good many secrets have died with him."

"He was not alone, madame."

"Who was with him?"

"Mrs. Lancaster."

Perdita was dumb for a moment. "Did you say Mrs. Philip Lancaster?" she then asked, bending forward curiously.

Fillmore bowed in assent.

"I did not know she was in London," said the Marquise, after another short pause. "Her husband certainly was not aware.... How did this happen?"

"It was the baronet's wish," replied Fillmore. "Her name had been often mentioned by him since his catastrophe: her kind behavior to him at Vauxhall—"

"What had she to do with him at Vauxhall?" interrupted Perdita, making herself erect in her chair.

"I am not acquainted with the details of the matter," said Fillmore, "but it seems that she wished to consult him on a subject of importance, and, owing to the mysterious habits he had adopted of late, she was obliged to seek him at Vauxhall. He was taken with a fit—indeed, I believe it was the disturbance which this occasioned that first discovered him to her—"

"This is a strange story!" Perdita broke out. "I had heard that Mrs. Lancaster was at Vauxhall, but the name of the gentleman with her was not Francis Bendibow."

"You yourself saw her there, did you not?" inquired Fillmore, with a steady look.

"Are you a detective as well as a solicitor, Mr. Fillmore?" demanded the Marquise, smiling ironically; "I did see her there, on the arm of Mr. Tom Moore."

"I do but repeat what is known and spoken of by others," said Fillmore: "but it seems to be generally conceded that her meeting with Moore was accidental,—he assisted her in getting a carriage to take the baronet away. She was guilty of great imprudence, but, it seems, in a cause which she thought urgent enough to justify it. As I was saying, Sir Francis never lost the recollection of her kindness, and toward the last he expressed a strong desire to speak with her. I went to her house in search of her; but was informed that she had been absent since the preceding day, and it was not known where she was."

"We must admit her conduct to be singular," remarked Perdita with a slight laugh. "No doubt, as you say, it was justifiable! Where did you find her?"

"Quite accidentally, I met Lady Flanders, and, in the course of conversation, was informed by her ladyship that Mrs. Lancaster was at her house."

"Ah! Lady Flanders.... But—well, go on!"

"Lady Flanders said," continued Fillmore, fixing his eyes in a marked way on Perdita, "that Mrs. Lancaster had felt herself grossly injured by ... a person from whom she had every right to expect different treatment, and that, in her distress and defenselessness, she had accepted Lady Flanders' proposal to make her ladyship's house her home for a few days."

"Really, Mr. Fillmore, a less charitable man than you might say that Lady Flanders had assisted Mrs. Lancaster to run away from her husband."

"Supposing Mrs. Lancaster to have had that intention," replied Fillmore coldly, "the general opinion seems to be that her husband had spared her the necessity."

"How do you wish me to understand that?"

"That Philip Lancaster had planned an elopement on his own account."

"Positively, you amuse me!" exclaimed Perdita, gazing at him intently. "Are you going to add the inspiration of a prophet to your two other professions? Tell me, with whom has Mr. Philip Lancaster planned to elope?"

"If you need to be told that," replied Fillmore, after a considerable pause, "there is nothing to tell."

The Marquise smiled. "Ah, Mr. Fillmore," said she, "you are not so clever a man as I thought! Mr. Lancaster came to me two nights ago; he was very tired and hungry, poor fellow; he had been hunting his wife over London, and seemed to think she might have taken refuge with me. I consoled him as well as I could, and sent him away. I have not seen or heard of him since then. Unfortunately, I was not in a position to give him the comforting information I have just heard from you. I am surprised that Lady Flanders, who seems to be such a friend of homeless wanderers, had not given him his wife's new address. He told me that he had spoken with her ladyship that very afternoon."

"I know nothing about that," said Fillmore, whose sombre aspect had lightened somewhat during this speech; "but I found Mrs. Lancaster at Lady Flanders' house: she went with me to see Bendibow, and afterwards I accompanied her back to Lady Flanders'. She seemed to be in a very low and anxious frame of mind; and there can be no doubt that she has been with Lady Flanders ever since she left her own house. As to the suggestion about Mr. Moore, I have the honor of that gentleman's acquaintance, and I could easily convince Mr. Philip Lancaster that he has no cause for misgiving on that score."

"The fact still remains that Mr. Lancaster did not know where his wife was. However, we can let that pass. Has it occurred to you, sir, that you owe me an apology?"

"I cannot find words in which to apologize for so great a wrong," said Fillmore, in a husky voice. "I cannot express, either, the joy I feel that it was a wrong. Oh, madame.... Perdita! how can I think about you or judge you dispassionately! You cannot punish me so much as the anguish I have endured has already punished me! I thought I could not bear not to have you love me: but now, that seems a delight in comparison with the misery of thinking that you had given yourself to him."

"Well, there seems to have been a contagion of error," said Perdita, with a queer smile. "Now that so much has been corrected, perhaps you may even come to your senses with regard to me! You are certainly a persistent man: 'tis a pity I am not a yielding woman."

"I can never give you up!" Fillmore said again.

"What! Had you not given me up an hour ago?"

"No: less than ever. I would have followed you—anywhere!"

"It would have been in vain," said Perdita, shaking her head. "I have too much regard for you to let you pick me out of the mud, Mr. Fillmore: and too little regard for myself to submit to be saved on those terms. When I am driven to extremity, there is another bridegroom who is waiting for me even more patiently than you are, and who, unlike you, is certain to have me at last."

"Do not smile so, and talk of death!" exclaimed Fillmore passionately. "There is more life in the thought of you than in the flesh and blood of any other woman!"

"You are welcome to the thought of me, if you will forego the rest!" returned Perdita with a sigh. "But really, sir, that is a finer compliment than I should have expected to hear from a man so reserved as you. No—let us speak of something else. If all that you tell me be true, we may expect a reconciliation between Mr. and Mrs. Lancaster. It will only be a question of time."

Fillmore moved his head, but said nothing.

"You have no sentiment," pursued the Marquise laughingly. "It will be an affecting scene, if you think of it! Lovers' reconciliations are worth the quarrel it costs to have them. Our friend Philip will be happier than ever, and he will give us a beautiful poem, inspired by his new experience; something that will make 'Iduna' seem crude and cold! There will be no drawback to his contentment!"

Something ironical in Perdita's tone struck Fillmore's ear, but he did not understand it, and remained silent.

"Too much happiness is dangerous," she went on: "it would be the part of friendship to abate a little of it. What do you think?"

"I am no friend of Mr. Lancaster's," said Fillmore, shortly.

"You are very dull, sir!" exclaimed the Marquise, giving him a sparkling glance. "If you are no friend of his, think how much reason I have to be his friend! When he was a youth, whom no one knew, he formed the acquaintance of the Marquis, and came to our house, and read me his first little poems, which I praised, and encouraged him to write more, so that his first book, the 'Sunshine of Revolt,' was my godchild, and at that time I was its only reader. I saw that he had intellect; but his nature was timid, suspicious, self-conscious, and cold; he dissected himself and mistrusted others. He had the poetic gift, but wanted the courage and vigor of the heart to use it: his fear of ridicule made him prefer criticism to creation: he could imagine himself to be so much that he was content to become nothing. His ambition made him vain, and his vanity made him indolent. He needed a stronger and more active spirit,—something to make him plunge into difficulties and struggles, and not to care if fools shrugged their shoulders. I thought I could supply what he lacked,—that I could give him the blood and the warmth to render his great faculties practical. He ought to have understood the value of such companionship as I offered him!" said Perdita, speaking with more intensity. "But what he says is not like what he is; he is a man who has fears and hesitations,—the kind of man that I despise! What right had he to marry? Was not I better than marriage? But really, Mr. Fillmore, these poets are great fools: they promise a great deal, and some of them write very charmingly; but a lawyer is more of a man!"

Fillmore's face indicated that he was beginning to recover from his dullness. Still, he dared not hope too soon; it might be that Perdita's words, as well as Philip's, could imply more than she meant. He waited to hear more. But she recommenced at an unexpected point.

"I have read those papers," she said, rising and going to a secretary, from a drawer of which she took Grantley's packet. "Sir Francis knew when to die: here is what would have made it impossible for him to live. He was false, cowardly and selfish beyond belief! And my father—Charles Grantley—was as noble as the other was base: too noble! I have no sympathy with such generosity. Let a man be as true as steel, but as hard and deadly, too, when there is need! But he was my father: I know that now, and I'm going to act upon it!"

"In what way?" asked Fillmore.

"To have my rights," answered Perdita, lifting her head.

"Who has deprived you of them?"

She laughed. "That is no more than I expected. I have been yielding and complaisant so long that people—even you—have forgotten I have any rights to claim. But I am tired ... that does not amuse me any longer. I am going to take what my father gave me."

"What did he give you?"

"Twenty thousand pounds."

"Of course you are not in earnest," said Fillmore with a smile.

"Mr. Lancaster will not agree with you."

The lawyer looked at her, and became grave. "It is too late. You passed it on to him."

"No!" said Perdita, planting her white hand on the papers upon the table. "Philip Lancaster appropriated a legacy which I did not know belonged to me. There was at that time no proof that the author of the will was my father. There was only a presumption, which, for reasons that I gave you, I refused to adopt. The death of Sir Francis, and the opening of this packet, have changed the whole matter. The proof is here, and the reasons that might influence me to disregard it no longer exist. I shall claim my right: I shall take what is mine: let him prevent me who can!"

"The possession by the other party makes against you," said Fillmore. "Your surrender of the property would be an obstacle to your claiming it now. It is not easy to play fast and loose with twenty thousand pounds. You should have stated your objections earlier."

"Tell me, sir, what proof was there, until now, that Mr. Grant was my father?"

"There was probability; and an understanding that proof could be produced if necessary."

"But it was not produced! And in the absence of it, how could Philip Lancaster, any more than I, lay claim to the legacy? His belief goes for nothing; a man would believe anything for the sake of twenty thousand pounds. The will directs that he is to possess the legacy only in case that I reject it. It is only within these two days that I have known it was mine to reject. But I shall not reject it; I shall keep it:—do you mean to tell me that he has had the audacity to lay hands upon it?"

"I scarcely know even now whether you are in earnest," said Fillmore, who was certainly perplexed. "There may have been technical delays in the way of his actually touching the money, but there can be no doubt that he has been regarded as the owner of it, and has acted accordingly. He has incurred expenses, in the furnishing of his house, and other matters, which he never could have afforded otherwise. For you to insist upon your claim now, would inevitably be his ruin."

"I have nothing to do with that," said the Marquise, smiling, "though I may be sorry that he has been so precipitate."

"This can only be caprice in you," said Fillmore, gravely. "The legacy is nothing to you. You have property to ten times that amount."

"I must be allowed to understand my own requirements, sir."

"You must have other reasons than those you state. It is not to benefit yourself but to injure him that you do this."

The Marquise shrugged her shoulders. "Say, if you like, that to injure him benefits me."

"How should it benefit you?"

"How should it not? Does it not benefit me to injure my enemy?—the man I hate! Has he not injured me? Is it no injury to have such things said of me as you repeated a while ago? Could they have been said if he had not authorized them? Do you pretend you love me, and do you let me be insulted by a man who gives it to be believed that I agreed to elope with him? Oh, if I were a man ... no! A woman is better!—except when she is fool enough to love!"

Fillmore stood up, his face reddening. "No man shall insult you without giving an account to me," he said, speaking with a certain stiffness of utterance. "My love for you gives me that right, whether you admit it or not. I should be slow to believe that Mr. Lancaster can be capable of doing what you suspect; but if he did, he shall answer for it."

"In what way?"

"In the way customary between gentlemen," replied Fillmore haughtily.

"That will not suit me," said the Marquise, shaking her head. "I am neither old enough nor young enough to care to be the subject of a duel, especially on such grounds. I must fight my battles in my own way; but you shall be my weapon, if you will."

"Your weapon?"

"Yes: my legal thunderbolt! You shall conduct my case against him."

"I cannot do that!" said Fillmore after a pause.

"Can you not? Then there can be nothing more between you and me. I will never see you again."

"It would not be honorable," exclaimed Fillmore, bending forward and grasping the edges of the table with his hands. "I was employed to draw up the will, and I have acted in Mrs. Lancaster's interests, and in those of her husband. I could not retain my standing and integrity as a lawyer, and do what you ask. I could not justify it to myself as a man. My profession has brought me to a knowledge of all the crime and weakness and rascality in human nature; and I have always tried to do right and justice, and I have never, for any cause, been a rascal myself. If I were to do this, it would be the last act of my professional life." Fillmore was extraordinarily moved; his voice faltered, and he stopped.

"In other words," said Perdita, with the quiet mercilessness that sometimes showed itself in her character, "you think our acquaintance has gone far enough. I agree with you, sir. I will not detain you any longer."

"No: I cannot give you up," returned Fillmore, after a short silence. He sighed heavily. In the struggle of opposing wills, he felt that the woman had the advantage. "If I refuse," he said, "you threaten me with a punishment greater than I can bear. But if I consent ..." he stepped forward and put his hands strongly upon her shoulders, and looked with power into her eyes. It was the first time he had ever touched her, save to take her hand in greeting or farewell. She could feel the emotion that made his arms vibrate. It gave her a new impression of him.

"What do you wish?" she asked in a gentle tone.

"What will you give me in return for what I give you?"

Perdita looked down, and hesitated.

"What will satisfy you?" she asked at length.

"You will satisfy me! Nothing else. Will you give me yourself?"

"For that, you will do all I ask?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, let it be so!" she said, looking up with a momentary smile.

Fillmore stooped and kissed her. A strange, reckless sort of happiness filled his heart. He was no longer the man he had been; but Perdita was his reward.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ONE morning Lady Flanders, enveloped in a dressing-gown bought at a bazaar in Damascus, which made her look like the Grand Vizier in the Arabian Nights, knocked at the room which her guest, Mrs. Lancaster, was occupying. Marion, who had not yet finished her toilet, opened the door, and Lady Flanders stalked in. She merely nodded a good morning, and did not at once explain the reason of this early visitation. With her hands behind her, she began to pace slowly up and down the room, her head bent and her shaggy brows drawn together: altogether rather an appalling spectacle. At length she halted, felt in the pocket of her caftan for her snuff-box, and not finding it there, sniffed, rubbed her nose, and went up to Marion, who had resumed the combing of her hair which the entrance of her ladyship had interrupted.

"How is your health this morning, my dear?" she demanded, scowling down upon her.

"I thank you; much as usual," replied Marion apathetically.

"Nonsense! You are not well at all: you're as pale and peaked as a charity-school girl!" returned the old lady testily. "You haven't improved at all since you came to my house, Mrs. Lancaster: and yet I've paid you every attention. I'm displeased at it!"

"You have been most kind to me, and I—" began Marion; but the other interrupted her with a peremptory gesture.

"You are altogether in the wrong, Mrs. Lancaster," she exclaimed, "and you should have discernment enough to be aware of it. I have shown you no kindness whatever: 'tis a thing I never do any one; I have simply pleased myself, as I always do: and 'tis as likely as not I have got you and your husband into a precious scrape, only for the gratification of my own antipathies. I have always abominated that little devil of a Marquise Desmoines, and I was determined to let her know it! That is the whole secret of the matter!"

"I shall not alter my opinion, madam," returned Marion with a smile, "and I can never forget the sympathy and protection you have given me. But I am unhappy: and I feel, now, that I did wrong to come here. I should have stayed at home with my mother."

"This is assurance, upon my honor! Where are your manners, ma'am? Pray, is my house not good enough for you?" But, having made these inquiries in a haughty and fierce way, the great lady suddenly took Marion in her arms and kissed her on both cheeks.

"I am an old fool, my dear," said she, sitting down with a disconsolate air, and crossing one leg over the other. "I'm not fit to be trusted alone any more. My likings and my dislikings both get me into trouble. I fell in love with you the minute I set eyes on you. For fifty years, at least, I have been ashamed of being a woman, and tried all I could to act as if I were a man—doing as men do, and thinking men's thoughts—or, at any rate, talking as if I thought them. And now, since I met you, I only wish I were more a woman than I am! My dear, you are the finest creature that ever stood in petticoats, and nobody is good enough for you. And when I fancied that that Philip of yours didn't appreciate the prize he had won—which, if he were the best man alive, he couldn't deserve—it made me so angry that I could have cut that handsome white throat of his from one ear to the other. And as if that wasn't enough, he must accuse you of improper behavior—"

"It was my own fault, Lady Flanders," said Marion, interrupting. "I'm sure I behaved very badly, and when I wouldn't tell him what I had been doing, I think he did quite right to be angry. I would ask him to forgive me, if he were here."

"Don't cry, my dear, it doesn't suit your character, and you only do it because you're weak and worn out, and God knows I don't wonder at it! As to asking him to forgive you, you would do no such thing—don't tell me!—until you were convinced he had done nothing to be forgiven for. And now," continued her ladyship, again diving into her pocket after the absent snuff-box, "I've come to tell you that I've begun to think he may not have been quite so bad as I thought. Mind—I know nothing more yet: I only make an inference. You know I pounced down upon that clever little wretch, the Marquise; and from her manner, and some things she said, my suspicions about her and that husband of yours were rather confirmed than disconcerted. So, rather than have you left alone in your house for people to snigger at, I persuaded you to come to me for a few days, until we could know exactly how matters stood. Poor child! You were in a state of mind not to care what became of you; and when I met your husband, that same afternoon, I had half a—"

"You met him, Lady Flanders? You never told me that!" exclaimed Marion, looking up and flushing.

"I know I didn't: why should I? I had no doubt he was on the way to that Marquise; and it was the next day, as I tell you, that I pounced down on her. Well, then ... you shouldn't interrupt me, my dear; and—I wish you'd touch that bell: I think I must have left my snuff-box on my dressing-table."

The box was brought, and her ladyship took a copious pinch and proceeded. "Last night I heard something that disturbed and surprised me a good deal, and the source it came from was unimpeachable. I saw Mr. Merton Fillmore, and he told me that Madame Desmoines is going to bring an action against Mr. Lancaster to recover the money Mr. Grantley left him. At first I didn't believe it, but he was quite serious, and said that he was her solicitor in the matter. I told him he ought to be ashamed of himself:—but 'tis no use scolding men like him, they only bow and grin, and that's an end of it! I asked him why she hadn't claimed it before, and he tried to make up some nonsense about her having only just received proof that she was entitled to it. I told him it was a scandalous piece of business, and that he ought to have known better than to let himself be mixed up in it; and that I didn't believe the case had a leg to stand on. But between you and me, my dear, I shouldn't wonder if that particular kind of thieving that they call legal justice was on her side; and I fear there may be danger. But what I was going to say is, that if she is actually setting to work to ruin your husband, it doesn't look much as if they were in love with each other, does it?"

Marion clasped her hands together softly in her lap, and her eyes shone. A long sigh breathed from her lips, which smiled tremulously.

"Aye, aye," said Lady Flanders, sighing also, and scowling, "I know how it is! You are feeling happier than if I'd just told you you'd been made heiress of all the money in the Bank of England: and by-and-by, as soon as you're able to think of anything else but Philip, you'll turn round and fly into a terrible passion with me, because I misled you about him. But upon my honor, my dear, it was only your dignity and welfare I was thinking of. And mind you, this may be nothing but a blind, after all."

"No," said Marion, in a tender, preoccupied tone: "it is true; I am sure of it. I have been the wicked one. If he will only forgive me!"

"Never tell a person of my age and character that you are wicked," said Lady Flanders dryly; "it is not in good taste, for it makes 'em wonder what the Recording Angel will call them. As to forgiving you, if he were here, and didn't—"

"Do you know where he is?" exclaimed Marion, springing up. "Is he in the house? Oh, Lady Flanders, is he—"

"My dear, I don't know where he is, any more than you do: but there's no doubt he will be found soon enough, and I hope the lesson he's had will have done him good. Meantime, there's another matter to attend to. Your good mother, Mrs. Lockhart, you know—we arranged that she should be told nothing of all this trouble; and I gave her to understand, when I took you away, that you and your husband were going into the country to visit the Earl, and 'twas uncertain when you'd be back. Now, I got a letter from her this morning, saying that this was the anniversary of her wedding-day, and she wanted to spend it in the old house at Hammersmith. She was going to set out this forenoon; and it occurred to me it might be a good thing if you went with her. As your husband will probably turn up during the next few days, you would probably prefer to meet him in her company rather than in mine."

"Yes, yes," murmured Marion, who had already begun hurriedly to complete her toilet: "I will be ready in a few minutes. Yes, that will be best.... Oh, I thank God! I could not have gone on living: but now, even if he doesn't forgive me, I am happy."

"I shall contrive so as to see him before you do," said her ladyship; "and after I've done with him, the only person he won't be ready to forgive will be me! Oh, 'tis just as well you both should have somebody to abuse, and I shall answer the purpose as well as anybody else. 'Tis about all an old hag like me is good for. Well, if you are going, I shall go with you, and deliver you safe into your mother's hands: and probably there'll have to be some lying done, when she asks where Philip is; and I'm a better hand at that than you are. You've no idea what experience I have had!"

Here the old lady chuckled rather cynically, and wrapping her caftan around her, stalked out of the room. Marion, left to herself, quickly went about her preparations, singing to herself at intervals, and moving with a lighter step and heart than she had known for many days. The old house at Hammersmith! It seemed like going home for the first time since the honeymoon. It was there that her first happiness had come to her; and if Heaven ever permitted her to be happy again, it ought to happen there. All this fever of wealth and fashionable society was as a dream that is past: freshness and sanity had returned with the morning.

Lady Flanders, with the promptness of an old campaigner, who knows how to concentrate hours into minutes when there is need for it, was ready almost as soon as Marion, and the two immediately set forth for the Lancasters' house in her ladyship's big carriage, with the coachman in front and the footman behind in pigtails and silk stockings. They arrived just as Mrs. Lockhart was about to depart. She greeted them with her usual gentle serenity.

"My dear daughter," she said, embracing Marion, "your trip to the country has done you good. She has a fine color, has she not, Lady Flanders? though I think she is a little thin. This city life is very trying: I used to find it so before I married your dear father. But no doubt 'tis different when you have your husband to go into society with you. A happy marriage is the best health preserver in the world. Has Philip come back too? Will he come out with us?"

"Your son-in-law, madam," said Lady Flanders, before Marion could command her voice or open her mouth, "is detained, I believe, but very probably he may join you before you return. Madam, that gown suits you admirably; and I can scarce believe, when I look at you, that so many years have passed since you were the toast of Bath."

Hereupon the lovely Fanny Pell of the last century flushed with innocent pleasure, and the color showed through the cheeks of the gentle widow of Major Lockhart: and the difficulty about Philip was evaded for the present. After a little more conversation, Mrs. Lockhart proposed that, as the day was fine, Lady Flanders should accompany them as far as Hammersmith, and perhaps lunch with them there; and in the afternoon she might drive back in time to keep her engagement to dine at Lord Croftus'. Marion added her entreaty to those of her mother: and her ladyship, doubtless perceiving that her presence would be a protection for Marion against the guileless inquisition of Mrs. Lockhart, who was as likely to prattle about Philip and the delights of a happy marriage as about anything else, consented; and the whole party got into the carriage, and rolled away on gently-swaying springs. The brief winter sunshine shone along the streets, throwing the shadow of the tall vehicle behind them; and the pedestrians on the sidewalks stepped out briskly, for the air was crisp and bright. Christmas was not far off, and its jovial influence was already felt. The long year, with all its happiness and its misery, its failure and its success, was drawing to a close; and for the bulk of mankind, the cheerfuller side of life seemed, on the whole, to have come uppermost. Marion, as she gazed out of the window of the carriage (while her mother and Lady Flanders chatted about the London of forty years ago), meditated over all which this year had brought her of good and evil: and tried to determine with herself whether, taking the good and the evil together, she would have wished this year omitted from her life. At first, with the remembrance of recent pain and suffering still fresh within her, and the future still so uncertain and clouded, she thought that it would have been better for her if she had died that day that she saw Philip and Mr. Grant enter the gate of the old house in Hammersmith, and knock at the door. But when she began to recall more in detail all the events that had happened, she thought that, for so much happiness, all the pain was not too dear a price to pay. There was the picture in her memory of Philip telling them how he had cared for Major Lockhart, on the field of Waterloo: his voice had been tremulous as he told it, and his eyes had met hers with a sympathy so manly and so honest that her heart went out to meet it. Then had ensued that period when she withdrew herself from him, as it were, and was harsh and cold, from the untamed maidenhood that had divined its danger, and blindly sought to preserve itself at any cost. But oh! how sweet it had been to feel, day by day, that the struggle was in vain! What fear, what joy, what self-distrust, what hope, what secret tears! And then, that summer ride to Richmond, with Philip at her side; the banter, the laughter, the betraying tones and looks, the swelling tenderness that drowned resistance; and at last, the touch of hands, and the few words that meant so much! Surely, to have lived through such a day might compensate for many a day of pain.

Besides, the season of outward coldness and suspended confidence that had followed this, had been founded on nothing real, and had vanished at the first touch of reality. On that black night when she and Philip groped their way through midnight ways to avert, if it might be, the peril so mysteriously foreshadowed. Their spirits touched and recognized each other, and the terror of the crisis had only made the recognition more deep and firm. On that tragic

night, love had avouched himself greater than all tragedy and sorrow; more true than they, and, unlike them, eternal. The flower of this love had she and Philip plucked, and had breathed its immortal fragrance. So much the year had brought her.

But then Marion fell to thinking about the months that had since elapsed, and the significance of their story. And the more she meditated, the more clearly did it appear to her that she, and not Philip, had been to blame. For why had she refused the legacy? From jealousy of Philip. But was her jealousy just? It had been a fancy merely, a vague suspicion, founded upon hints half understood and whimsically exaggerated. A woman who is loved has no right to say, "Because another woman is more beautiful or brilliant than I, therefore my husband will care more for her than he does for me." For love is the divine Philosopher's Stone, which transfigures that which it touches; and, for the lover, there is a beauty in his mistress before which the splendor of Helen of Troy or the Egyptian Cleopatra seem but as dust. And let her beware lest she so far vulgarize the dignity of love as to make it one with her own estimate of herself. As justly might the Song that Solomon sang rate its worth at that of the material forms and substances whereby it was conveyed from his mind to ours. As regarded Philip, moreover, how could he, being innocent of that which she suspected, have done otherwise than he did? For him to have yielded, would have been to acknowledge himself vulnerable. And again, what justification could she plead for the dissipated and reckless life she had led since the difference of opinion between Philip and herself? None, none! It had been the ungenerous revenge which, to requite open defeat, goes about to rob the victor of the comfort of his victory. Still less defensible was this last act of hers, to which the present disastrous state of things was immediately due. To gain an end which she had ostensibly given up, she had put herself in a predicament fairly open to the worst interpretation; and then, when her husband had demanded the explanation which was his right, she had defiantly refused to give it. When a woman like Marion begins to be repentant and forgiving, she allows herself no limits; and by the time the carriage had reached Hammersmith, Marion was disposed to consider herself the most reckless and culpable of wives, and Philip the most injured and long-suffering of husbands. But where, alas! was Philip, that she might tell him so?

They turned down the well-remembered little side street, and in another minute the carriage had drawn up before the iron gate, to which, so long ago and yet so recently, Marion had fastened the card with "To Let" written on it, which had been the means of bringing her and Philip together. The footman jumped down, opened the carriage door, and let down the steps; he assisted Mrs. Lockhart to alight, and gave her his arm up the walk. Marion followed with Lady Flanders. The old house looked forlorn, though a care-taker had been left in charge of it; the windows were dull and bare; the cedar of Lebanon had scattered its dry needles over the path and grass-plot: the knocker was tarnished, the foot-scraper red with dust. The footman lifted the knocker to rap; but before the stroke sounded, the door was opened from within.

Marion heard her mother give a little exclamation of surprise and pleasure, and then say something, in words she did not distinguish. She raised her eyes languidly: but the broad back of the liveried footman intercepted her view. Lady Flanders, however, whose vision was not thus obstructed, gave a start, and cried out, "Why, d— him, there he is!"

The footman's back disappeared, and in its place Marion's gaze absorbed the vision of a tall dark figure, a white face, black, exploring eyes, disheveled hair,—all suddenly kindled up and vivified by a flash of poignant delight. She remained standing erect on the lower step, and, without removing her wide, breathless gaze, she slowly raised her hands, and clasped them together against her heart.

"Mr. Lancaster," said Lady Flanders, in a high, sharp tone, "help your wife into the house, can't you! she's feeling faint. You ought to be more careful how you play off your surprises on a woman in her condition. Why didn't you let us know you were going to be here? Come, Mrs. Lockhart," she added, seizing the latter by the arm and drawing her in-doors, "let us get up stairs and take off our bonnets. That's the way with these young married people! They can't meet after a separation of twelve hours without going into such heroics and ecstasies as would make one think they had been dead and returned to life again, at least! Leave 'em to themselves, and perhaps in half an hour they'll be able to recognize our existence."

In this way the wise old woman of the world, who had comprehended the situation at a glance, at once parried whatever inconvenient inquiries Mrs. Lockhart might have made, and afforded an opportunity to Philip and Marion to enjoy their explanation and reconciliation in private, away from the inspection of footmen and other ignorant and inquisitive persons. When she got up stairs, and before she removed her bonnet, she took out a large silk pocket-handkerchief, and blew her nose; and for some time made no articulate rejoinder to the serene little observations which Mrs. Lockhart kept offering.

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"How did you happen to be here, my dearest?" said Marion, in the course of the interview. "Did you know we were coming?"

"I have been here for several days, I believe," answered Philip: "I hardly know how long, or when the days begun or ended. I did not know where to look for you, darling, and it seemed most natural to come here, where we loved each other first."

"Oh, my Philip! and were you thinking I was wicked all that time?"

"No, thank God! I don't think I ever seriously believed that. But one day, before I came here, I saw Tom Moore; he came up to me, and said he wanted to say something to me in private. So we walked across the park, and pretty soon I found that he was talking about you. From that moment I remember every word he uttered. 'Mr. Lancaster,' he said, 'you'll do me the credit to believe that I'm a man of honor and a gentleman, and the good name of a lady is sacred to me. I have admired and revered Mrs. Lancaster since first I had the honor to be in her presence; and though, to be sure, 'twas mighty small notice she ever took of me, my nature is not so petty that a slight to my vanity can obscure my judgment or dim my perception.' Then he went on to tell me all about meeting you at Vauxhall, and what a state of excitement you were in, and how he hurried you out of sight, and put you into a carriage, and then went and got Sir Francis; and how you all drove to the inn in Pimlico, and afterwards how he saw you safe home with your maid. Then he said that tortures would never have unsealed his lips on the subject; but he had learned that, in some way, a rumor had got abroad that you were seen there. Whereupon he had deemed it due to his honor as a gentleman, as well as to his consciousness of integrity and innocence, to come to me at once, in a frank and manly way, and give me to know at first hand all there was to be known of the matter. It was very eloquent and chivalrous," added Philip, "and at any other time I might have laughed: as it was, I just thanked him, and we bowed to each other

and parted; and I came here."

"It seems like coming up out of the grave," said Marion, musingly. "And now, my poor Philip, after all our quarreling and trouble, what do you think has happened? The Marquise is going to sue for your money; and Lady Flanders says she's afraid the law may give it to her."

"Will the Marquise do that?" said Philip, arching his eyebrows.

"So Merton Fillmore says: and he is to conduct her case."

"Well," said Philip, beginning to smile, "she could not have done anything that pleases me better; for I have gained much wisdom since I saw you last, and am as anxious to be rid of that burden as ever you were. So, if you agree, my darling, we'll give her the twenty thousand pounds, without putting her to the trouble to sue for it: for there's only one kind of wealth worth having, and that is what I have been enjoying ever since I caught sight of you on the doorsteps."

"But, Philip, you know we have spent ever so much money on that miserable house in town. What are we to do about that? for the money from 'Iduna' will not be enough to pay it."

"Why, that is all right, too," said Philip, laughing: "for, though I had forgotten it till this moment, Lord Seabridge, who is not expected to live more than a week, said when I saw him the other day that he put five thousand pounds in his will for me, 'just to buy my wife a present.' We can pay our debts with that, and still have a few hundreds left to begin life again in this old house." He put his arm round her waist, and added, looking down at her, "You won't object to my receiving that legacy, will you?"

"Oh, Philip!" said Marion, with a long sigh, hiding her face on his shoulder; "I wish.... I think.... I hear my mother and Lady Flanders coming down stairs!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHEN the Marquise Desmoines received from Fillmore a letter announcing that the defendants in the case of Desmoines vs. Lancaster declined to defend, she uttered a sharp cry, and dropped the letter as if it had been poisonous. That strange sense of justice—of what is fairly due to one as a human being—which is perhaps the last thing to die out of even the least deserving of God's creatures, told her heart that she had been outraged. All things had slipped away from her. Despite all her powers, and her desperate yearning to exercise them, she was powerless. There could scarcely be, for her, a keener suffering. With some natures, the very intensity of anguish is its own partial antidote; the faculties are so far stunned as to be unable, for a time, to gauge the poignancy of the disaster. But Perdita's clear and vigorous intellect would not permit her such an escape. She immediately saw her position in all its bearings and prospects. Her mind shed a pitiless light upon every aspect of her defeat and humiliation. Something vital within her seemed to gasp and die.

After a long, breathless pause, she took up the letter again, and read it to the end. It contained a request on the part of the writer to be allowed to call on her at a certain hour that evening. It was not difficult to see what that meant. She had made the surrender of herself to Fillmore contingent upon his recovery of the legacy: and he was coming to claim the fulfillment of her promise. She would be called on to play the part of a complaisant fiancée. At this picture, Perdita laughed; and then, setting her teeth with rage, tore the paper into fragments. Such rage is deadly. Had Fillmore been present, his fiancée would have attempted his life. And yet it was not he that could enrage her: nothing that he could have done could have affected one pulsation of her heart. She had passed into a region of emotion almost infinitely more intense than any with which he could be connected. But, as sometimes a woman will kiss a child or a dog, thinking "this kiss is for my lover!" so might Perdita have driven a dagger to Fillmore's heart, and said, "Be Philip and die!"

She looked at her hands: how white and fine they were,—how beautifully formed! She rose and walked to and fro in the room; every movement was grace and elasticity,—the harmonious play of parts exquisitely fashioned and proportioned. She paused before the looking-glass, and contemplated the form and features imaged there. She drew out her comb, and shook down on her shoulders a soft depth of bright-hued hair. She loosened the front of her dress, and exposed a bosom white as milk and curved like the bowl of Ganymede, save for the slight indentation of a scar, on the right breast. She gazed into the sparkling reflection of her eyes, as if some mystery were hidden there. "I have seen no woman more beautiful than you," she said aloud. "What is the use of beauty? Why was I born?"

She returned to her chair, and threw herself in it sidewise, as a child might do, with her cheek resting against the back, one knee drawn up, her hands folded, her eyelids closed. As she lay thus she looked like a type of lovely and innocent weariness. "Why was I born?" she repeated in a whisper. Her thoughts strayed back along the vista of her seven and twenty years: from the distance she saw the figure of a little girl, with bright hair and laughing eyes, come tripping onwards, inquisitive, observant, quick-witted, stout-hearted; fond of her own way, and ready to take her own part; but good-humored always and tolerant of others. Sometime comes the child, growing taller as it advances, beginning now to realize its loneliness in the world, sometimes meditating gravely thereon, but never losing courage; beginning also to realize its own superior gifts, and exercising them experimentally, for the pleasure of the use, and not always with too much heed for the effect on others. Still forward she comes, with a step somewhat less frolicsome, with eyes that look more penetratingly ... a mind that harbors ambitious thoughts; a face that can conceal as well as express; a confidence in herself and in her fortune: worldly wisdom already, at seventeen years. That great, broad book of the world—of human life and character—with its profundity, its insanity, its pathos, its absurdity, its veins of good, its masses of evil,—the girl Perdita has studied it all, and no mother no loving friend, has been beside her, to direct her studies, to interpret her discoveries, to correct her errors.... Who is this antique figure who now walks beside her, to whose formal and laborious gait she endeavors to accommodate her own: this gray-haired man of more than thrice her age, with his habits, his prejudices, his limitations, his ailments? Is this her husband?—the lord and master of that brilliant, buoyant creature? Ah, Perdita, are you his wife? Do you love him, honor him, obey him? Are he and his possessions the final embodiment and satisfaction of your ambitious dreams? Can you do without love—you, who have never tried what love is? It is ill being prudent before experience, and wise before instruction. Why are your lips so persuasive, your eyes so winning, your touch so caressing?—Why are you so lovely, Perdita?... Why were you born?

But still the young wife passes onward, with little misgiving and less regret. There is a great deal of splendor and luxury around her, and she easily makes herself their nucleus and culmination. Famous men pay court to her; wise men listen to her conversation; women criticise and try to imitate her. In the brilliant society of her day and place she is a figure and a topic. Musicians dedicate their compositions to her; poets immortalize her in their rhymes of a season. She is the heroine of a hundred anecdotes, but of not a single romance: very intrepid and adventurous, but with the coldness as well as the sparkle of ice. "Can't make her out," said Lord Fitz Hardinge, who was said to have come to Paris especially to be presented to her. "Don't see how she keeps it up—a woman of her complexion, too. Egad! I have it! The Marquis must be Cupid in disguise!" This *mot* was repeated until it reached Perdita's ears. "A woman's complexion changes with her company," she said; "and as to the Marquis, my husband, it is better to be a disguised Cupid than a make-believe one." As his Lordship's excesses had somewhat worn upon his constitution, this shaft struck deep and resisted all efforts to extract it. People seldom attacked the Marquise Desmoines more than once.

Meanwhile, Perdita is still sitting in the same position in her chair, one knee drawn up, her hands clasped and her eyelids closed. What vision does she behold now? A handsome room, with polished floor, the walls bright with pictured panels bordered with gold; candles set in burnished sconces: the door opens and her husband enters, leaning on the arm of a tall young man. The stranger is plainly dressed, but his form and bearing are noble: and his face, relieved by the black hair around it, prints itself on her mind, never to be forgotten—so intense and vivid does it seem with life and meaning, yet so composed and clear. A new feeling, strange and sweet, creeps in gentle undulations along Perdita's nerves, and settles in her heart. He sits beside her, and they converse, easily and with mutual pleasure and comprehension; his voice, grave and genial, makes music in her ears; his dark direct glance meets hers—absorbs and mingles with it. She draws fuller breath; this atmosphere, in which she has never lived before, gives her for the first time real life: she understands what she is, and what is possible for her. The Enchanted Prince has awakened the Sleeping Beauty.

The days that follow are like no other days, before or since. He is a poet, but what poetry ever equaled their companionship? The world, with its follies, its emptiness, its formulas, its delusions, seems to stand aside to let them pass.... One day they have ridden out with a cavalcade, bound on an expedition of pleasure to some distant chateau. Riding onward, she and he, and drawn insensibly together, they pass fleetly along woodland paths, through dancing shade and sunlight, leaving the others behind, or in advance, perhaps; they have little thought but of each other. Light is Perdita's heart; no shadow has darkened it since that first meeting. The passing moments have filled the capacity of sensation, leaving no room for reflection or forecast; she has never even said to herself, "This is friendship," or "This is love;" enough that it is delight, growth, harmony, beauty: that it lets her know how sweet it is to be a woman. At last, as they ride on, the pinnacles of the chateau taper upward above the trees; anon, before them opens a sweep of lawn, which they cross, and alight at the broad steps that lead up to the door. They are the first to arrive; for half an hour, perhaps, they will have the house to themselves, save for the servants who are preparing the collation below-stairs.

They stroll through the airy rooms, with merry and gentle talk, until at length they enter a hall where, over the chimney-piece, is suspended a pair of antique rapiers. Perdita takes down one of these, and putting herself in posture of offense, bids her companion take the other and defend himself. He complies, and, for a few moments, laughingly parries and pretends to return her thrusts. All at once, as she presses him, his foot slips on the polished floor, and ere he can recover himself he feels his point touch her breast....

At this point of the vision, Perdita slightly changes her position in her chair, and a flush reddens her cheek. She breathes unevenly and her lips move. Ah, that summer noon, so distant now, when she found herself resting in his arms, her riding-habit stained with red blood—his face, his voice, so near, so tender: his touch so gentle! She had looked into his eyes, and laughed softly, in mere joy. Blessed sword! that by drawing her blood had revealed their hearts to each other. But ah! why was the wound not mortal? Was not the wound that it symbolized so? Why had she not died during those few minutes—too few—that had gone by before the sound of voices and horses' hoofs announced the arrival of the party? Had anything that had happened since been worth the trouble of living through it? True, she had hoped; but hope is but the mask of despair, sooner or later to be cast aside. Before her wound was healed, the love which it had discovered had withdrawn itself, never to return. There had been some talk about honor, obligation, duty, prudence—to which she had assented with her lips, while all the rest of her rebelled; for it had not been sin that she contemplated, but only to let her heart love and be loved. Then, a farewell: and afterward a dreary blankness, amidst which she moved hardened, witty, cynical, unreconciled, until these latter days, which were bitterer and more disastrous than the first. Why was she born?

Enough of visions! Perdita rose to her feet, and gazed about her. Luxury and beauty surrounded her, as they had always done; but the darkness and wilderness that were within her turned all to ugliness and mockery. There was a terrible simplicity in her situation; a fatal lack of resources and alternatives. She walked across the room: something seemed to tread behind her; she turned quickly, but nothing was there. The sense of being dogged—pursued—still remained however. What was it?—fate? She smiled; then shivered nervously, and stood twisting her handkerchief between her fingers. Fate.... The idea fascinated her. Was her fate so near? and what was it like? Let it appear and declare itself! After a while she began to walk again, but now meditating profoundly. Once she stopped before the fire, and gazed fixedly at the burning coals: then moved away once more, not pacing up and down, but wandering irregularly about the room, knotting and untying her handkerchief; sometimes, in her pre-occupation, almost stumbling against a chair or table. Meanwhile, her usually varying expression had assumed a certain fixedness, and there was a vertical wrinkle between her brows, which seemed not to be caused by drawing her brows together, but to have marked itself there by some other means.

At last she stopped, passing her hands across her eyes and over her hair, which she seemed surprised to find hanging about her shoulders. She twisted it up into place again, adjusted her dress, and after pausing a moment as if to recover the thread of her thoughts, went to a cabinet at the side of the room, and looked attentively at the objects which it contained. They were mostly curiosities and works of art, such as a carved ivory cup, a box of Indian enamel, a vase of Venetian glass, figures in Dresden porcelain, a Chinese idol of silver, an antique locket of wrought gold. From among these objects Perdita selected a small, quaintly-fashioned lamp of pure crystal; it was of Persian manufacture, and bore some figures or letters of enigmatic purport, perhaps having reference to the tenets of the ancient fire-worshippers. She examined this lamp curiously, wiping away the dust with her handkerchief, and assuring herself that it contained no crack or imperfection. Finally she placed it upon the table near the fire; and having rung the bell, bade the servant summon Madame Cabot.

"Madame," said the Marquise, when the old lady appeared, "I am expecting some one to call here this evening,—Monsieur Fillmore."

"Yes, Madame la Marquise."

"I wish you to lay out the black satin gown, and the diamonds,—you understand?"

"Yes, Madame la Marquise."

"I am going out now,—alone: I shall not need your company. If any one calls in the meantime, say I shall not return until to-morrow. At no time to-day is any one to be admitted except Monsieur Fillmore: he will arrive about seven o'clock. Will you attend to this?"

"Certainly, Madame la Marquise. Will Madame dine at the usual hour?"

"No; you will dine by yourself to-day. That is all."

"*Au revoir*, Madame la Marquise."

The old lady courtesied and went out. Perdita sat down at her desk and wrote several letters, which she locked up in a drawer. Her dejection seemed to have been lightened: her demeanor was grave, but not oppressed or unnatural. Occasionally she would fall into revery for a few minutes, but the abstraction was not painful, and was easily cast aside. In the course of an hour or so she closed her desk, and going to her room, put on a dark pelisse and veiled bonnet, and went out. The sky was overcast, and the air cold; but there was neither rain nor wind. The streets were full of people, and the shops were doing a thriving trade in Christmas goods. Perdita mingled with the crowd, and seemed to take pleasure in observing them: in gazing into the shop windows, shoulder to shoulder with them: in listening to the confused noise of voices, tramping feet, and rattling wheels. On the Strand she happened to notice four ragged children flattening their noses against the glass of a candy-shop. "I choose this," said one little girl "Oh!

I choose this!" said another, in the pride of superior discernment. "Don't yer wish yer may git it?" remarked a boy, the eldest of the party, with gloomy cynicism. "Come in here, youngsters," said Perdita; "you shall have all the candy you want!" With the matter-of-course acceptance of miracles characteristic of children, they followed her into the shop, and presently came forth again with candy enough to last them for a week. None of them thanked her, any more than we thank the sun for shining through a break in the clouds—the supposition being that the sun is made for that purpose. But Perdita was not in need of gratitude. She wanted to feel the actual contact of human creatures for a few hours, and that was all. Resuming her walk, she passed through St. Paul's churchyard, and along Cheapside, where she entered a shop and made one or two purchases on her own account. Thence she turned in a southerly direction, and presently came in sight of London Bridge. It was a quaint, narrow, high-backed structure, with jutting piers, affording spaces for venders of apples and other cheap merchandise to set up their little stalls. The bridge was roaring with vehicles and crowded with foot-passengers; there was no noisier or more populous place in London. There was a high balustrade on each side; but by stepping upon one of the semicircular stone seats over the piers, it was possible to look over at the broad stream beneath. Perdita did this, and remained for a long time, absorbed by the spectacle. The brown river, rushing at the arches of the bridge, fell through them in boiling cataracts, with a sound that was audible over the tumult of the vehicles and the foot-passengers above. On either bank, the wharves were thronged with shipping—straight masts and cobweb cordage, dense as primeval forests. Black chimneys belched forth blacker smoke, which trailed and brooded over the city: huge, ugly buildings of stone or brick looked down into the dark water. Millions of human beings had done all this: millions of human beings lived and moved here, labored and hungered, fought and conquered, struggled and succumbed, were born and died. Here was the centre and concentration of the human race, the culmination of the history of five thousand years; and what a gloomy, dirty, toiling, roaring, sordid Babel it was! And yet, what a strong charm and attraction! We battle and shout and hope in the face of death; we know that our hopes are vain and that death is sure; we know that life is weariness and that death is rest; we bury our parents and know that our children shall bury us; and still generation succeeds generation—appears and disappears—and each maintains the turmoil with as much energy and earnestness as if to it alone belonged not the present only, but likewise the future and the past. Earthly life, the oldest of all deceivers, the mightiest of all hypocrites, exposed and condemned at each passing moment of recorded time—by what spell does it still retain its mastery over us? Does it inspire the wish to be cheated that it gratifies? or is there something behind—within it—some reality whereof it is but the symbol, which leads us onward to another goal than that we aimed at,—a goal which, were it revealed to us, we never should attain?

Chilled by long contact with the stone parapet, Perdita stepped down from her perch, and returned along the bridge. In one of the narrow streets leading toward Cheapside, she noticed a small inn or ordinary, where a card nailed to the door-post announced that a dinner was to be had inside at a cheap rate. Perdita entered; the place was low and dark, and was tolerably full of customers, most of whom were seated at opposite sides of the little oblong tables projecting at right angles from the walls. A man, seeing Perdita stand there, made room for her beside him. He wore a dirty fur cap and a topcoat of coarse cloth; had a bold, not unhandsome face, and powerful but by no means clean hands. A plate full of some sort of food was put before Perdita, and she began to eat. The man who had nearly finished his dinner, now called for a pot of ale; and having glanced at Perdita once or twice, he addressed her:

"Say, my dear, you're a good-looking gal, do you know that?"

"Yes," said Perdita, "other men have told me so."

"What's your name?"

"Perdita."

"Perdita? Rum name, that! What's your lay?"

"Nothing, in particular."

"Flush, eh? Made a haul?"

Perdita nodded.

"Hello! you," said the man, raising his voice, "fetch 'arf a pint for this lady."

The ale was brought, and Perdita raised it to her lips, saying, "Here's your health!"

"Same to you, my dear," said the man, taking a gulp from his pewter. "By G—! you're one of the right sort. Do you know who I am?"

Perdita looked at him. "You're a stout fellow," she said; "you look as if you could take your own part. Are you a highwayman?"

"Easy! none of that!" exclaimed the man, in a low tone, catching her by the shoulder. Perdita eyed him composedly, and he presently relinquished his grasp, and chuckled. "All right," he said, "I see you know a thing or two. Now, look here. I ain't got no mort. What do you say—shall we strike hands? You and me together can do good business. What do you say?"

"What do you mean by mort?"

"Come, now? Walker! Well, wife, if you like."

"Do you mean that you'll marry me?"

"As sure as my name's—what it is!" said the man.

"Will you take care of me, and beat any man who insults me?"

"Yes, I will!"

"I have a great mind to let you marry me," said Perdita, after a pause. "You'd be as good as anybody else, and perhaps better. But I've been married once, and I don't think I shall ever marry again. I'm going to do something else."

"What?"

"That's no business of yours."

"Can't yer marry me and do that, too?"

"No."

"Well, look here! Think it over. I've got money, and I can make things easy for you. You'll find me here to-morrow. I ain't often met the woman I'd take to as quick as I would to you. Think it over. You ain't got any other chap

in your eye, have yer?"

"I'll promise you this much," said Perdita; "if I don't marry you, I'll marry no one else."

"And will you be here to-morrow?"

"If I'm alive."

"That's hearty! Well, good-by, my dear, if you must go. Give us a kiss, won't yer?"

"Why?"

"Because I'm fond of yer."

"Truly?"

"Honor bright!"

"You may kiss me," said Perdita; and when he had done so, she added, "You have done what no other man will ever do. Good-bye!"

.....

When the Marquise reached home, it was after five o'clock. In the dressing-room she found Madame Cabot; the black satin dress was laid out on the sofa, and the diamonds were on the dressing-table. The Marquise performed her toilet carefully, and when it was completed, she scrutinized her appearance with unusual deliberation. "Do I look well, Madame Cabot?" she asked at length.

"I have never seen Madame la Marquise look more beautiful."

Perdita smiled. "Well, I have need to look beautiful to-night. The gentleman whom I expect to-night—Monsieur Fillmore—is coming to claim my promise to marry him. A woman should appear beautiful in the eyes of her bridegroom, should she not, Madame Cabot?"

"Without doubt! Madame la Marquise is then resolved to marry?"

"I have resolved to change my condition," said Perdita. "I am tired of this lonely life, and am going to make an end of it."

"May Madame enjoy every happiness!"

"I don't think of that—I don't expect it!" said the Marquise, after a pause. "After my experience, Madame Cabot, I should be a fool to look forward to happiness, either in this state or in any other. But it will be a change, at least: a great change!" She added, after a moment, "I have spoken to you of this, because, when the change comes, I shall not any longer need your services. You have been comfortable with me, I hope, madame?"

"It will be a great grief to me to leave Madame le Marquise."

The Marquise seemed gratified. "You will be able to make yourself comfortable in your own way, hereafter," she said. "I have arranged that you shall want for nothing in the future.... Well, you may leave me now. Remember that no one is to be admitted but Monsieur Fillmore; and that I am not to be disturbed till he comes."

"I shall not forget, Madame."

"Good-night."

"Good-night, Madame la Marquise, and much felicity!"

Perdita went into her boudoir and locked the door. The candles were lighted, the fire was burning cheerfully, everything was warm and luxurious. Perdita held in her hands a large vial containing a colorless fluid, and something done up in a piece of paper. These she placed on the table, beside the crystal Persian lamp, which has already been mentioned. She drew a chair to the table, and seating herself in it, unfolded the paper, which proved to contain a small wick. This she inserted in the lamp, and then filled the lamp full of the colorless fluid from the vial. Finally, she lit the wick from one of the candles. It burned with a pale bluish flame, emitting, however, an intense heat.

After contemplating this flame awhile, and testing its ardor by passing her hand over it, Perdita rose up nervously, and glanced around her. She had suddenly grown very pale, and her eyes looked black. Her lips also were white, and for a moment they trembled; but only for a moment. She held herself erect, and raised her head, looking straight before her across the table, as if at some one who stood on the other side. Her expression, at first, was haughty; but gradually it softened, and at last became exquisitely tender and gentle. Her bosom rose and fell with a long sigh....

She raised her hands, and clasped them firmly over her eyes. She stooped quickly down, until her lips almost touched the bluish flame of the lamp, at the same instant drawing in a sharp, deep breath, that made the flame leap far down her throat. She tried to do it a second time, but only partially succeeded. She reeled backward, uttering no sound, and fell, as she had wished to do, on the sofa. A few convulsive movements shook her, and then she lay still, her head thrown back, and her eyes half closed. Her position had not altered by a hair's breadth when, an hour later, the door was broken open, and Fillmore came in.

.....

Perdita's death was known to many persons in London that same night; but the news did not reach Hammersmith until the next morning. It so happened that Marion was the first to receive it, by a messenger from Lady Flanders. She read the few lines, scarcely comprehending their purport; but after waiting a few moments, she read them again, and understood them. She returned up-stairs with difficulty, for all strength seemed to have gone out of her. She entered the room in which Philip was, but was unable to speak. She held the paper toward him.

"From Lady Flanders, eh?" said he, recognizing the handwriting. "An invitation to dinner I suppose." He read what was written, and silence fell upon him. Marion, though she would gladly have turned her eyes away from him, could not do so. She saw the change that came over his face, and it made her heart faint. He kept his eyes down, gazing at the paper, and it seemed to Marion as if he were never going to raise them. The suspense became more than she could bear, and it gave her the power to use her voice.

"Do you know why she did it, Philip?" was her question.

He looked up, at last, with a slow and heavy movement, as if his eyelids were weighted, and met his wife's gaze gloomily.

"If I do know," he said, "it was for something very worthless."

"Have you ... anything to tell me?" asked Marion, just audibly.

"Perdita was honest and noble: she died pure. There is nothing to tell. A priest would absolve me; I can never absolve myself. Many a man who has sinned is worthier to be your husband than one who has avoided sin as I have."

There followed a deep silence. Then Marion moved a step nearer to him, and said, "Do you love me, Philip?"

"I used to say 'yes' last summer," he replied; "I thought I could do anything and be anything, then. Now it seems to me that I am nothing, and can do nothing. Whether I love you, or not, years must tell you, not words. Such men as I are the curse of the earth."

"You are not a curse to me!" said Marion, putting her arms around him, and looking up in his face. "You are my husband, and I love you: and neither years nor words shall make me believe you do not love your wife!"

[THE END.]

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Typographical errors corrected by the etext transcriber:

unusal degree=> unusual degree {Pg 166}

What have I do with his fortune=> What have I to do with his fortune {pg 255}

I believe that scoundred=> I believe that scoundrel {pg 316}

morever, how could he=> moreover, how could he {pg 381}

except Monsienr Fillmore=> except Monsieur Fillmore {pg 394}

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