

A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN
AND HIS FAMILY

BY

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A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE moment, however, was approaching when Warrender had to declare for himself what he intended to do. It is true that he had given indications of previous intention which had put his family on their guard. He had said to Cavendish and to others that it was doubtful whether he would return to Oxford,—words which had made the ladies look at each other, which had drawn a sharp exclamation from Minnie, but which even she had consented to say nothing of until his resolution was more evident. It might be but a caprice of the moment, one of the hasty expressions which Theo was not unaccustomed to launch at his little audience, making them stare and exclaim, but which were never meant to come to anything. Most likely this was the case now. And the preparations went on as usual without anything further said. Mrs. Warrender had curbed her own impatience; she had yielded to his wishes and

remained at the Warren, with a sympathy for his sudden fascination and for the object of it which no one else shared; but she looked not without longing for the time when he should return to his studies,—when there should no longer be any duty to keep her to the Warren, nothing to make self-denial necessary. The thought of the free air outside this little green island of retreat almost intoxicated her by times, as the autumn days stole on, and October came red and glowing, with sharp winds but golden sunsets which tinged the woods. By this time, Chatty, too, began to have sensations unusual to her,—such as must thrill through the boat upon the shore, when the little waves run up and kiss its sides, wooing it to the water, for which it was made. Chatty had been almost as much a piece of still life as the boat: but the baptism of the spray had been flung in her face, and dreams of triumphant winds and dazzling waves outside had crept into her cave. Minnie was conscious of no longings, but she knew that it was time to prepare Theo's linen, to see that everything was marked, so that he might have a chance at least of getting his things back from the wash. And Chatty had knitted him half a dozen pairs of silk socks,—some in stripes of black and white, some violet, like a cardinal's,—suitable for his mourning. No one, however, mentioned the subject until the beginning of October, when, as they sat at luncheon one

day, it was suddenly introduced by Miss Warrender without timidity, or recollection that there was any doubt about it. "When does term begin, Theo?" his sister asked, in the midst of the usual conversation. The other ladies, who were more quick to sympathise with his feelings, held their breath; but Minnie put her question quite simply, as if she expected him (as she did) to say "the 15th" or "the 17th," as the case might be.

Theo paused a moment, and cast a glance round them all. Then he answered in a voice which seemed louder than usual because it was somewhat defiant. "I don't know," he said slowly; "and if you want the truth, I don't care."

"Theo!" cried Minnie, with a little scream. Chatty, who had been contemplating at her ease, when this conversation began, the bubbles rising in a glass of aerated water which she was holding up to the light, set it down very quickly, and gave him an appealing look across the table. Mrs. Warrender looked at him too, pretending, poor lady, not to understand. "But, my dear," she said, "we must get everything ready; so it is very necessary to know."

"There is nothing to be got ready, so far as I am aware," he replied, with a flush on his face, and the look of a man who is making a stand against his opponents,

“I am not going up this term, if that is what you mean.”

Then all three looked at him with different degrees of remonstrance, protest, or appeal. Mrs. Warrender was much too sensible of her incapacity to prevail against him to risk any controversy. And even Minnie was so confounded by the certainty of his tone that, except another resounding “Theo!” the tone of which was enough to have made any man pause in an evil career, she too, for the moment, found nothing to say.

“My dear, don’t you think that’s a great pity?” his mother remarked very mildly, but with a countenance which said much more.

“I don’t wish to discuss the question,” he said. “I thought I had told you before. I don’t mean to be disagreeable, mother; but don’t you think that in my own case I should know best?”

“Theo!” cried Minnie for the third time, “you are more than disagreeable; you are ridiculous. How should you know best,—a boy like you? You think you can do what you like because poor papa is dead, and we are nothing but women. Oh, it is very ungenerous and undutiful to my mother, but it is ridiculous too.”

“My mother can speak for herself,” said the young man. “I don’t owe any explanations to you.”

“You will have to give explanations to every one, whether you owe them or not!” cried Minnie. “I know what people think and what they say. There is always supposed to be some reason for it when a young man doesn’t go back to his college. They think he has got into disgrace; they think it is some bad scrape. We shall have to make up excuses and explanations.”

“They may think what they please, so far as I am concerned,” he replied.

“But, my dear, she is right, though that does not matter very much,” said Mrs. Warrender. “There will be a great many inquiries; and explanations will have to be given. That is not the most important, Theo. Didn’t you tell me that if you lost this term you could not go in, as you call it, for honours? I thought you had told me so.”

“Honours!” he said contemptuously. “What do honours mean? I found out the folly of that years ago. They are a sort of trade-mark, very good for business purposes. Brunson has sense on his side when he goes in for honours. They are good for the college to keep up its reputation as a teaching machine; and they are good for a schoolmaster in the same way. But what advantage would all the honours of the University be to me?” he added, with a laugh of scorn. “There’s an agricultural college

somewhere. There would be some meaning in it if I took honours there."

"You have a strange idea of your own position, Theo," said Mrs. Warrender, roused to indignation. "You are not a farmer, but a country gentleman."

"Of the very smallest," he said,—“a little squire. If I were a good farmer and knew my trade, I should be more good."

"A country gentleman," cried Minnie, who had kept silence with difficulty, and seized the first opportunity to break in, "is just the very finest thing a man can be. Why, what are half the nobility compared to us? There are all sorts of people in the nobility,—people who have been in trade, brewers and bankers and all sorts; even authors and those kind of people. But I have always heard that an English country gentleman who has been in the same position for hundreds of years—Why, Theo, there is not such a position in the world! We are the bulwark of the country. We are the support of the constitution. Where would the Queen be, or the Church, or anything, without the gentry? Why, Theo, an English country gentleman——"

She paused from mere want of breath. On such a subject Miss Warrender felt that words could never have failed; and she devoutly believed everything she said.

"If he's so grand as that," said Theo, with a laugh,

“what do you suppose is the consequence of a little more Latin and Greek?”

Minnie would have said with all sincerity, Nothing at all ; but she paused, remembering that there were prejudices on this subject. “You might as well say, What’s the use of shoes and stockings,” she said, “or of nice, well-made clothes, such as a gentleman ought to wear? By the bye, Mr. Cavendish, though I did not care so much for him this time as the last, had his clothes very well made. Education is just like well-made things,” she added, with a sense that she had made, if not an epigram, something very like it,—a phrase to be remembered and quoted as summing up the discussion.

“If that’s all,” said Warrender, “I’ve got enough for that.” The reference to Cavendish and the epigram had cleared the atmosphere and given a lighter tone to the family controversy, and the young man felt that he had got over the crisis better than he hoped. He waved his hand to Minnie amicably as he rose from the table. “I thank thee, Jew,” he said with a lighter tone and laugh than were at all usual with him, as he went away. The ladies sat silent, listening to his steps as he went through the hall, pausing to get his hat ; and no one spoke till he suddenly appeared again, crossing the lawn towards the gate that led into the village. Then there was a simul-

taneous long breath of fulfilled expectation, not to be called a sigh.

“Ah!” said Minnie, “I thought so. He always goes that way.”

“It is the way that leads to all the places Theo would be likely to go to.”

“You mean it leads to Markland, mamma. Oh, I know very well what Theo means. He thinks he is very deep, but I see through him; and so would you, if you chose. I never thought him so clever as you all did—but that he should let that woman twist him round her little finger, and give up everything for her!—I could not have supposed he would have been so silly as that.”

Mrs. Warrender made no reply except a brief reproof to her daughter for speaking of Lady Markland as that woman. Perhaps she was herself a little vexed with Lady Markland, though she was aware it was unjust. But she was not vexed with Theo. She followed his foolishness (for to be sure it was foolishness, poor boy!) with a warmth of sympathy such as very rarely animates a mother in such circumstances. In her growing anxiety about him, in the commotion of mind with which she had watched the rising passion in his, there had been something which seemed to Mrs. Warrender like a new vicarious life. She had been, as it were, the spectator of this drama from the day when,

to her great surprise, Theo had urged, almost compelled her to offer her services and society to the young widow. His vehemence then and a look in his eyes with which she was noways acquainted, but of which, as a woman capable of similar emotion, she divined the meaning, had awakened her, with a curious upspringing of her whole being, to the study of this new thing, to see what was going to come of it, and how it would develop. She had never known in her own person what passion was ; she had never been the object of it, nor had she felt that wild and all-absorbing influence ; but she recognised it when she saw it in her son, with the keenest thrill of sympathetic feeling. She watched him with a kind of envy, a kind of admiration, a wondering enthusiasm, which absorbed her almost as much as his love absorbed him. She who had been surrounded by dulness all her life, mild affections, stagnant minds, an easy, humdrum attachment which had all the external features of indifference, —it brought a curious elation to her mind to see that her boy was capable of this flaming and glowing passion. It had curbed her impatience as nothing else could have done, and made her willing to wait and watch, to withstand the pressure of the long monotonous days, and content herself with the dead quiet of her life. She had not known even anxiety in the past. That of itself was a vivifying influence now.

A little later Mrs. Warrender drove into Highcombe.

with Chatty, an expedition which she had made several times of late, as often as the horses could be spared. The house in Highcombe, which was her own, which she was to live in with the girls if Theo married or anything happened, was being put in order, and that too was a gentle interest. Fortunately, upon this afternoon Minnie was occupied in the parish. It was her "day," and nothing in heaven or earth was ever permitted to interfere with Minnie's "day." The other two were pleased to be alone together, though they never said so, but kept up even between themselves the little fiction of saying, What a pity Minnie could not come! Chatty sympathised with her mother more than Minnie had ever done, and was very glad in her heart to ask a question or two about what was happening and what Theo could mean, to which Mrs. Warrender answered with much greater ease and fulness than if her elder daughter had been present to give her opinion. Chatty asked with bated breath whether there was not something wicked and terrible in the thought that Lady Markland, a woman who was married, and who had been consoled in her affliction by the clergyman and all her friends reminding her that her husband was not lost but gone before, and that she would meet him again,—that she should be loved and wooed by another man. Chatty grew red with shame as she asked the question. It seemed to her an insult to any woman.

“As if our ties were for this world only!” she said. Mrs. Warrender in her reply waived the theological question altogether, and shook her head, and declared that it was not the thought that Lady Markland was a widow or that she was Theo’s senior which troubled her. “But she will never think of him,” said the mother. “Oh, Chatty, my heart is sore for my poor boy. He is throwing away his love and the best of his life. She will never think of him. She is full of her own affairs and of her child. She will take all that Theo gives her, and never make him any return.”

“Then, mamma, would you wish——” cried Chatty, astonished.

“I wish anything that would make him happy,” her mother said. “It is a great thing to be happy.” She said this more to herself than to her daughter; and to be sure, to a young person, it was a most unguarded admission for a woman to make.

“Does being happy always mean——?” Here Chatty paused, with the sudden flame of a blush almost scorching her cheeks. She had turned her head in the opposite direction, as if looking at something among the trees; and this was perhaps why Mrs. Warrender did not hear what she said. Always mean love—Chatty did not say. Various events had suggested this question, but on the whole she was very glad her mother did not hear.

CHAPTER II.

WARRENDER went off very quickly upon his long walk. He could not but feel, notwithstanding his little bravado of indifference, that it was a very important decision, which he had made irrevocable by thus publishing it. For some time it had been a certainty in his mind ; but nothing seems a certainty until it has been said, and now that it had been said, the thought that he had absolutely delivered himself over into the nameless crowd, that he had renounced all further thought of distinction in the only way he knew of for acquiring it, was somewhat awful to him. The unimaginable difference which exists between a man within whose reach a first class is still dangling and him who has no hope but to be "gulfed," is little comprehensible by the un-academical mind ; but it is one not to be contemplated without a shudder. When he thought of what he was resigning, when he thought of what he must drop into, the blood seemed to boil in Theo's veins and to ring in his ears. To be a passman ; to descend among the crowd ; to

consort with those who had "pulled through," perhaps with difficulty, who had gone through all sorts of dull workings and struggles, and to whom their books were mere necessary instruments of torture, to be got done with as soon as possible,—these were things terrible to contemplate. And in the silence of his own soul, it was difficult to console himself with those theories about the trade-mark, and the merely professional use of academic distinction. It was all true enough, and yet it was not true. Even now he thought of his tutor with a pang; not the tutor at college, who had dropped him for Brunson, but the genial old tutor at school, who had hoped such great things for him. He said, "Poor old Boreas!" to himself, sympathising in the disappointment with which the news would be received. Warrender a pass-man! Warrender "gulfed"! Nobody would believe it. This gave him many pangs as he set out upon his walk. He had sacrificed his early glories to the fastidious fancy of youth; but he had never really intended to be distanced by Brunson, to fall out of the ranks at the end.

Softer thoughts began to steal over him as he pursued his way, as he began to draw near the other country in which she abode. Half-way between the houses was a little wood, through which the road passed, and which was like a vestibule to the smiling place where her throne and empire was. To other eyes it was no more smiling than the other

side, but as soon as Theo became conscious, in the distance, of the bare height, all denuded of trees, on which Markland stood, the landscape seemed to change for him. There was sunshine in it which was nowhere else, more quiet skies and warmer light. He threw down the burden of his thoughts among the autumn leaves that strewed the brook in that bit of woodland, and, on the other side, remembered with an elation that went to his head, that he had this sacrifice, though she might never know it, to lay at her feet; the flower of his life, the garland of honour, the violet crown, all to scatter on her path. He would rather she should put her foot on them than that they should decorate his brow,—even if she never knew.

With these thoughts, he sped along the country road, which no longer was so green, so warm with sunshine, as before. Markland looked already cold in its bareness against the distant sky all flushed with flying clouds, the young saplings about bending before the wind as if they supplicated for shelter and a little warmth, and the old tottering cedar behind the house looking as if the next blast would bring it down with a crash. There had been a great deal of planting going on, but this only added to the straggling lines of weak-kneed, uncomfortable younglings, who fluttered their handful of leaves, and shivered in every wind that blew. Lady Markland no longer sat on the terrace. She

received her familiar visitor where only intimate friends were allowed to come, in the morning-room, to which its new distinction gave something of the barrenness and rigidity of a room of business. The big writing-table filled up the centre, and nothing remained of its old aspect except Geoff's little settlement within the round of the window; a low table for his few lesson books, where less lawful publications, in the shape of stories, were but too apt to appear, and a low, but virtuously hard chair, on which he was supposed to sit, and—work; but there was not much work done, as everybody knew.

Lady Markland did not rise to receive her visitor. She had a book in her right hand, which she did not even disturb herself to put down. It was her left hand which she held out to Warrender, with a smile: and this mark of a friendship which had gone beyond all ceremony made his heart overflow. By an unusual chance, Geoff was not there, staring with his little sharp eyes, and this made everything sweeter. He had her to himself at last.

“Do I disturb you? Are you busy?” he said.

“Not at all. At least, if I am busy, it is nothing that requires immediate attention. I am a little stupid about those drainages, and what is the landlord's part. I wonder if you know any better? You must have the same sort of things to do?”

“I am ashamed to say I don't, now ; but I'll get it all up,” he said eagerly,—“that must be perfectly easy,—and give you the result.”

“You will cram me, in short,” said Lady Markland, with a smile. “You ought to be somebody's private secretary. How well you would do it ! That was all right about the lease. Mr. Longstaffe was very much astonished that I should know so much. I did not tell him it was you.”

“It was not me !” cried Warrender. “I had only the facts, and you supplied the understanding. I suppose that is to be my trade too ; it will be something to think that you have trained me for it.”

“That we have studied together,” she said, “with most of the ignorance on my side, and most of the knowledge on yours. Oh, I am not too humble. I allow that I sometimes see my way out of a difficulty, with a jump, before you have reasoned it out. That sort of thing is conceded to a woman. I am ‘not without intelligence,’ Mr. Longstaffe himself says. But what do you mean to imply by that tone of regret—you suppose it is to be your trade?”

“I don't mean anything,—to make you ask, perhaps. I have no doubt I mean that finding out what was the exact pound of flesh the farmers could demand, and how much on our side we could exact, did not seem very lofty work : until I remembered that you were doing it too.”

“My doing it makes no difference,” said Lady Markland. “You ought to know better than to make me those little compliments. But for all that, it is a fine trade. Looking after the land is the best of trades. Everything must have begun with it, and it will go on for ever. And the pleasure of thinking one can improve, and hand it over richer and better for the expenditure of a little brains upon it, as well as other condiments—” she said, with a laugh. “Guano, you will say, is of more use perhaps than the brains.”

She carried off a little enthusiasm, which had lit up her eyes, with this laugh at the end.

“I don’t think so,” said Warrender. “Do you think I meant any compliment? but to see you giving yourself up to this, you, who—and to remember that I had been perhaps grumbling, thinking of the schools, and other such paltry honours.”

“Oh, not paltry,—not paltry at all; very, very much the reverse. I am sure no one interested in you can think so.”

“I think so myself,” he said. “I must tell you my little experiences on that subject.” And with this he told her all his little story about the devotion of the Dons; about their discovery of his pursuits, and the slackening of their approbation; and about how Brunson (a very good

fellow, and quite aware of their real meaning) had taken his place. Lady Markland was duly interested, amused, and indignant; interested enough to be quite sincere in her expressions, and yet independent enough to smile a little at the conflict between wounded feeling and philosophy on Warrender's part.

"But," she added, with a woman's liking for a practicable medium, "you might have postponed your deeper reading till you had done what was necessary, and so pleased both them and yourself."

"I thought one could not serve two masters," said Theo; "and that is why I encourage myself, by your example, to take to the land and its duties, and give up the other poor little bubble of reputation."

"Don't talk of my example," she said. "I am not disinterested. I am making no choice. What I am doing is for the only object I have in life, the only thing I have in the world."

He did not ask any question, but he fixed her with intent, inquiring eyes.

"You need not look as if you had any doubt what it was. It is Geoff, of course. I don't care very much for anything else. But to hand back his inheritance unburdened, to make a man of my poor little Geoff——" Her bright eyes moistened with quick-springing tears. She smiled,

and her face looked to Theo like the face of an angel; though he was impatient of the motive, he adored her for it. And she gave her head a little toss, as if to shake off this undue emotion. "I need not talk any high-flown nonsense about such a simple duty, need I?" she said, once more with a soft laugh. Instead of making the most of her pathetic position, she would always ignore the claims she had upon sympathy. Her simple duty,—that was all.

"We must not discuss that question," he said; "for if I were to say what I thought—— And this brings me to what I wanted to talk to you about, Lady Markland. Geoff——"

She looked at him, with a sudden catching of her breath. She had no expectation of a sudden invasion of the practical into the vague satisfaction of the pause, which kept Geoff still by his mother's side. And yet she knew that it was her duty to listen, to accept any reasonable suggestion that might be made.

"There was that question,—between a school and a tutor," he said. "I have been thinking a great deal about it. We settled, you remember, that to send him away to school would be too much; not good for himself, as he is delicate: and for you it would be hard. You would miss him dreadfully."

"Miss him!" she said. As if these common words

could express the vacancy, the blank solitude, into which her life without Geoff would settle down !

“But it seems to me now that there is another side to the question,” he continued, with what seemed to Lady Markland a pitiless persistency. “A tutor here would be too much in your way. You would not like to let him live by himself altogether. His presence would be a constant embarrassment. You could not have him with you, nor could you, for Geoff’s sake, keep him quite at a distance.”

She held out her hands to stop this too clear exposition. “Don’t !” she cried. “Do you think I have not considered all that ? You only make me see the difficulties more and more clearly, and I see them so clearly already. But what am I to do ?”

“Dear Lady Markland,” he said, rising from his chair, “I want to propose something to you.” The young man had grown so pale, yet by moments flushed so suddenly, and had altogether such an air of agitation and passionate earnestness, that a certain alarm flashed into her mind. The word had an ominous sound. Could he be thinking—was it possible—— She felt a hot flush of shame and a cold shiver of horror and fear at the thought, which after all was not a thought, but only a sharp pang of fright, which went through her like an arrow. He saw that she looked

nervously at him, but that was easily explained by what had gone before.

“It is this,” he said. “It is quite simple; it will cost nobody anything, and give a great deal of pleasure to me. I want you to let *me* be Geoff’s tutor. Wait a moment before you answer. It will be no trouble. I have absolutely nothing to do. My father left all his affairs in complete order; all my farms are let, everything going on quite smoothly. And you must remember our little bit of a place is very different from all you have to think of. No, I don’t want to thrust myself upon you. I will ride over, or drive over, or walk over, every day. The distance is nothing; it will do me all the good in the world. And, honours or no honours, I have plenty of scholarship for Geoff. Ah, don’t refuse me; it will be such a pleasure. I have set my heart on being tutor to Geoff.”

She had listened to him with a great many endeavours to break in. She stopped him at last almost by force, putting out her hand and taking his when he came to a little pause for breath. “Mr. Warrender,” she said, almost as breathless as he, tears in her eyes, her voice almost choked, “how can I thank you for the thought! God bless you for the thought. Oh, how good, how kind, how full of feeling! I hope if you are ever in trouble you will have as good a friend as you have been to me.”

“If you will be my friend, Lady Markland—”

“That I will,” she cried, “all my life; but never be able to make up to you for this.” She had put out both her hands, which he held trembling, but dared not stoop to kiss lest he should betray himself. After a moment, half laughing, half sobbing, she bade him sit down again beside her. “You are very, very good,” she said; “but there are a few things to be talked over. First, you are going back to Oxford in a week or two.”

“I am not going up this term; that is settled already.”

“Not going up! But I thought you must go up. You have not taken your degree.”

“Oh, that is not till next year,” he said lightly, confident in her ignorance of details. “There is no reason why I should hurry; and, in fact, I had made up my mind some time since, so there is no difficulty so far as that goes.”

She looked at him with keen scrutiny; her mind in a moment flashing over the whole course of their conversation like a light over a landscape, yet seeing it imperfectly, as a landscape under a sudden flash can only be seen with a perception of its chief features, but nothing more. The young man had been tenderly kind to her all through. Since the moment when he came into this very room to tell her of her husband's accident he had never forsaken her. She

had not thought that such chivalrous kindness existed in the world, but she was yet young enough and inexperienced enough to believe in it and in its complete disinterestedness; for what return could she ever make for all he had done? And now, was this a crowning service, an offer of brotherly kindness which was almost sublime, or—what was it? She looked at him as if she could see into his soul. “Oh,” she said, “I know your generosity. I feel as if I could not trust you when you say it doesn’t matter. How could I ever forgive myself if you were injuring your own prospects for Geoff!—if it was for Geoff.”

For Geoff! Warrender laughed aloud, almost roughly, in a way which half offended her. Could anybody suppose for a moment that for that ugly, precocious little boy—? “You need not distress yourself on that account, Lady Markland,” he said. “It is not for Geoff,—I had made up my mind on that question long ago,—but by way of occupying my idle time—And if you think me good enough——”

“Oh, good enough!” she said. But she was too much alarmed and startled to make any definite reply. Almost for the first time she became conscious that Theo was neither a boy nor a visionary young hero of the Sir Galahad kind, but a man like other men. The further discovery which awaited her, that she herself was not a dignified

recluse from life, a queen mother ruling the affairs of her son's kingdom for him and not for herself: but in other people's eyes, at least, a young woman, still open to other thoughts, was still far from Lady Markland's mind.

CHAPTER III.

“You will give me my answer after you have thought it all over.”

“Certainly you shall have an answer: and in the meantime my thanks; or if there is any word more grateful than thanks,—more than words can say——”

He turned to look back as he closed the little gate for foot passengers at the end of the bare road which was called the avenue, and took off his hat as she waved her hand to him. Then she turned back again towards the house. It was a ruddy October afternoon, the sun going down in gold and crimson, with already the deeper, more gorgeous colours of winter in the sky. Geoff was hanging upon her arm, clinging to it with both of his, walking in her very shadow, as was his wont.

“Why do you thank Theo Warrender like that? What has he done for us?” asked Geoff.

“I don’t think, dear, that you should talk of him in that familiar way. Theo! He is old enough to be”—here

she paused for a moment, not pleased with the suggestion, and then added—"he might be your elder brother, at least."

"Not unless I had another mamma," said Geoff. "Theo is about as old as you."

"Oh no; much younger than I am. Do you remember you once said you would like him for your tutor, Geoff?"

"I don't think I should now," said the little boy. "That was because he was so clever. I begin to think now, perhaps it would be better not to have such a clever one. When you are very small you don't understand."

"You are not very big still, my dear boy."

"No, but things come different." Geoff had a way of twisting his little face, as he made an observation wiser than usual, which amused the world in general, but not his mother. He was not a pretty boy; there was nothing in his appearance to satisfy a pretty young woman in her ambition and vanity for her child; but his little face was turned into a grotesque by those queer contortions. She put her hand upon his arm hastily.

"Don't make such faces, Geoff. Why should you twist your features out of all shape, with every word you say?"

This was perhaps too strong, and Geoff felt it so. "I

don't want to make faces," he said, "but what else have you got to do it with when you are thinking? I'll tell you how I have found out that Theo Warrender would be too clever. That day when he showed me how to do my Latin"—The boy here paused, with a curious elfish gravity. "It was a long time ago."

"I remember, dear."

"Well, you were all talking, saying little speeches, as people do, you know, that come to pay visits; and he was out of it, so he talked to me. But now, when he comes, he makes the speeches, and you answer him, and you two run on till I think you never will be done; and it is I who am out of it," said Geoff, with great gravity, though without offence. His mother pressed his clinging arms to her side, with a sudden exclamation.

"My own boy, *you* feel out of it when I am talking!—you, my only child, my only comfort!" Lady Markland held him close to her, and quick tears sprang to her eyes.

"It is nothing to make any fuss about, mamma. Sometimes I like it. I listen, and you are very funny when you talk. That is, not you, but Theo Warrender. He talks as if nothing was right but only as you thought. I suppose he thinks you are very clever." Geoff paused for a moment, and gave her an investigating look; and then added in a

less assured tone, "And I suppose you are clever, ain't you, mamma?"

She was moved to a laugh, in the midst of other feelings. "Not that I know of, Geoff. I was never thought to be clever, so far as I am aware."

"You are, though," he said, "when you don't make speeches as all the people do. I think you are cleverer with Theo than with anybody. What was he talking of to-day, for instance, when I was away?"

The question was put so suddenly that she was almost embarrassed by it. "He was saying that he wished to be your tutor, Geoff. It was very kind. To save me from parting with you,—which I think would be more than I could bear,—and to save me the trouble of having a—strange gentleman in the house."

"But he would be a strange gentleman, just the same."

"He is a friend, the kindest friend; and then he would not be in the house. He wants to come over every day, just for your lessons. But it is too much,—it is too much to accept from any one," she said suddenly, struck for the first time with this view.

"That would be very jolly!" cried Geoff. "I should like that: if he came only for my lessons, and then went away: and afterwards there would be only you and me,—

nobody but you and me, just as we used to be all the time, before——”

“Oh, don't say that! We were not always alone—before ; there was——”

“I know,” said the little boy; but after a moment's pause he resumed: “You know that generally we were alone, mamma. I like that,—you and me, and no one else. Yes, let Theo come and teach me; and then when lessons are over go away.”

Lady Markland laughed. “You must think it a great privilege to teach you, Geoff. He is to be allowed that favour,—to do all he can for us,—and as soon as he has done it to be turned from the door. That would be kind on his part, but rather churlish on ours, don't you think?”

“Oh,” said the boy, “then he does it for something? You said tutors worked for money, and that Theo was well off, and did not want money. I see; then he wants something else. Is no one kind just for kindness? Must everybody be paid?”

“In kindness, surely, Geoff.”

The boy looked at her with his little twinkling eyes and a twist in the corner of his mouth. Perhaps he did not understand the instinctive suspicion in his mind,—indeed, there is no possibility that he could understand it; but it moved him with a keen premonition of danger. “I

should think it was easiest to pay in money," he said, with precocious wisdom. "How could you and me be kind?"

They strolled homeward during this conversation along the bare avenue, through the lines of faint, weak-kneed young trees which had been planted with a far-off hope of some time, twenty years hence, filling up the gaps. Little Geoff, with all the chaos of ideas in his mind, a child unlike other children, just saved from the grave of his race, the last little feeble representative of a house which had been strong and famous in its day, was not unlike one of the feeble saplings which rustled and swayed in the wailing autumn wind. The sunshine slanted upon the two figures, throwing long shadows across the wet grass and copse, which only differed from the long slim shadows of the young trees in their steadiness as they moved along by their own impulse, instead of blowing about at the mercy of the breeze, like the heirs of the old oaks and beeches. The scene had a mixture of desolation and hopefulness which was very characteristic: everything young and new, where all should have been mature and well established, if not old—yet in the mere fact of youth conveying a promise of victory against the winds and chills of winter, against the storms and tribulations of life. If they survived, the old avenue would rustle again with verdant wealth, the old house would raise up its head; but for the present, what was

wanted was warmth and shelter and protection, tempered winds and sunshine and friends, protection from the cold north and blighting east. The little human sapling was the one most difficult to guard : and who can tell before the event which alternative is best ? Happily no serious question keeps possession long of a child's brain, and the evening passed as all their quiet evenings passed, without any further discussion. But Geoff's question echoed in Lady Markland's mind after the child had forgotten it and was fast asleep : "How could you and me be kind ?" How was she to repay Theo for a devotion so great ? It was like the devotion of a knight in the times of chivalry. She had said both to herself and others, many times, how kind he was, how could she ever repay him ?—like a brother. But it was true, after all, that everybody had to be paid. How could she reward Theo for his devotion ? What could she do for him ? There was nothing within her power ; she had no influence to help him on, no social advantage, no responsive favour of any kind. He was better off, better educated, more befriended, more surrounded, than she was. He wanted nothing from her. How could she show her gratitude, even ? "How can you and me be kind ?" she said to herself, with a forlorn pride that Geoff always saw the heart of the difficulty. But this did not help her to any reply.

Next morning Mr. Longstaffe, the "man of business" who had the affairs of half the county in his hands, came to Markland to see her, and any idea there might have been of attending to Geoff's lessons had to be laid aside. He had to be dismissed even from his seat in the window, where he superintended, on ordinary occasions, everything that went on. With an internal reflection how it would have been had Theo begun his labours, Lady Markland sent the boy away. "Take care of yourself, Geoff. If you go out, take Bowen with you, or old Black." Bowen was the nurse, whom Geoff felt himself to have long outgrown, and Black was an old groom, whose company was dear to Geoff on ordinary occasions, but for whom he felt no particular inclination to-day. The little boy went out and took a meditative walk, his thoughts returning to the question which had been put before them last night: Theo Warrender for his tutor, to come daily for his lessons, and then to go away. With the unconscious egotism of a child, Geoff would have received this as perfectly reasonable, a most satisfactory arrangement; and indeed it appeared to him, on thinking it over, that his mother's suggestion of a payment in kindness was on the whole somewhat absurd. "Kindness!" Geoff said to himself, "who's going to be unkind?" He proceeded to consider the subject at large. After a time he slapped his little

thigh, as Black did when he was excited. "I'll tell you!" he cried to himself. "I'll offer to go over *there* half the time." He paused at this, for, besides the practical proof of kindness to Theo which he felt would thus be given, a sudden pleasure seized upon and expanded his little soul. To go over *there*: to save Theo the trouble, and for himself to burst forth into a new world, a universe of sensations unknown,—into freedom, independence, self-guidance! An exhilaration and sentiment hitherto unexperienced went up in fumes to Geoff's brain. It was scarcely noon, a still and beautiful October day; the sky as blue as summer, the trees all russet and gold, the air with just enough chill in it to make breathing a keen delight. Why not now? These words, Geoff said afterwards, came into his mind as if somebody had said them: and the boldness and wildness of daring suggested ran through his little veins like wine. He rather flew than ran to the stables, which were sadly shorn of their ancient splendour, two horses and Geoff's pony being all that remained. "Saddle me my pony, Black!" the boy cried. "Yes, Master Geoff" (the old man would not say my lord); "but the cob's lame, and I can't take Mirah without my lady's leave." "Never mind. I'm going such a little way. Mamma never says anything when I go a little way." Was it a lie, or only a fib? This question of casuistry gave Geoff great trouble afterwards; for (he said

to himself) it *was* only a little way, nothing at all, though mamma of course thought otherwise, and was deceived. "You'll be very careful, Master Geoff," said the old man. Black had his own reasons for not desiring to go out that day, which made him all the more willing to give credence to Geoff's promise; and the boy had never shown any signs of foolhardiness to make his attendants nervous. With an exultation which he could scarcely restrain, Geoff found himself on his pony, unrestrained and alone. When he got beyond the park, from which he made his exit by a gate which the servants used, and which generally stood open in the morning, a sort of awful delight was in his little soul. He was on the threshold of the world. The green lane before him led into the unknown. He paused a moment, rising in his stirrups, and looked back at the house standing bare upon the ridge, with all its windows twinkling in the sun. His little heart beat, as the heart beats when we leave all we love behind us, yet rose with a thrill and throb of anticipation as he faced again towards the outer universe. Not nine till Christmas, and yet already daring adventure and fortune! This was the consciousness that rose in the little fellow's breast, and made his small gray eyes dance with light, as he turned his pony's head towards the Warren, which meant into the world.

Geoff was very confident that he knew the road. He

had gone several times with his mother in the carriage direct to the Warren; one time in particular, when the route was new to him,—when he went clinging to her, as he always did, but she, frozen into silence, making no reply to him, leant back in Mrs. Warrender's little brougham, like a mother made of marble. Very clearly the child remembered that dreadful drive. But others more cheerful had occurred since. He had got to know the Warren, which was so different from Markland, with those deep old shadowing trees, and everything so small and well filled. And they had all been kind to Geoff. He liked the ladies more than he liked Theo. On the whole, Geoff found ladies more agreeable than men. His father had not left a very tender image in his mind, whereas his mother was all the world to the invalid boy. It occurred to him that he would get a very warm reception at the Warren, whither he meant to go to convey to Theo his gracious acceptance of the offered lessons; and this gave brightness and pleasure to the expedition. But the real object of it was to show kindness which his mother had suggested as the only payment Theo would accept. Geoff in his generosity was going to give the price beforehand, to intimate his intention of saving Theo trouble by coming to the Warren every second day, and generally to propitiate and please his new tutor. It was a very important expedition, and

nobody after this could say that Theo's kindness was not repaid.

The pony trotted along very steadily so long as Geoff remembered to keep his attention to it; and it cantered a little, surprising Geoff, when it found the turf under its hoofs, along another stretch of sunny road which Geoff turned into without remembering it, with a thrill of fresh delight in its novelty and in the long vista under its over-arching boughs. Then he went through the little wood, making the pony walk, his little heart all melting with the sweetness and shade as he picked his way across the brook, in which the leaves lay as in Valombrosa. The pony liked that gentle pace; perhaps he had thoughts of his own which were as urgent, yet as idle, as Geoff's, and like the boy felt the delight of the unknown. Anyhow, he continued to walk along the level stretch of road beyond the wood; and Geoff, upon his back, made no remonstrance. The boy began to get a little confused by the turnings, by the landscape, by the effect of the wide atmosphere and the wind blowing in his face. He forgot almost that he was Geoff. He was a little boy on his way to fairyland, riding on and on in a dream.

CHAPTER IV.

THE pony walked on, sometimes a little quicker, sometimes a little slower, while Geoff dreamed. No doubt the pony too had his own thoughts. His opinion was that summer had come again. He was rather a pampered little pony, who had never been put to any common use, who had never felt harness on his back, or a weight behind him, or even the touch of a whip beyond that of Geoff's little switch; and he had come so far and had trotted so long that he was hot, and did not like it. He had come so far that he no longer knew which was the direction of home and the comfortable cool stable, for which he began to puff and sigh. When they came to a cross-road he sniffed at it, but never could be sure. The scent seemed to lie one time in one way, another time in another. Not being able to make sure of the way home, the pony made it up to himself in a different direction. He sauntered along, and cooled down. He took a pull at the grass, nearly snatching the loose reins out of Geoff's small hands. Then, after having

thus secured the proper length, he had a tolerable meal, a sort of picnic refreshment, not unpleasant; and the grass was very crisp and fresh. He began to think that it was for this purpose, to give him a little beneficial change of diet, that he had been brought out. It was very considerate. Corn is good, and so even is nice dry, sweet-smelling hay. But of all things in the world, there is nothing so delightful as the fresh salad with all its juices, the nice sweet grass with the dew upon it, especially when it is past the season for grass, and you have been ridden in the sun.

Geoff's mind was pleurably moved in a different way. The freedom, the silence, the fresh air, entered into his little being like wine. He had not much experienced the delights of solitude. A sickly child, who has to be watched continually, and who is alone in the sense of having no playmates, no one of his own age near him, has less experience than the robust of true aloneness. He had been always with his mother, always, in his mother's brief absences,—so brief that they scarcely told in the little story of his life,—under the charge of the nurse, who was entirely devoted to him. He knew all the stories she had to tell by heart, and yet would have them repeated, with a certain pleasure in the sound of the words. But his mother,—he never could be sure what she was going to say. To question her was the chief occupation of his life, and she never was weary

of replying. His days were full of this perpetual intercourse. So it happened that to get out alone into the absolute stillness, broken only by the rustle of the leaves, the sound of the wind as it brought them down, the twitter of the birds, the tinkle of the little stream, was a new delight to Geoff, unlike anything that had gone before. And to see miles and miles before him, to see all round, roads stretching into the unknown, houses and churches and woods, all nameless and new ; was he riding out to seek his fortune, was he going to conquer the world, was he the prince riding to the castle where the Sleeping Beauty lay? Or was he going on unawares to the ogre's castle, where he was to kill the giant and deliver the prisoners?

The little boy did not, perhaps, put these questions into form, but they were all in his mind, filling him with a vague, delicious exhilaration. He was all of them put together, and little Geoff Markland beside. He was afraid of nothing : partly, perhaps, because of his breeding, which had made it apparent to him that the world chiefly existed for the purpose of taking care of Geoff ; and partly from an innate confidence and friendliness with all the world. He had no serious doubt that ogres, giants, and other unpleasant people did exist to be overcome ; but so far as men and women were concerned, Geoff had no fear of them, and he was aware that even in the castle of the ogre these natural aids and

auxiliaries were to be found. He wandered on, accordingly, quite satisfied with his fancies, until the pony gave that first jerk to the reins and began his meal. Geoff pulled him up at first, but then began to reflect that ponies have their breakfast earlier than boys, and that even he himself was beginning to feel that the time for eating had come. "We can't both have luncheon," said the little man, "and I think you might wait, pony;" but he reflected again that, if he could put out his hand and reach some bread and butter, he would not himself, at that moment, be restrained by the thought that pony's hunger was unsatisfied. This thought induced him to drop his wrists and leave pony free. They formed an odd little vignette on the side of the road: the pony, with his head down, selecting the juicy spots; the little boy amicably consenting, with his hands upon its neck. Geoff, however, to those who did not know that he was consenting, and had philosophically made up his mind to sanction, in default of luncheon for himself, his pony's meal, looked a somewhat helpless little figure, swayed about by the movements of his little steed. And this was how he appeared to the occupants of a phaeton which swept past, with two fine bay horses, and all their harness glittering and jingling in the sun. There was a lady in it, by the driver's side, and both greeted the little boy with a burst of laughter. "Shall I touch him up for you?" the gentleman cried,

brandishing his whip over the pony's head. This insult went to Geoff's soul. He drew himself up out of his dreaming, and darted such a glance at the passers-by as produced another loud laugh, as they swept past. And he plucked the pony's head from the turf with the same startled movement, and surprised the little animal into a canter of a dozen paces or so, enough, at least, he hoped, to show those insolent people that he could go when he liked. But after that the pony took matters into his own hand.

It was beginning to be afternoon, which to Geoff meant the decline of the day, after his two o'clock dinner. He had no dinner, poor child, and that afternoon languor which the strongest feel, the sense of falling off and running low was deepened in him by unusual emptiness, and that consciousness of wrong which a child has who has missed a meal. Pony, after *his* dinner, had a more lively feeling than ever that the stable at home would be cool and comfortable, and, emboldened by so much salad, wanted to turn back and risk finding the way. He bolted twice, so that all Geoff's horsemanship and all his strength were necessary to bring the little beast round. The little man did it, setting his teeth with childish rage and determination, digging his heels into the fat refractory sides, and holding his reins twisted in his little fists with savage tenacity. But a conflict of this sort is very exhausting, and to force an unreasonable

four-footed creature in the way it does not want to go requires a strain of all the faculties which it is not easy to keep up, especially at the age (not all told) of nine. Geoff felt the tears coming to his eyes ; he felt that he would die of shame if any one saw him thus almost mastered by a pony, yet that he would give anything in the world to see a known face, some one who would help him home. Not the phaeton, though, or that man who had offered to "touch him up." When he heard the wheels again behind him Geoff grew frantic. He laid his whip about the pony's sides, with a maddening determination not to be laughed at again. But circumstances were too strong for Geoff. The pony made a spring forward, stopped suddenly : and Geoff, with a giddy sense of flying through the air, a horrible consciousness of great hoofs coming down, lost all knowledge of what was going to happen to him, and ended in insensibility this wild little flight into the unknown.

It was well for Geoff that some one who had been crossing a field close by, at this climax of his little history, saw the impending accident, and sprang over the stile into the road at the decisive moment ; for the driver of the phaeton could scarcely, with the best will in the world, have otherwise avoided mischief, though he pulled his horses back on their hindquarters in the sudden alarm. Theo Warrender flung himself under the very hoofs of the dashing bays.

He seized the child and flung him out on the edge of the road, but was himself knocked down, and lay for a moment not knowing how much he was himself hurt, and paralysed by terror for the child, whom he had recognised in the flash of the catastrophe. There was a whirl of noise for a moment, loud shrieks from the lady, the grinding of the suddenly stopped wheels, the prancing and champing of the horses, the loud exclamations of the man who was driving, to the groom who sprang out from behind, and to his shrieking companion. The groom raised Geoff's head, and propped him on the grass at the roadside, while Warrender crept out from the dangerous position he occupied, his heart sick with alarm. "He's coming to," said the groom. "There is no harm done. The gentleman's more hurt than the boy." "There is nothing the matter with me," cried Warrender, though the blood was pouring from his forehead, making bubbles in the dust. When Geoff opened his eyes he had a vision first of that anxious, blood-stained countenance; then of a bearded face in an atmosphere of cigar smoke, which reminded him strangely, in the dizziness of returning consciousness, of his father, while the carriage, the impatient bays, the lady looking down from her high seat, were like a picture behind. He could not remember at first what it was all about. The bearded man knelt beside him, feeling him all over. "Does

anything hurt you, little chap? Come, that's brave. I think there's nothing wrong."

"But look at Theo! Theo's all bleeding," said Geoff, trying to raise himself up.

"It's nothing,—a trifle," said Warrender, feeling, though faint, angry that the attention of the stranger should be directed to his ghastly countenance. He added, "Don't wait on account of him. If you will let your man catch the pony, I'll take him home."

Then the lady screamed from the phaeton that the little darling must be given to her, that he was not fit to get on that pony again, that he must be driven to Underwood. She called her companion to her, who swore by Jove, and plucked at his moustache, and consulted with the groom, who by some chance knew who the child was. The end of the discussion was that Geoff, to his own great surprise, and not without a struggle, was lifted to the phaeton and placed close to the lady, who drew him to her, and kept him safe within her arm. Geoff looked up at the face that bent so closely over him with a great deal of curiosity and a mingled attraction and repulsion. In his giddy state, it seemed to him another phase of the dream. The sudden elevation, the rush of rapid motion, so different from his slow and easy progress, the two bays dashing through the air, the lady's perfumery and her caresses, all bewildered

the boy. Where were they taking him? After all, was there really some ogre's castle, some enchanted palace, to which he was being swept along without any will of his? The little boy was disturbed by the kisses and caresses of his new friend. He was neither shy nor forward; but he felt himself too old to be kissed, and a little indignant, and slightly alarmed, in the confusion of his shaken frame, as to where he was being taken and what was going to happen to him. The bays were grand and the lady was beautiful; but as Geoff looked at her, holding himself as far away as was possible within the tight reach of her arm holding him, he thought her more like the enchantress than the good, lovely fairy queen, which had been his first idea. She was not like the ogre's wife he knew so well,—that pathetic, human little person, who did what she could to save the poor strayed boys; but rather of ogre kind herself, kissing him as if she would like to put a tooth in him, with loud laughter at his shrinking and indisposition to be caressed. Geoff also felt keenly the meanness of forsaking Theo, and even the pony, who by this time, no doubt, must be very sorry for having thrown him, and very much puzzled how to get home. Would the groom (left behind for the purpose) be able to catch him? All these things much disturbed Geoff's thoughts. He paid little attention to the promises that were made to him of tea and nice things to eat, although

he was faint and hungry ; feeling not altogether certain, in his little confused brain, that he might not, instead of eating, be eaten, although he was quite aware at the same time that this was nonsense, and could not be.

But when the phaeton turned in at the gate of the Elms, and Geoff saw the high red brick house, surrounded with its walls, like a prison, or like the ogre's castle itself, his perturbation grew to a climax. The vague alarm which takes complete possession of a child when once aroused in him rose higher and higher in his mind. When the lady sprang lightly down, and held out her arms to receive him as he alighted, the little fellow made a nervous leap clear of her, and stood shaking and quivering with the effort, on his guard, and distrustful of any advance. "Nobody is going to harm you, my little fellow," said the man, kindly enough : while the lady asked why he was frightened, with laughter, which confused and alarmed him more and more ; for Geoff was accustomed to be taken seriously, and did not understand being laughed at. He wanted to be civil, notwithstanding, and was about to follow in-doors, plucking up his courage, when a glance round, which showed him how high the walls were, and that the gates had been closed, and that in the somewhat strait inclosure inside there was no apparent outlet by which he could communicate with the world in which his mother and Theo and every-

body he knew were left behind, brought a thrill of panic, which he could not overcome, through him. As he paused, scared and frightened, on the threshold, he saw at the farther end of the inclosure a door standing a little ajar, at which some one had entered on foot. Geoff did not pause to think again, but made for the opening with a sudden start, and, when outside, ran like a hunted hare. He ran straight on seeing houses before him where he knew there must be safety,—houses with no high walls, cottages such as a small heart trusts in, be it beggar or prince. He ran, winged with fear, till he got as far as Mrs. Bagley's shop. It was not far, but he was unused to violent exertion, and his little body and brain were both quivering with excitement and with the shock of his fall. The dread of some one coming after him, of the house that looked like a prison, of the strangeness of the circumstances altogether, subsided at the sight of the village street, the church in the distance, the open door of the little shop. All these things were utterly antagonistic to ogres, incompatible with enchantresses. Geoff became lively again when he reached the familiar and recognisable; and when he saw the cakes in Mrs. Bagley's window, his want of a dinner became an overpowering consciousness. He stopped himself, took breath, wiped his little hot forehead, and went in in a very gentlemanly way, taking off his hat, which was dusty and crushed with his

fall, to the astonished old lady behind the counter. "Would you mind giving me a cake or a biscuit?" he said. "I don't think I have any money, but I am going to Mrs. Warrender's, if you will show me where that is, and she will pay for me. But don't do it," said Geoff, suddenly perceiving that he might be taken for an impostor, "if you have any doubt that you will be paid."

"Oh, my little gentleman," cried Mrs Bagley, "take whatever you please, sir! I'm not a bit afraid; and if you was never to pay me, you're but a child, if I may make bold to say so; and as for a cake or a—— But if you'll take my advice, sir, a good bit of bread and butter would be far more wholesome, and you shall have that in a moment."

"Thank you very much," said Geoff, though he cast longing eyes at the cakes, which had the advantage of being ready; "and please might I have a chair or a stool to sit down upon, for I am very tired? May I go into that nice room there, while you cut the bread and butter? My mother," said the boy, with a sigh of pleasure, throwing himself down in Mrs. Bagley's big chair, which she dragged out of its corner for him, "will be very much obliged to you when she knows. Yes, I am only a child," he continued, after a moment; "but I never thought I was so little till I got far away from home. Will you tell me, please, where I am now?"

Mrs. Bagley was greatly impressed by this little personage, who looked so small and talked with such imposing self-possession. She set down before him a glass of milk with the cream on it, which she had intended for her own tea, and a great slice of bread and butter, which Geoff entered upon without further compliment. "This is Underwood," she said, "and Mrs. Warrender's is close by, and there's nobody but will be ready to show you the way; but I do hope, sir, as you haven't run away from home."

"Oh no," said Geoff, with his mouth full of bread and butter, "not at all. I only came to see Theo,—that is Mr. Warrender's name, you know. To be sure," he added, "mamma will not know where I am, and probably she is very frightened; that is something like running away, isn't it? I hope they have caught my pony, and then when I have rested a little I can ride home. Is that a nice house, that tall red house with the wall round it, or do they shut up people there?"

"Ah, that's the Elms," said the old lady, and she gave a glance which Geoff did not understand to the young woman who was sitting at work behind. "I don't know as folks is ever shut up in it," she said, significantly; "but don't you never go there, my little gentleman, for it ain't a nice house."

“The like of him couldn’t get no harm—if even, Granny, it was as bad as you think.”

“There is nobody as wouldn’t get harm, man or woman, or even children,” cried Granny dogmatically. “It was the last place as poor Lord Markland was ever in afore his accident, and who knows——”

Geoff put down his bread and butter. “That’s my father,” he said. He did not use the more familiar title when talking to strangers. “Did he know those people? Perhaps his horses got wild escaping from them.”

Mrs. Bagley lifted up her hands in awe and wonder. “My stars!” she said, “I thought I had seen him before. Lizzie, it’s the little lord.”

“That is what the lady called me,” said Geoff, “as if it was my fault. Do they set traps there for people who are lords?”

CHAPTER V.

IT may be supposed what the sight of Theo all bound up and bleeding was to the family in the Warren. He had not at all the look of a benevolent deliverer, suffering sweetly from a wound received in the service of mankind. He had a very pale and angry countenance, and snorted indignant breath from his dilated nostrils. "It's nothing; a little water will make it all right," he answered to the eager questions of his mother and sisters. "Has the brat got here?"

"The brat? What brat? Oh, Theo! You've been knocked down; your coat is covered with dust. Run for a basin, Chatty, and some lint. You've been fighting, or something." These cries rose from the different voices round him, while old Joseph, who had seen from a window the plight in which his master was, stood gazing, somewhat cynical and very curious, in the background. The scene was the hall, which has been already described, and into which all the rooms opened.

"Well," said Theo angrily, "I never said I hadn't.

Where's the boy? Little fool! and his mother will be distracted. Oh, don't bother me with your bathing. I must go and see after the boy."

"Let me see what is wrong," pleaded Mrs. Warrender. "The boy? Who is it? Little Markland? Has he run away? Oh, Theo, have patience a moment. Joseph will run and see. Minnie will put on her hat."

"Running don't suit these legs o' mine," grumbled Joseph, looking at his thin shanks.

"And what am I to put on my hat for?" cried Minnie. "Let Theo explain. How can we tell what he wants, if he won't explain?"

"I'll run," said Chatty, who had already brought her basin, and who flew forth in most illogical readiness, eager to satisfy her brother, though she did not know what he wanted. Good-will, however, is often its own reward, and in this instance it was emphatically so, for Chatty almost ran into a little group advancing through the shrubbery,—Mrs. Bagley, with her best bonnet hastily put on, and holding little Geoff Markland by the hand. The little boy was in advance, dragging his guardian forward, and Mrs. Bagley panted with the effort. "Oh, Miss Chatty," she cried, "I'm so thankful to see you! The little gentleman, he's in such a hurry. The little gentleman——"

Geoff left go in a moment of the old lady's hand, nearly

throwing her off her balance ; but he was full of his own affairs, as was natural. "It is me," he said to Chatty. "I came to see Theo ; but I had an accident and he had an accident. And they wanted to take me to that tall house, but I wouldn't. Has Theo come back? and where is pony? This old lady has to be paid for the bread and butter. She was very kind, and took care of me when I ran away."

"Oh," cried Chatty, "did you run away? And Lady Markland will be so unhappy."

No one paid attention to Mrs. Bagley declaring that she wanted no payment for her bread and butter ; and Geoff, very full of the importance of the position, hurried Chatty back to the house. "Can I go in?" he said, breathless ; "and will you send me home, and find pony for me? Oh, here is Theo. Was it the horse that tipped you on the head?" He came forward with great gravity, and watched the bathing of Warrender's head, which was going on partly against his will. Geoff approached without further ceremony, and stood by the side of the table, and looked on. "Did he catch you with his forefoot?" said the boy. "I thought it was only the back feet that were dangerous. What a lot of blood ! and oh, are they going to cut off your hair? When I got a knock on the head, mamma sent for the doctor for me."

“Dear Theo, be still, and let me do it. How could you get such a blow?”

“I will tell you, Mrs. Warrender,” said the little boy, drawing closer and closer, and watching everything with his little grave face. “Pony threw me, and the big bays were coming down to crush my head. I saw them waving in the air, like that, over me! and Theo laid hold of me *here* and tore me, and they crushed him instead.”

“What is all this about a pony and the bays? Theo, tell me.”

“He tore me all here, look, in the back of my knickerbockers,” said Geoff, putting his hand to the place; “but I’d rather have that than a knock on my head. Theo, does it hurt? Theo, what a lot you have bled! Were you obliged to tear my knickerbockers? I say, Theo, the lady was pretty, but I didn’t much like her, after all.”

Theo, though his head was over the basin, put out his hand and seized the child by the shoulders. “What did you run away for, you little——? Do you know your mother will be wretched about you?—your mother, who is worth a hundred of you.” This was said through his teeth, with a twist of Geoff’s shoulder which was almost savage.

“I say!” cried the child; then he added indignantly, “I never ran away, I came to see you, because you are

going to be my tutor. I didn't think it was such a long way. And pony got hungry. And so was I."

"Going to be his tutor!" It was Minnie's voice that said this so sharply that the air tingled with the words: and even Mrs. Warrender started a little; but it was not a moment at which any more could be said. The bathing was done, and Theo's wound had now to be brought together by plaster and bound up. It was not very serious. A hoof had touched him, but that was all, and fortunately not on a dangerous place.

"Take him away and give him something to eat," said the patient, but not in a hospitable voice.

"I want to see it all done," said Geoff, pressing closer. "Is that how you do it? Don't you want another piece of plaster? Will you have to take it off again, or will it stay till it is all well? Oh, look, that corner isn't fast. Press it there, a little farther. Oh, Theo, she has done it so nicely. You can't see a bit of the bad place. It is all covered with plaster, like that, and then like this. I wish now it had been me, just to know how it feels."

"Take him away, mother, for Heaven's sake!" cried Warrender under his breath.

"My dear, you must not worry Theo. He is going to lie down now, and be quiet for a little. Go with Minnie, and have something to eat."

“I am not so hungry now,” said the boy, “but very much interested. When you are interested you don’t feel hungry: and the old woman gave me something to eat. Would you pay her, please? Won’t you tie something on, Mrs. Warrender, to hide the plaster? It doesn’t look very nice like that.”

“Come,” said Chatty, taking him by the hand. The elder sister had thrown herself into a chair at the mention of the tutorship, and seemed unable for further exertion.

“Oh yes, I am coming; but I am most interested about Theo. Theo, you have got a stain upon your cheek; and your coat is torn, too, as bad as my—— Well, but he did tear my knickerbockers. Look! I felt the cold wind, though I did not say anything; not upon the open road, but when we got among your trees. It is so dark among your trees. Theo!”

“Come, come; I want you to come with me,” Chatty said, hurrying Geoff away; and perhaps the sight of the table in the dining-room, and the tray which Joseph, not without a grumble, was placing upon it, became about this time as interesting as Theo’s wound.

“We ought to send and tell his mother that the child is here.”

“Or send him back,” said Minnie sharply, “and get rid of him. A little story-teller! Theo his tutor! If I were

his mother, I should whip him, till he learned what lies mean !”

Mrs. Warrender looked with some anxiety at her son. “Children,” she said, “make such strange misrepresentations of what they hear. But we should send——”

“I have sent already,” said Theo. “She will probably come and fetch him : and, mother——”

“My dear, keep still, and don’t disturb yourself. There might be a little fever.”

“Oh, rubbish, fever ! I shall not disturb myself, if you don’t disturb me. Look here. It is quite true ; I’ve offered myself to be his tutor.”

“His tutor !” cried Minnie once more, in a voice which was like the report of a pistol. Mrs. Warrender said nothing, but looked at him with a boundless pity in her eyes, slightly shaking her head.

“Well ! and what have you to say against it ?” cried Theo, facing his sister, with a glow of anger mounting to the face which had been almost ghastly with loss of blood.

“This is not a moment for discussion. Go and see to the child, Minnie. Theo, my dear boy, if you care so much for Geoff as that—; at another time you must tell us all about it.”

“There is nothing to tell you, save that I have made up my mind to it,” he said, looking at her with that prompt defiance which forestalls remark. “Geoff ! Do you think

it is for Geoff? But neither at this time nor at any other time is there more to say."

He looked at her so severely that Mrs. Warrender's eyes fell. He felt no shame, but pride, in his self-sacrifice, and determination to stand by it and uphold his right to do it in the face of all the world. But this very determination, and a consciousness of all that would be said on the subject, gave Warrender a double intolerance in respect to Geoff himself. To imagine that it was for the boy's sake was, he already felt, the most unbearable offence. For the boy's sake! The boy would have been swept away before now if thought could have done it. From the first hour he had been impatient of the boy. The way in which he clung to his mother had been a personal offence. And his mother!—ah no, she could do no wrong. Not even in this matter, which sometimes tortured him, could he blame Lady Markland. But that she or any one should imagine for a moment that he was ready to sacrifice his time, his independence, so much of his life, for the sake of Geoff! That was a misconception which Warrender could not bear. "Don't let that little—— come near me," he said to his mother, as he finally went off, somewhat feebly, to the old library, where he could be sure of quiet. "Make the girls take care of him and amuse him. She will probably come and fetch him, and I will rest—till then."—

That little—— Warrender did not add any epithet ; the adjective was enough.

“Till then,—till she comes ! Is that all your thought ?” said his mother. “Oh, my poor boy !”

He met her eyes with a pride which scorned concealment. Yes, he would own it here, where it would be in vain to deny it. He would not disavow the secret of his heart. Mothers have keen eyes, but hers were not keen, they were pitying,—more sad than tears. She looked at him, and once more softly shook her head. The blood had rushed again to his face, dyeing it crimson for a moment, and he held his head high as he made his confession. “Yes, mother, that is all my thought.” And then he walked away, tingling with the first avowal he had ever made to mortal ears. As for Mrs. Warrender, she stood looking after him with so mingled an expression that scarcely the most delicate of casuists could have divined the meaning in her. She was so sorry for him, so proud of him. He was so young, not more than a boy, yet man enough to give all his heart and his life—to sacrifice everything, even his pride—for the sake of the woman he loved. His mother, who had never before come within speaking distance of a passion like this, felt her heart glow and swell with pride in him, with tender admiration beyond words. She had neither loved nor been loved after this sort ; and yet it was no romance of the

poets, but had a real existence, and was here, here by her side, in the monotonous little world which had never been touched by such a presence before. She said to herself that it would never come to anything but misery and pain ; yet even misery was better than nothingness, and he who had loved had lived. To think that a quiet, middle-aged Englishwoman, a pattern of domestic duty, should think thus, and exult in her son's inconceivable and, as she believed, unhappy passion, is almost too much to be credible. Yet so it was.

Geoff's absence was not discovered until two o'clock, when Lady Markland, at the end of a long and troublesome consultation over matters only partially understood, suggested luncheon to her man of business. "Geoff will be waiting and very impatient," she said, with a smile. Mr. Longstaffe was not anxious to see Geoff, nor disturbed that the little boy's midday meal should have been postponed to business, though this disturbed Geoff's mother, who had been in the habit of thinking his comfort the rule of her life. She was much startled not to find him in the dining-room, and to hear that he had not come back. "Not come back ! and it is two o'clock ! But Black will take good care of him," she said, with a forced smile, to Mr. Longstaffe, "and I must not keep you waiting." "If you please, my lady," said the butler, "Black's not gone with him." At this

Lady Markland stared at the man, the colour dying out of her face. "You have let him go out alone!" "I had nothing to do with it, my lady. The colt's lame, and Black——" "Oh," she cried, stamping her foot, "don't talk to me of excuses, but go, go, and look for my child!" Then she was told that Black had gone some time since, and was scouring all the roads about; that he had come back once, having seen nothing; and that now the coachman and gardener were gone too. From this time until the hasty messenger arrived with Theo's hurried note, Lady Markland spent the time in such distraction as only mothers know, representing to herself a hundred dangers, which reason told her were unlikely, but which imagination, more strong than reason, placed again and again before her eyes, till she felt a certainty that they were true. All those stories of kidnapping, which people in their senses laugh at, Lady Markland as much as any, being when in her right mind a very sensible woman—came before her now as possible, likely, almost certain. And she saw Geoff, with his little foot caught in the stirrup, dragged at the pony's frightened heels, the stones on the road tearing him, his head knocking against every obstacle; and she saw him lying by the roadside, white and lifeless. She saw everything that could and could not happen, and accused herself for not having sent him to school, out of

danger, — for not having kept him by her side night and day.

Mr. Longstaffe naturally looked on at all this anguish with a mixture of contempt and pity. He was not at all alarmed for Geoff. “The young gentleman will have gone to visit one of his friends ; he will have gone farther than he intended. He may, if he doesn’t know the country very well, have missed his way : but we don’t live in a country of brigands and bandits, my dear lady ; somebody will be sure to direct him safely back.” He managed to eat his luncheon by himself, after she had begged him not to mind her absence, and had left him undisturbed to confide to the butler his regret that Lady Markland should be so much upset, and his conviction that the little boy was quite safe. “He’ll be all right, sir,” the butler said. “He is as sharp as a needle, is Mr. Geoff. I did ought to say his little lordship, but it’s hard to get into new ways.” They said this, each with an indulgent smile at her weakness, in Lady Markland’s absence. The lawyer had a great respect for her, and the butler venerated his mistress who was very capable in her own house, but they smiled at her womanish exaggeration, all the same.

Warrender had been quite right in thinking she would come at once for Geoff. She had almost harnessed the horses herself, so eager was she, and they flew along the

country roads at a pace very unlike their ordinary calm. Evening had fallen when she rushed into the hall at the Warren, in her garden hat, with a shawl wrapped about her shoulders, the first she had found. Terrible recollections of the former occasion when she had been summoned to this house were in her mind, and it was with a fantastic terror which she could scarcely overcome that she found herself once more, by the same waning light, in the place where she had been sent for to see her husband die. If she had been deceived. If the child should be gone, like his father! She had not, however, a second moment in which to indulge this panic, for Geoff's voice, somewhat raised, met her ears at once. Geoff was in very great feather, seated among the ladies, expounding to them his views on things in general. "Our trees at Markland are not like your trees," he was saying. "They are just as young as me, mamma says. When I am as old as you are, or as Theo, perhaps they will be grown. But I should not like them so big as yours. When Theo is my tutor I shall tell him what I think; it will be a fine opportunity. Why, mamma!"

She had him in her arms, kissing and sobbing over him for a moment, till she could overcome that hysterical impulse. Theo had come from his room at the sound of the wheels, and the party was all collected in the drawing-

room, the door of which stood open. There was little light, so that they could scarcely see each other, but Minnie had full time to remark with horror that Lady Markland did not even wear a widow's bonnet, or a crape veil, for decency, but had on a mere *hat*,—a straw hat, with a black ribbon. She put her hand on her heart in the pang of this discovery, but nobody else took any notice. And, indeed, in the outburst of the poor lady's thanks and questions, there was no room for any one else to speak.

“Oh, it was all right,” said Geoff, who was in high excitement, the chief spokesman, and extremely eager to tell his own story before any one could interfere. “I knew the way quite well. I wanted to see Theo, you know, to ask him if he really meant it. I wanted to speak to him all by himself; for Theo is never the same, mamma, when you are there. I knew which turn to take as well as any one. I wasn't in a hurry; it was such a nice day. But pony was not interested about Theo, like me, and he remembered that it was dinner-time. That was all about it. And then those people in the phaeton gave him a start. It was nothing. I just popped over his head. There was no danger except that the bays might have given me a kick; but horses never kick with their forefeet.”

Here Lady Markland gave a shriek, and clutched her boy again. “You fell off, Geoff, among the horses' feet!”

“Oh, it didn't matter, mamma; it didn't matter a bit. Theo caught me, and tore my knickerbockers (but they're mended now). He bled a great deal, and I helped Mrs. Warrender to plaster up the cut; but I wasn't hurt,—not a bit; and my knickerbockers——”

It was Geoff's turn now to pause in surprise, for his mother left him, and flew to Theo, and, taking his hands, tried to kiss them, and, between laughing and crying, said, “God bless you! God bless you! You have saved my boy's life!”

Geoff was confounded by this desertion, by the interruption, by the sudden cry. He put his hand up to the place where Warrender's cut was, dimly realising that it might have been in his own head but for Theo. “Was that what it was?” he said, wondering and unobserved in the midst of the new commotion, which for the moment left Geoff altogether, and rose around Warrender, as if he had been the hero of the day.

CHAPTER VI.

THEY all sat round the table and took their evening meal together before Lady Markland went back. It was not a ceremonious, grand dinner, as if there had been a party. Old Joseph pottered about, and put the dishes on the table, and handed the potatoes now and then when they were not wanted, and sometimes leaned across between the young ladies to regulate the lamp, explaining why as he did so. "Excuse me, Miss Chatty, but it's a-going to smoke," he said; and in the meantime the family helped each other. But Lady Markland was not conscious of the defects in the service. She sat by Theo's side, talking to him, looking at him in a kind of soft ecstasy. They had been friends before, but it seemed that she had now for the first time discovered what he was, and could not conceal her pleasure, her gratitude, her admiration. She made him tell her how it all happened, a dozen times over, while the others talked of other things, and poured out her thanks, her happiness, her ascriptions of praise, as if he had been more than mortal,

devoting herself to him alone. Lady Markland had never been the kind of woman who allows herself in society to be engrossed by a man. It was entirely unlike her, unlike her character, a new thing. She was quite unconscious of Minnie's sharp eyes upon her, of the remarks which were being made. All she was aware of, in that rapture of safety after danger and relief from pain, was Geoff, blinking with eyes half sleepy, half excited, by the side of Mrs. Warrender, nothing hurt in him but his knickerbockers; and the young man by her side, with the wound upon his head, who had saved her child's life. Theo, for his part, was wrapped in a mist of delight for which there was no name. He saw only her, thought only of her; and for the first time began to imagine what life might be if it should ever come to mean a state in which this rapture should be permanent,—when she would always look at him so, always devote herself, eyes and lips and all her being, to make him happy.

The room lay in darkness beyond the steady light of the white lamp, shining on the circle of faces. There was not much conversation. Minnie was sternly silent, on the watch; Chatty sympathetically on the alert, too, though she scarcely knew why, because her sister was; Mrs. Warrender listening with a faint smile to Geoff's little chatter, occasionally casting a glance at the other end of the table, which she could see but imperfectly. Lady Markland spoke low,

addressing Theo only, so that Geoff, as before, held the chief place. He was never weary of going over the adventures of the day.

“It is that tall house before you come to the village,—a tall, tall house, with a wall all round, as if to keep prisoners in. I know there are no prisoners now. Of course not! There are people all about in the fields and everywhere, who would soon tell the policeman and set you free. I was not afraid. Still, if the gates had been shut, and they refused to open, I don’t know what one would do. The lady was like a picture in the Pilgrim’s Progress,—that one, you know—I thought her pretty at first. But then she held me in her arm as if I had been a baby.”

“Oh, it would be Those People!” said Minnie, moved to a passing exclamation of horror.

“Never mind that now. You must not venture out again without the groom, for it makes your mother unhappy—Theo,” said Mrs. Warrender, with a smile and a sigh, “when he was a little fellow like you, never did anything to make me unhappy.”

“Didn’t he?” said Geoff seriously. “But I didn’t know. How could I tell pony would so soon get hungry? He hasn’t a regular dinner-time, as we have; only munches and munches all day. But I was telling you about the tall house.”

“You must tell me another time, Geoff. Theo must bring you back with him sometimes for a holiday.”

“Yes,” said Geoff, “that would do better. Pony would go splendid by the side of Theo’s big black. I shall come often—when I do my lessons well. I have never done any lessons except with mamma. Does Theo like teaching boys?”

“I don’t know, my dear. I don’t think he has ever tried.”

“Then why is he coming to teach me? That, at the very bottom of it, you know, is what I wanted him to tell me; for he would not tell straight out, the real truth, before mamma.”

“I hope he always tells the real truth,” said Mrs. Warrender gently. “I suppose, my little Geoff, it is because he is fond of you.”

Upon this Geoff shook his little head for a long time, twisting his face and blinking his keen little eyes. “He is not fond of me—oh no, it is not that. I can do with Theo very well,—as well as with any one; but he is not fond of me.”

“I am glad to hear that you can do with Theo,” said the mother, much amused.

“Yes. I don’t mind him at all: but he is not fond of me; and he is sure not to teach mamma’s way, and that is

the only way I know. If he were to want to punish me, Mrs. Warrender——”

“I hope, my dear, there will be no question of that.”

“I shouldn’t mind,” said the boy, “but mamma wouldn’t like it. It might be very awkward for Theo. You are flogged when you go to school, aren’t you? At least, all the books say so. Mamma,” he went on, raising his voice, “here is a difficulty,—a great difficulty. If Theo should want to flog me, what should you do?”

Lady Markland did not hear him for the moment. She was absorbed!—this was the remark made by Minnie, who watched with the intensest observation. Then Geoff, in defiance of good manners, drummed on the table to attract his mother’s attention, and elevated his voice: “Can’t you hear what I am saying, mamma? If I were to be stupid with my lessons, and Theo were to flog me——” (“It is only putting a case, for I am not stupid,” he added, for Mrs. Warrender’s instruction, in an undertone.)

“You must not suggest anything so dreadful,” said Lady Markland from the other end of the table. “But now you must thank Mrs. Warrender, Geoff, and Mr. Theo, and every one; for the carriage has come round, and it is growing late, and we must go away.”

Then Mrs. Warrender rose, as in duty bound, and the whole party with her. “I will not ask you to stay; it is

late for him, and he has had too much excitement," said the mistress of the house.

"And to think I might never have brought him home at all, never heard his voice again, but for your dear son, your good son!" cried Lady Markland, taking both her hands, putting forward her head, with its smooth silken locks in which the light shone, and the soft round of her uplifted face, to the elder woman, with an emotion and tenderness which went to Mrs. Warrender's heart. She gave the necessary kiss, but though she was touched there was no enthusiasm in her reply.

"You must not think too much of that, Lady Markland. I hope he would have done it for any child in danger."

This, of course, is always perfectly true; but it chills the effusion of individual gratitude. Lady Markland raised her head, but she still held Mrs. Warrender's hands. "I wish," she said, "oh, I wish you would tell me frankly! Does it vex you that he should be so good to me? This kind, kind offer about Geoff,—is it too much? Yes, yes, I know it is too much; but how can I refuse what he is so good, so charitable, as to offer, when it is such a boon to us? Oh, if you would tell me! Is it displeasing, is it distasteful to you?"

"I don't know how to answer you," Mrs. Warrender said.

“Ah! but that is an answer. Dear Mrs. Warrender, help me to refuse it without wounding his feelings. I have always felt it was too much.”

“Lady Markland, I cannot interfere. He is old enough to judge for himself. He will not accept guidance from me,—ah, nor from you either, except in the one way.” She returned the pressure of her visitor’s hand, which had relaxed, with one that was as significant. “It is not so easy to lay spirits when they are once raised,” she said.

Lady Markland gave her a sudden, alarmed, inquiring look; but Theo came forward at that moment with her cloak, and nothing could be said more.

He came back into the dining-room, expectant, defiant, fire in all his veins, and in his heart a sea of agitated bliss that had to get an outlet somewhere; not in a litany to her, for which there was no place, but at least in defence of her and of himself. It was Minnie, as usual, who stood ready to throw down the glove; Chatty being no more than a deeply interested spectator, and the mother drawing aside with that sense of impossibility which balks remonstrance, from the fray. Besides, Mrs. Warrender did not know, in the responsive excitement in herself which Theo’s passion called forth, whether she wished to remonstrate or to put any hindrance in his way.

“Well, upon my word!” said Minnie, “Mrs. Wilber-

force may well say the world is coming to a pretty pass. Only six months a widow, and not a bit of crape upon her! I knew she wore no cap. Cap! why, she hasn't even a bonnet, nor a veil, nor *anything!* A little bit of a hat, with a black ribbon,—too light for *me* to wear; even Chatty would be ashamed to be seen——”

“Oh no, Minnie; in the garden, you know, we have never worn anything deeper.”

“Do you call this the garden?” cried Minnie, her voice so deep with alarm and presentiment that it sounded bass, in the silence of the night. “Six miles off, and an open carriage, and coming among people who are themselves in mourning! It ought to have given her a lesson to see my mother in her cap.”

“If you have nothing better to do than to find fault with Lady Markland——” said Theo, pale with passion.

“Oh,” cried Minnie, “don't suppose I am going to speak about Lady Markland to you. How can you be so infatuated, Theo? You a tutor,—you, that have always been made such a fuss with, as if there was not such another in the world! What was it all he was to be? A first class, and a Fellow, and I don't know what. But tutor to a small boy, tutor to a little lord,—a sort of a valet, or a sort of a nurse——”

“Minnie! your brother is at an age when he must choose for himself.”

“How much are you to have for it?” she cried,—“how much a year? Or are you to be paid with presents, or only with the credit of the connection? Oh, I am glad poor papa is dead, not to hear of it. He would have known what to think of it all. He would have given you his opinion of a woman—of a woman——”

“Lady Markland is a very nice woman,” said Chatty. “Oh, Theo, don’t look as if you were going to strike her! She doesn’t know what she is saying. She has lost her temper. It is just Minnie’s way.”

“Of a woman who wears no crape for her husband,” cried Minnie, with an effort, in her bass voice.

Theo, who had looked, indeed, as if he might have knocked his sister down, here burst into an angry peal of laughter, which rang through the house; and his mother, seizing the opportunity, took him by the arm and drew him away. “Don’t take any notice,” she said. “You must not forget she is your sister, whatever she says. And, my dear boy, though Minnie exaggerates, she has reason on her side, from her point of view. No, I don’t think as she does, altogether; but, Theo, can’t you understand that it is a disappointment to us? We always made so sure you were going to do some great thing.”

“And to be of a little real use once in a way, is such a small thing!”

“Oh, Theo, you must be reasonable, and think a little. It does not want a scholar like you to teach little Geoff.”

“A scholar—like me. How do you know I am a scholar at all?”

Mrs. Warrender knew that no answer to this was necessary, and did not attempt it. She went on: “And you are not in a position to want such employment. Don’t you see that everybody will begin to inquire what your inducement was? A young man who has nothing, it is all quite natural; but you—Theo, have you ever asked yourself how you are to be repaid?”

“You are as bad as Minnie, mother,” he said, with scorn; “you think I want to be repaid.”

She clasped her hands upon his arm, looking up at him with a sort of pitying pride. “*She* must think of it, Theo—everybody must think of it; ah yes, and even yourself, at the last. Every mortal, everybody that is human,—oh, Theo, the most generous!—looks for something, something in return.”

The young man tried to speak, but his voice died away after he had said “Mother!” To this he had no reply.

But though he could not answer the objection, he could put it aside; and as a matter of course he had his way. At

the beginning of a thing, however clearly it may be apparent that embarrassment is involved, few people are clear-sighted enough to perceive how great the embarrassment may come to be. Lady Markland was not wiser than her kind. She spoke of Theo's kindness in a rapture of gratitude, and ended always by saying that, after all, that was nothing in comparison with the fact that he had begun by saving the boy's life. "I owe my child to him," she said,—“I owe him Geoff's life; and now it almost seems natural, when he has done so much, that he should do anything that his kind heart prompts.” She would say this with tears in her eyes, with such an enthusiasm of gratitude that everybody was touched who heard her. But then, everybody did not hear Lady Markland's account of the matter; and the common mass, the spectators who observe such domestic dramas with always a lively desire to get as much amusement as possible out of them, made remarks of a very different kind. The men thought that Warrender was a fool, but that the widow was consoling herself; the ladies said that it was sad to see a young man so infatuated, but that Lady Markland could not live without an adviser; and there were some, even, who began to lament “poor dear young Markland,” as if he had been an injured saint. The people who heard least of these universal comments were, however, the persons most concerned: Lady Markland, because she saw few

people, and disarmed, as has been said, those whom she did see ; and Warrender, because he was not the sort of man, young though he was, whom other men cared to approach with uncalled-for advice. There was but one person, indeed, after his sister, who lifted up a faithful testimony to Theo. Mrs. Wilberforce, as his parish clergyman's wife, felt that, if the rector would not do it, it was her duty to speak. She took advantage of the opportunity one evening after Christmas, when Warrender was dining at the Rectory. "Are you *still* going to Markland every day?" she said. "Isn't it a great tie? I should think by the time you have ridden there and back you can't have much time for any business of your own."

"It is a good thing, then," said Theo, "that I have so little business of my own."

"You say so," said the rector's wife, "but most gentlemen make fuss enough about it, I am sure. There seems always something to be doing when you have an estate in your hands. And now that you are a magistrate—though I know you did *not* go to Quarter Sessions," she said severely.

"There are always enough of men who like to play at law, without me."

"Oh, Theo, how can you speak so? when it is one of a gentleman's highest functions, as everybody knows! And then there are the improvements. So much was to be

done. The girls could talk of nothing else. They were in a panic about their trees. There is no stauncher Conservative than I am," said Mrs. Wilberforce, "but I do think Minnie went too far. She would have everything remain exactly as it is. Now I can't help seeing that those trees—— But you have no time to think of trees or anything else," she added briskly, fixing upon him her keen eyes.

"I confess," said Theo, "I never thought of the trees from a political point of view."

"There, that is just like a man!" cried Mrs. Wilberforce. "You seize upon something one says that can be turned into ridicule; but you never will meet the real question. Oh, is that you, Herbert? Have you got rid of your churchwarden so soon?"—for this was the pretext upon which the rector had been got out of the way.

"He did not want much,—a mere question. Indeed," said the rector, remembering that fibs are not permitted to the clergy any more than to the mere laic, and perceiving that he must expect his punishment all the same—with that courage which springs from the conviction that it is as well to be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb, "it was not the churchwarden at all; it was only a mistake of John."

"Well," said his wife significantly, "it was a mistake that was quickly rectified, one can see, as you have come back so soon. And here is Theo talking already of going

home. Of course he has his lessons to prepare for to-morrow ; he is not a mere idle gentleman now."

Little gibes and allusions like these rained upon the young man from all quarters during the first six months, but no one ventured to speak to him with the faithfulness used by Mrs. Wilberforce ; and after a time even these irritating if not very harmful weapons dropped, and the whole matter sank into the region of the ordinary. He rode, or, if the weather was bad, drove, five days in the week to his little pupil, who in himself was not to Theo's mind an attractive pupil, and who kept the temper of the tutor on a constant strain. It ought, according to all moral rules, to have been very good for Warrender to be thus forced to self-control, and to exercise a continual restraint over his extremely impatient temper and fastidious, almost capricious temperament. But there are circumstances in which such self-restraint is rather an aggravating than a softening process. During this period, however, Theo was scarcely to be accounted for by the ordinary rules of human nature. His mind was altogether absorbed by one of, if not by the most powerful influence of human life. He was carried away by a tide of passion which was stronger than life itself.

CHAPTER VII.

IT may now be necessary to indicate the outline, at least, of an incident which was the reason why, at the most critical period of the affairs both of her brother and sister, Minnie's supervising and controlling care was neutralised. Whether it is the case that nothing that did happen would have happened, as is her sincere conviction, had she been free to observe and guide the course of events, is what neither the writer of this history nor any other human looker-on can say. We are all disposed to believe that certain possibilities would have changed the entire face of history had they ever developed, and that life would have been a different thing altogether had not So-and-So got ill, or gone on a journey, or even been so ill-advised as to die at a particular juncture. Miss Warrender was of this opinion strongly, but it is possible the reader may think that everything would have gone on very much as it did, in spite of all that she could have said or done. It is a problem which never can be settled, should we go on discussing it for evermore.

The thing which deprived the family of Minnie's care at the approaching crisis was what cannot be otherwise described than as a happy event. In the early summer, before Mr. Warrender died, a new curate had come to Underwood. This, however, is not an entirely just way of stating the case. A curate, in the ordinary sense of the word, was not wanted at Underwood. The parish was small. Such a thing as a daily service had not begun to be thought of, and the rector, who was full of energy, would have thought it wasteful extravagance to give a hundred pounds a year to another clergyman, in order that he might have the lessons read for him and the responses led by an educated voice. Ideas about educated voices, as well as about vestments and lights on the altar, have all developed since that time. People in general were quite satisfied with the clerk in those days, or, if they were not satisfied, at least accepted him as a necessary evil, at which one was free to laugh, but against which there was nothing to be said. The morning service on Sunday was the only one that was of much importance, to which the whole parish came. That in the afternoon was attended only by the village people, and did not count for much. The rector would not have said in so many words, like a French *curé*, that vespers was *pas obligatoire*, but he had the same feeling. Both he and his wife felt kindly to the people who came,

as if it were a personal compliment. It is needless to say that things ecclesiastical have very, very much changed since, and that this easy indulgence exists no longer.

Thus there was evidently no need of a curate at Underwood proper. But the parish was now a double one. Once "St. Mary's Underwood," it was now "Underwood-cum-Pierrepoint;" and the condition of drawing the revenues of the latter district was, that the rector should always provide for the duty in the little church at Pierrepoint, which was considered a fine specimen of early architecture, though not much adapted to modern needs. It had been usually some shabby old parson, some poor gentleman who had been a failure in life, one of those wonderful curates who are rich in nothing but children, and to whom the old, rambling, out-at-elbows parsonage house at Pierrepoint was of itself an attraction, who had taken this appointment. And it had been a great surprise to the neighbourhood when it was known that the Honourable and Reverend Eustace Thynne (to say the Reverend the Honourable, which is now the highest fashion in such matters, postponing, as is meet, secular rank to that of the Church, was unknown in those pre-Ritualistic days), a young man, an earl's son, an entirely unexceptionable and indeed every way laudable individual, had accepted this post. A greater surprise it would be impossible to imagine. The Warrenders had

been as much interested as anybody before the death in the family had made such sentiments for a time inappropriate. But Mr. Thynne had turned out a very sympathetic young clergyman. He had left his card and kind inquiries at once. He had helped to officiate at the funeral, and afterwards Minnie had been heard to say that no one had given her so true an idea of how grief ought to be borne. He had been a frequent visitor through the summer. If Theo saw little of him, that was entirely Theo's fault. It was Mr. Thynne who persuaded the girls that to resume their duties in the Sunday school was not only right, but the best thing for them,—so soothing and comforting; and he had come a great deal to the Warren while Theo was so much away, and in many things had made himself useful to the girls, as Theo had been doing to Lady Markland. He did not, indeed, devote himself to them with the same indiscriminate devotion. There was no occasion for anything of the kind. Mrs. Warrender was quite capable of looking after things herself, and Minnie's energy was almost greater than was necessary for the needs of their position; so that it was not at all needful or desirable that he should put himself at their disposal in any exaggerated way. But all that a man and a clergyman could do to make himself useful and agreeable Eustace Thynne did. They got to call him Eustace Thynne quite naturally, when they

were talking of him, though they still called him Mr. Thynne when conversing with him. They saw a great deal of him. There was very little to do at Pierrepont, and he was a great walker, and constantly met them when they were out. And he was very sound in his views, not extreme in anything ; not an evangelical, much less inclining towards the section of the Church which began to be known in the world under the name of Puseyists. Eustace Thynne had no exaggerated ideas ; he was not eccentric in anything. The Thirty-Nine Articles sat as easily upon him as his very well made coat ; he never forgot that he was a clergyman, or wore even a gray checked necktie, which the rector sometimes did, but always had a white tie, very neatly tied, and a tall hat, which was considered in those days the proper dress for a clergyman, even in the country. His political ideas inclined to Conservatism, whereas, as Minnie always said, the Warrenders were Liberal ; but it was a very moderate Conservatism, and the difference was scarcely appreciable.

From all this it may be divined that Minnie was in the way of following the example set her by her mother and grandmother, and the majority of women generally. She had not thought herself very likely to marry for some time back ; for the county had wonderfully few young men in it, and she had no desire ever to leave home. But when

Providence sent Eustace Thynne in her way, there was no reason why she should shut her eyes to that divine and benevolent intention. She softened in some ways, but hardened in others, during the course of the year. In matters upon which Eustace Thynne agreed with her,—and these were the principal features of her social creed,—she was more determined than ever, having his moral support to fall back upon: and would not allow the possibility of a doubt. And this made her the more severe upon Theo, for in all questions of propriety Mr. Thynne was with her, heart and soul.

As usually happens in the forming of new bonds, the old ones were a little strained while the process was going on. Chatty, who had been very deeply interested at first, when she saw in her elder sister symptoms of a state about which she herself had entertained only the vaguest dreams, became sometimes a little tired of it, when she found one of the results to be a growing inclination to get rid of herself. When they went out together to visit a pensioner, if they met Mr. Thynne (as they often did) on the road, Minnie would stop at the end of the lane. “Will you just run in and see how old Sarah is?” she would say to Chatty. “Two of us in such a little place is too much for the poor old dear;” and Mr. Thynne would remark, in a low voice, that Miss Warrender was so considerate (if everybody would

be as considerate !), and linger and talk, while Chatty went and informed herself about all old Sarah's ills. This, however, the younger sister could have borne ; but when she found, on rejoining the pair, that they had been discussing Theo, and that Minnie had been asking Mr. Thynne's advice, and that he entirely agreed with her, and thought she was quite right about Lady Markland, Chatty's spirit rose. "I would not talk about Theo to any one," she said, indignantly. "Who do you call any one? Mr. Thynne takes a great interest in all of us, and he is a clergyman, and of whom should one ask advice if not of a clergyman?" Minnie replied, with triumphant logic. "If he was a bishop, I would not talk over Theo ; not with him, nor any one," Chatty replied. She had always been inclined to take Theo's part, and she became his partisan in these new circumstances, standing up for him through thick and thin. And in her little expeditions up and down the lane to ask after old Sarah, while Minnie strolled slowly along with her clerical lover, Chatty began to form little opinions of her own, and to free herself more or less from that preponderating influence of the elder sister which had shaped all her previous life. And a little wistfulness began to float across Chatty's gentle mind, and little thrills of curiosity to go through it. Her surroundings at this moment gave much room for thought. Minnie, who had never shown

any patience in respect to such vanity, and was always severe with the maids and their young men, wandering on ahead with Mr. Thynne; and Theo, who had always been so imperious, given up in every thought to Lady Markland, and not to be spoken to on ordinary subjects during the short time he spent at home! With these two before her eyes, it can scarcely be supposed that Chatty did not ask herself, now and then, whether for her also there was not somebody whose appearance would change everything? And for the first time she began to get impatient of the Warren, in the gloom of the winter, and to wish, like her mother, for a change.

Mr. Thynne was not ineligible, like most curates. It was not for poverty, or because he had no other place to turn to, that he had taken the curacy at Pierrepont. There was a family living awaiting him, a very good living; and he had some money, which an uncle had left him; and he was the honourable as well as the reverend. Minnie had her own opinion, as has been seen, on matters of rank. She did not think overmuch of the nobility. She was of opinion that the country gentry were the support and salvation of England. Still, while a plain Mrs. or Miss may be anybody to those who don't know her, a dairyman's daughter or a scion of the oldest of families—an honourable to your name does at once identify you as occupying a

certain position. "It is a very good thing," she said, "in that way; it is a sort of hall-mark, you know."

"It is sometimes put on very false metal, Minnie."

"Oh, I don't know," said Minnie, with an indignant flush; "no more than any other kind of distinction. The peerage does not go wrong oftener, perhaps not so often, as other people: but it does give a *cachet*. It is known then who you belong to, and that you must be more or less nice people. I like it for that."

"There could be no doubt about Mr. Thynne, any way, my dear."

"I never said I was thinking of Mr. Thynne," said Minnie, with a violent flush, as she broke off the conversation and hurried away. And, indeed, it was not at all of Mr. Thynne that she was thinking, but rather of a possible Mrs. Thynne, and what her advantages might be over other ladies who did not possess that pretty and harmless affix. She decided that, unquestionably, it was an advantage. Out of your own county it might very well happen that nobody might know who you were: but an honourable never could be mistaken. She came gradually to change her views about the peerage in general, after that discovery, and made up her mind that a title in the family was good in every way. There could never be any doubt about that. There it was in Debrett, and everybody could satisfy them-

selves about its genuineness and antiquity, and lay their finger upon the descendants and relatives of the house. There were inconveniences in that, especially in respect to age, but still it was an advantage ; and to be sure, for those who were added to a noble family by marriage even that inconvenience did not exist.

Mr. Thynne declared himself in summer, after the year of mourning was over, and when even Miss Warrender felt that it was permitted to be lively, and wear white dresses, though with black ribbons, of course ; and as the family living fell vacant immediately, the wedding took place almost at once. It made a great sensation in the parish, it need not be said ; and while the few people in Pierrepont gave the curate a teapot, in Underwood there was a great agitation in the Sunday school and much collecting to buy a fine big Bible, with a great deal of gilding outside, for Miss Warrender, which was given to her at a tea in the schoolroom, with a speech from the rector, who was chary of public speaking, and had to be egged up to it by many little moral pricks from his wife. It was considered a very suitable present for a young lady who was going to marry a clergyman, just as the teapot was most suitable for a young clergyman about to be married. In those days there was not the rain of marriage presents from everybody within reach which are the painful fashion now. But Minnie had

a very excellent, solid trousseau, as might be expected, full of useful clothes ; the silks very handsome, and the dinner dresses, though serious, which she thought suitable to a clergyman's wife, quite good enough to go *anywhere in*. If she had been yielded to in that respect, her going-away dress would have been lavender with black lace, quite second mourning. But not only her mother and sister, but Mrs. Wilberforce and even Mr. Thynne himself, who did not fancy a bride in mourning, remonstrated so strongly that she was obliged to yield. "I am in favour of showing every respect to our dear ones who are gone ; but there are limits," the bridegroom said, and Mrs. Wilberforce declared that, though herself a Conservative and staunch upholder of the past she did think dear Minnie sometimes went a little too far, notwithstanding that the Warrenders were Liberals. This determined stand on the part of all belonging to her resulted in Minnie's departure from the Warren clothed in a suit of russet brown, which was very becoming to her,—much more so than the whiteness of her bridal dress and veil.

This withdrew Minnie's thoughts in great measure from the other events which were preparing, and finally carried her off altogether on the eve of many and great changes, such as turned topsy-turvy the life of the Warrenders. She was naturally very much taken up by her husband and her

new surroundings, and the delightful trouble of settling down in her new parish and home. And she was at a considerable distance from them, half a day's journey, which made very frequent visits impossible. It has been already said that we do not pretend to give our opinion as to whether, if Minnie had not married, things might not have gone very differently in the Warrender family life.

After the wedding guests had departed Warrender ordered his horse to be brought round, as usual. He had, of course, been occupied all the morning with his own family, and with the marriage and the entertainment afterwards. Geoff had got a holiday, which he prized very much. (Lady Markland and the boy had been asked, of course, to the wedding, but it was perhaps a relief to all that they declined to come.) And if there ever was a moment in which Mrs. Warrender wanted her son it was that day. She was tired out, and in the nervous state to which the best of us are liable at agitating moments. Minnie was not, perhaps, in absolute sympathy with her mother, but Mrs. Warrender had a great deal of imagination, and partly by those recollections of the past that are called up by every great family event, and partly by inevitable anticipations of the future, she was in special need of kindness and filial care. Her heart swelled within her when she saw the black horse brought round. She went to the door in the

gray gown which she had got for Minnie's marriage, and met her son as he came into the hall. "Oh, Theo, are you going to leave us to-day? I thought you would have stayed with us to-day," she said, with what an unfavourable judge would have called a querulous tone in her voice. It was in reality fatigue and weariness, and a great desire for her boy's affection and comforting care; but the other explanation was not without reason.

"Why should I stay to-day, more than any other day?" he said.

"You don't require me to tell you, Theo. It is getting late; you can't be wanted *there*, surely, to-day."

Now this was injudicious on Mrs. Warrender's part: but a woman cannot always be judicious, however it may hurt her. He looked at her with quick offence.

"Suppose I think differently?" he said; "or suppose that it is for my own pleasure I am going, as you say, *there*?"

"I meant no harm," said Mrs. Warrender. "I have not opposed you. Often I have longed to have you a little more at home: but I never said anything, Theo,—you know I have never said anything."

"I can't imagine, mother, what there was to say."

She checked herself with difficulty, but still she did check herself. "There are some things," she said, "that

I wish you would attend to,—I cannot help feeling that there are several things ; but to-day, dear Theo, both Chatty and I are feeling low. Stay with us this afternoon. It will do us so much good.”

She thought that he wavered for an instant, but if so it was only for an instant. “I don’t believe that,” he said. “We should only quarrel ; and what is the use of a thing that is forced ? And besides, of all days, this is the one above all others that I want to go. It is my best chance” —and then he stopped and looked at her, the colour rising to his face.

“I thought Geoff was to go somewhere, for a holiday ?”

He gave her another look, and the red became crimson. “That is just the reason,” he said enigmatically, and with a slight wave of his hand passed her, and went out to the door.

“You will be back to dinner, Theo ?”

He turned round his head as he was about to ride away, looking down upon her. “Perhaps I may be back immediately,” he said,—“most likely ; but never mind me, one way or another. I want nothing but to be let alone, please.”

Chatty had come out to the door, and they both stood and watched him as he rode along, disappearing among the trees. “I think he must be going to—seek his fortune,” his mother said, restraining a sob.

“Oh, mamma!” said simple Chatty, “I would go and pray for him, but I don’t know what to ask.”

“Nor I,” said Mrs. Warrender. “God bless him,—that is all that one can say.”

But the house looked very dreary as they went back to it, with all the confusion of the wedding feast and the signs of a great company departed. They scarcely knew where to sit down, in the confusion that had been so gay a few hours ago, and looked so miserable now.

But Theo! What was he doing? Where was he carrying the heart that beat so high, that would be silent no longer? Was he going to lay it at the feet of a woman who would spurn it? When would he come back, and how? Already they began to listen, though he had scarcely set out, for the sound of his return,—in joy or in despair, who could say?

CHAPTER VIII.

THEO came home neither late nor early ; neither in joy nor in despair. He came back harassed and impatient, eaten up with disquietude and suspense. He was pale and red in succession ten times in a moment. He was so much absorbed in his own thoughts that he hardly heard what was said to him as the three sat down, a little forlorn, as the late summer twilight began to close over all the brightness of that long fatiguing day. The evening of the wedding, with its sense already of remoteness to the great event of the morning so much prepared for and looked forward to— with the atmosphere so dead and preternaturally silent which has tingled with so much emotion, with the inevitable reaction after the excitement—nothing could ever make this moment a cheerful one. It is something more than the disappearance of a member of the family, it is the end of anticipation, of excitement, of all that has been forming and accelerating the domestic life for weeks or months, perhaps. Even if there should happen to be an unexpressed

and inexpressible relief in having permanently escaped a rule of sharp criticism, a keen inspecting eye which missed nothing, even that consciousness helps to take the edge off life and make it altogether blurred and brief for the moment. The very meal was suggestive : cold chickens, cold lamb, ham on the sideboard with ornamentations upon it, remains of jellies, and preparations of cream,—an altogether chilly dinner, implying in every dish a banquet past.

And there was not very much said. Joseph, who was rather more tired than everybody else, made no attempt to bring the lamp, and no one asked for it. They sat in the waning light, which had less of day and more of night in it in that room than anywhere else, and made a very slight repast in a much subdued way, very tired, and with little interest in the cold chicken. Once Mrs. Warrender made a remark about the evening. “How dark it is! I think, Theo, if you don’t do something soon the trees will crush the house.” “I don’t see what the trees have to do with it,” he answered with irritation; “I have always begged you not to wait for me when I was late.” “But you were not late, dear Theo,” said Chatty, with a certain timidity. “I suppose I ought to know whether I was late or not,” he replied. And the ladies were silent, and the salad was handed round. Very suitable for a summer evening, but yet on the whole a depressing meal.

When they rose from the table Mrs. Warrender asked Theo to take a turn with her, which he did with great reluctance, fearing to be questioned. But she had more discretion than to begin, at least on that subject. She told him that if he did not particularly want her, she had made up her mind to go away. "Chatty will be dull without her sister. I think she wants a little change, and for that matter, so do I. And you don't want us, Theo."

"That is a hard thing to say, mother."

"I do not mean any blame. I know that the time is critical for you too, my dear boy. That is why I ask, do you wish me to remain? but I don't think you do."

He did not answer for a full minute. Then, "No," he said, "I don't think I do." They were walking slowly round the house, by the same path which they had taken together when the father was lying dead, and before there had been question of Lady Markland in the young man's life. "Mother," he said after another interval, "I ought to tell you, perhaps. I know nothing about myself or what I am going to do; it all depends on some one else. Minnie would moralise finely on that, if she were to hear it. Things have come to this, that I know nothing about what may happen to-morrow. I may start off for the end of the world,—that is the most likely, I think. I can't go on living as I am doing now. I may go to—where? I

don't know and I don't care much. If I were a Nimrod, as I ought to have been, I should have gone to Africa for big game. But it will probably be Greece or something conventional of that kind."

"Don't speak so wildly, dear. Perhaps you will not go away at all. You have not made up your mind."

"When I tell you I know nothing, not even about to-morrow! But I don't entertain much hope. That is how it will end, in all probability. And of course I don't want you to stay like rooks among the trees here. Poor old house! it will soon have no daylight at all, as you say."

"Theo, I hope you will do something before it is too late. It is not a beautiful house, but you were born in it, and so was your father."

He pressed her arm almost violently within his. "Who knows, mother? great days may be coming for the old place: or if not, let it drop to pieces, what does it matter? I shall be the last of the Warrenders."

"Theo," she said with agitation, returning the pressure of his arm, "have you said anything to-night?"

Her question was vague enough, but he had no difficulty in understanding. He said, after a moment, "I had no opportunity, there were people there; but to-morrow, to-morrow——"

They came out together as these words were said upon

the edge of the pond. In the depth of that dark mirror, broken by water-lilies and floating growth of all kinds, there was a pale reflected sky, very colourless and clear, the very soul and centre of the brooding evening. Everything was dark around, the heavy summer foliage black in the absence of light, the heart of June as gloomy as if the trees had been funeral plumes. The two figures, dark like all the rest, stood for a moment on the edge of the water, looking down upon that one pale, dispassionate, reflected light. There was no cheer in it, nor anything of the movement and pulsation of human existence. The whiteness of the reflection chilled Mrs. Warrender, and made her shiver. "I suppose," she said, "I am fanciful to-night ; it looks to me like an unkindly spectator, who does not care what becomes of us." She added, with a little nervous laugh, "Perhaps it is not very probable that our little affairs should interest the universe, after all."

Warrender did not make any reply. He heard what was said to him and saw what was round him in a dim sort of confused way, as if every object and every voice was at a distance ; and with an impatience, too, which it was painful to him to keep down. He went back with her to the house saying little ; but could not rest there, and came out again, groping his way through the surrounding trees, and returned after a while to the pond, where there was that light to

think by, more congenial even in its chill clearness than the oppressive dark. It changed beneath his eyes, but he took no notice ; a star came into it and looked him in the face from under the shadow of the great floating shelf of the water-lily leaves ; and then came the blue of the dawn, the widening round him of the growing light, the shimmer of the early midsummer morning, long, long before those hours which men claim as the working day. That sudden bursting forth of life and colour startled him in the midst of his dreams, and he went home and stole into the sleeping, darkened house, where by dint of curtains and shutters the twilight still reigned, with something of the exhaustion and neglect of the morning after the feast. It was the morning of the day which was to decide for him whether life should be miserable or divine.

These were the words which the young man used in his infatuation. He knew no others—miserable, so that he should no longer care what happened to him, or believe in any good, which was the most probable state of affairs ; or divine, a life celestial, inconceivable, which was indeed not to be dwelt upon for a moment as if under any suggestion of possibility it could be.

Next day, Mrs. Warrender began at once her preparations for that removal which she had so long contemplated, which had been so often postponed, throwing Chatty into

an excitement so full of conflicting elements, that it was for some time difficult for the girl to know what her own real sentiments were. She had been figuring to herself with a little wistfulness, and an occasional escapade into dreams, the part which it was now her duty to take up, that of her mother's chief companion, the daughter of the house, the dutiful dweller at home, who should have no heart and no thought beyond the Warren and its affairs. Chatty was pleased enough with the former rôle. It had been delightful both to her mother and herself to feel how much they had in common, when the great authority on all family matters, the regulator of proprieties, the mistress of the ceremonies, so to speak, was out of the way, and they were left unmolested to follow their natural bent; but Chatty felt a little sinking of the heart when she thought of being bound to the Warren for ever; of the necessity there would be for her constant services, and the unlikelihood of any further opening of life. While there had been two, there was always a possibility of an invitation, of a visit and little break of novelty: but it was one of Minnie's most cherished maxims that a young lady in the house was indispensable, and Chatty in the recollection of this felt a certain cheerful despair, if the expression is permissible, seize her. She would be cheerful, she said to herself, whatever happened. It was her duty: she loved her home, and

wanted nothing else, oh, nothing else! Home and one's mother, what could one want more?

But when Chatty heard all in a moment those plans which promised, instead of the monotonous life to which she was accustomed, a new world of novelty, of undiscovered distance, of gaieties and pleasure unknown, her despair changed into alarm. Was it right, however pleasant it might be, to go away; to abandon the Warren; to be no longer the young lady of the house, doing everything for those about her, but a young woman at large, so to speak, upon the world, getting amusements in her own person, having nothing to do for anybody? Chatty did not know what to think, what to reply to her mother. She cried, "O mamma!" with a gleam of delight; and then her countenance fell, and she asked, "What will Theo do alone?" with all the conscious responsibility of a sister, the only unmarried sister left. But the question that was uppermost in her mind did not really concern Theo. It was "What will Minnie say?" She turned this over in her mind all day with a breathless sense that among so many new things Minnie's opinion was a sort of support to her in the whirlwind of change. Minnie had often said that nothing short of necessity would make her leave the Warren. But then the firmness of that assertion was somewhat diminished by the fact that Minnie had not hesitated to leave the Warren when Mr. Thynne

asked her to do so. Was necessity another name for a husband? Chatty blushed at this thought, though it seemed very improbable that any husband would ever appear to suggest such a step to herself. Would Minnie still think that the only motive; would she disapprove? Chatty went out by herself to take the usual afternoon walk which her sister had always insisted upon. The day was dull and gray for midsummer, and Chatty had not yet recovered from the fatigue of yesterday. She allowed to herself that the trees were sadly overgrown, and that it was quite dark within the grounds of the Warren when it was still light beyond; and she permitted herself to think that it was a little dull having nowhere to walk to but Mrs. Bagley's shop. To be sure there was the Rectory: but Mrs. Wilberforce would be sure to question her so closely about all that had happened and was going to happen that Chatty preferred not to risk that ordeal. There was not a soul about the village on this particular afternoon. Chatty thought she had never seen it so deserted. To make her walk a little longer, she had come out by the farther gate of the Warren,—the one that Theo always used; that which was nearest Markland. The only figures she saw in all her line of vision, as she came out, making a little sound with the gate, which in the silence sounded like a noise and startled them, were two women, just parting as it seemed.

One of them Chatty saw at a glance was Lizzie Hampson. The other—she came hurrying along towards Chatty, having parted, it seemed, with a kiss from her companion. They met full without any possibility of avoiding each other, and Chatty, in spite of herself, gave a long look at this woman whom she had seen before in the high phaeton, and sometimes at the gate of the Elms. She was as young, or it might be younger than Chatty, with a lovely complexion, perhaps slightly aided by art, and quantities of curled and wavy hair. But the chief feature in her was her eyes—of infantine blue, surrounded with curves of distress like a child's who has been crying its very heart out. It was evident that she had been crying, her eyelashes were wet, her mouth quivering. Altogether, it seemed to Chatty the face of a child that had been naughty and was being punished. Poor thing! she said in her soft heart, looking at the other girl with infinite pity. Oh, how miserable it must be to go wrong! Chatty felt as if she could have found in her heart to stop this poor young creature, and entreat her, like a child, not to be naughty any more. The other looked at her with those puckered and humid eyes, with a stare into which there came a little defiance, almost an intention of affronting and insulting the young lady; but in a moment had hurried past and Chatty saw her no more. Chatty, too, quickened her steps, feeling, she could not tell

why, a little afraid. Why should she be afraid? She did not like to look back, but felt as if the woman she had just passed must be mocking her behind her back, or perhaps threatening her, ready to do her a mischief. And certainly it was Lizzie Hampson who was running on in front. Chatty called to her in the sudden fright that had come over her, and was glad when the girl stopped and turned round reluctantly, though Lizzie's face was also stained with crying and wore a mutinous and sullen look.

“Did you call me, Miss Warrender? I am going home, Granny is waiting.”

“Wait for me a moment, Lizzie. . Oh, you have been crying too. What is the matter? And that—that lady——”

“I won't tell you a lie, Miss Chatty, when you've just found me out. But—if you're going to tell upon me, this is the truth. I have been saying good-bye to her; and no one in Underwood will ever see her more.” Then Lizzie began to cry again, melting Chatty's soft heart.

“Why should I tell upon you? I have nothing to say. It appears that it is some one you know; but I—don't know who it is.”

“Oh, Miss Chatty, you are the real good one,” said Lizzie, “you don't think everybody's wicked. I don't love her ways, but I love her, that poor, poor thing. Don't tell

Granny I was with her; but it is only to say good-bye;—that was all, for the last time, just to say good-bye.”

“Is she—going away?” Chatty spoke in a low and troubled voice, knowing that she ought not to show any interest, but with a pity and almost awe of the sinner which was beyond all rule.

“Oh yes, Miss Warrender, she is going away; the gentleman spoke the truth when he said it always comes to misery. There may be a fine appearance for a time, and everything seem grand and gay; but it always comes to misery in the end.”

To this Chatty made no reply. It was not a lesson that she required in her innocence and absence from all temptation, to learn; but she had an awe of it as if a gulf had opened at her feet and she had seen the blackness of darkness within.

“And if you’ll believe me, she once was just as good and as innocent—! Well, and she’s a kind of innocent now for that matter. Oh, poor thing! Oh, Miss Warrender, don’t you be angry if I’m choking and crying, I can’t help it! She don’t know what she’s doing. She don’t know bad from good, or right from wrong. There’s some like that. Just what pleases them at the moment, that’s all they think of. She once had as happy a life before her! and a good husband, and served hand and foot.”

“Lizzie,” said Chatty, with a shudder, “don’t please tell me any more. If anything can be done——”

“Nothing,” said the girl, shaking her head. “What could be done? If the good ladies were to get her into their hands, they would put her in a penitentiary or something. A penitentiary for her! Oh, Miss Chatty, it’s little they know. If they could put her in a palace, and give her horses and carriages and plenty to amuse her, that might do. But she doesn’t want to repent; she doesn’t know what it means. She wants to be well off and happy. And she’s so young. Oh, don’t think I would be like that for the world, not for the world, don’t think it! But I can’t help knowing how she feels. Oh, my poor dear, my poor dear!”

The wonder with which Chatty heard this strange plea was beyond description; but she would ask no more questions, and hear no more, though Lizzie seemed ready enough to furnish her with all details. She went back with the girl to the shop, thus disarming Mrs. Bagley, who was always full of suspicions and alarm when Lizzie was out of the way, and stood talking to the old woman while Lizzie stole into the parlour behind and got rid of the traces of her tears. Chatty felt very solemn as she stood and talked about her patterns, feeling as if she had come from a death-bed or a funeral. It was something still more terrible and

solemnising; it was her first glimpse into a darkness of which she knew nothing, and her voice sounded in her own ears like a mockery as she asked about the bundle of new things that had come from Highcombe. "There's one as is called the honeysuckle," said Mrs. Bagley: "it will just please you, Miss Chatty, as likes nice delicate little things." The old woman thought she must be feeling her sister's loss dreadful, looking as melancholy as if it was her coffin she was buying. And Chatty accepted the honeysuckle pattern and looked out the materials for working it, without relaxing from that seriousness which was so little habitual to her. She even forgot all about her own problems, as she went home, seeing constantly before her the pretty childlike face all blurred with tears. Was it true, as Lizzie said, that there was no way to help or deliver? If she had stopped, perhaps, as she had almost been impelled to do, and said as it was on her lips to say, "Oh, I am so sorry for you; oh, don't do wrong any more," would the unhappy creature perhaps have listened to her, and repented, though Lizzie said she did not want to repent? Chatty could not forget that pitiful face. Would she ever, she wondered, meet it again?

CHAPTER IX.

MARKLAND lay as usual, bare and white against the sun upon that day of fate. The young trees had grown a little and stood basking, scarcely shivering, leaning their feeble young heads together in the sun, but making little show as yet; all was wrapped in the warmth and stillness of the summer morning. The old butler stood upon the steps of the great door, his white head and black figure making a point in the bright, unbroken, still life about. Within, Lady Markland was in the morning-room with her business books and papers, but not doing much; and Geoff in another, alone with *his* books, not doing much; thinking, both of them, of the expected visitor now riding up in a breathless white heat of excitement to the hall door.

The entire house knew what was coming. Two or three maids were peeping at the windows above, saying, "There he is," with flutters of sympathetic emotion. That was why the butler himself stood on the steps waiting. All these spectators in the background had watched for a long

time past ; and a simultaneous thrill had run through the household, which no one was conscious of being the cause of, which was instinctive and incontrovertible. If not yesterday, then to-day ; or to-morrow, if anything should come in the way to-day. Things had come to such a pitch that they could go no farther. Of this every one in Markland was sure. There is something that gets into the air when excitement and self-repression run high, and warns the whole world about of the approach of an event. "A bird of the air hath carried the matter." So it is said in all languages. But it is more than a bird in the air, swifter, flying, entering into the very scent of the flowers. The last thing that Warrender thought of was that the fire and passion in his own breast had been thus publicly revealed. He wondered night and day whether *she* knew, whether she had any suspicion, if it had ever occurred to her to think ; but that the maids should be peeping from the windows, and the old butler watching at the door to receive the lover, was beyond his farthest conception of possibility—fortunately, since such a thought would have overwhelmed him with fury and shame.

Lady Markland sat at her table, pondering a letter from Mr. Longstaffe. She had it spread out before her, but she could only half see the words, and only half understand what they meant. She had read in Theo's eyes

upon the previous day—all. Had he but known he had nothing to reveal to her, nothing that she could not have told him beforehand! She had felt that the tempest of his young passion had been about to burst, and she had been extravagantly glad of the sudden appearance of the visitors who made it impossible. She had been glad, but perhaps a little disappointed too; her expectation and certainty of what was coming having risen also to a white heat of excitement, which fell into stillness and relief at the sight of the strangers, yet retained a certain tantalised impatience as of one from whose lips a cup has been taken, which will certainly have to be emptied another day. This was what she said to herself, with a trembling and agitation which was fully justified by the scene she anticipated. She said to herself that it must be got over, that she would not try to balk him, but rather give him the opportunity, poor boy! Yes! it was only just that he should have his opportunity, and that this great crisis should be got over as best it might. Her hands trembled as she folded Mr. Longstaffe's letter and put it away; her mind, she allowed to herself, was not capable of business. Poor boy, poor foolish boy! was not he a boy in comparison with herself, a woman not only older in years, but so much older in life; a woman who had been a wife, who was a mother; a woman whose first thoughts were already pledged to other interests, and

for whom love in his interpretation of the word existed no more? She would look down upon him, she thought, as from the mountain height of the calm and distant past. The very atmosphere in which such ideas had been possible was wanting. She would still him by a word; she would be very kind, very gentle with him, poor boy! She would blame herself for having unintentionally, unconsciously, put him in the way of this great misfortune. She would say to him, "How could I have ever thought that I, a woman so much older, past anything of the kind—that *I* could harm you? But it is not love, it is pity, it is because you are sorry for me! And it will pass, and you will learn to think of me as your friend." Oh, such a friend as she would be to him! and when some one younger, prettier, happier than she came in his way, as would certainly happen! Lady Markland could not help feeling a little chill at that prospect. The warmth of a young man's devotion has a great effect upon a woman. It makes many women do foolish things, out of the gratitude, the exhilaration of finding themselves lovable and beloved, especially those who are past the age and the possibility of being loved, as Lady Markland, now seven-and-twenty, had concluded herself to be.

Seven-and-twenty! ah, but that was not all! a wife already, to whom it was shame so much as to think of any other man. A second marriage appeared to her, as to

many women, a sort of atheism ; a giving up of the religion of the immortal. If marriage is a tie that endures for ever, as it is every happy woman's creed it is, how could she die, how dare ever to look in the face a man whom because he was dead,—no, more than that, because a change had happened to him which was no doing of his—she had abandoned for another man? This argument made it once and for ever impossible to contemplate such an act. Therefore it was to another man's wife that this poor boy, this generous enthusiast, was giving his all. But a woman cannot have such a gift laid down at her feet without a sensation of gratitude, without a certain pleasure even amid the pain in that vindication of herself and her womanhood which he makes to her, raising her in her own esteem. Therefore she could not be hard, could not be angry. Poor boy! to think of what it was he was throwing away ; and of the beating heart full of foolish passion with which he was coming to say words which her imagination snatched at, then retired from, trying not to anticipate them, not to be curious, not to be moved in advance by what he must say. But then she paused to ask herself whether she could not prevent him, whether she could not spare him these fruitless words. Would not it be wrong to let him say them when it was so certain what her response must be? She might stop him, perhaps, in the utterance; tell him—with what sympathy,

with what tenderness ! that it must not be ; that not for her were such expressions possible ; that he was mistaking himself, and his own heart, in which pity was moving, not love. Could she do this ? She felt a quick pang of disappointment in the thought of thus not hearing what he had to say : but it would be kinder to him—perhaps : would it be kinder ?—to stop those words on his lips, words that should only be said to the woman who could listen to them ; to the happy young creature whom some time or other he might still love. This was the confusion of thought in Lady Markland's mind while she sat by her writing-table among her papers, turning them over with nervous hands, now opening, now closing again the letters to which she could give no attention ; letters, a cool observer might have said, much more important than a question of a foolish young fellow's love. Meanwhile the maids peeped, and the old butler looked down the avenue where Warrender's black horse was visible, marked with foam as if he had been pushed on at a great pace, and yet, now that the house was in sight, coming slowly enough. The servants had no doubt about what was going to happen so far as Warrender was concerned—but it was all the more like an exciting story to them that they had no certainty at all how it was to end. Opinions were divided as to Lady Markland ; indeed so wrapped was the whole matter in mystery that those who ought to

know the best, old Soames for one, and her own maid for another, could give no opinion at all.

Geoff was all this time in the room where he had his lessons, waiting for his tutor. He was biting his nails to the quick, and twisting his little face into every kind of contortion. Geoff was now ten, and he had grown a great deal during the year,—if not so very much in stature, yet a great deal in experience. A little, a very little, and yet enough to swear by, of the wholesome discipline of neglect had fallen to Geoff's share. Business and lessons had parted his day from his mother's in a way which was very surprising when it was realised; and Geoff realised it, perhaps, better than Lady Markland did. In the evenings she was, as before, his alone; though sometimes even then a little preoccupied and with other things in her mind, as she allowed, which she could scarcely speak to him about. But in the long day these two saw comparatively little of each other. At luncheon, Warrender was always there talking to Lady Markland of subjects which Geoff was not familiar with. The boy thought, sometimes, that Theo chose them on purpose to keep him "out of it." Certainly he was very often out of it, and had to sit and stare and listen, which was very good for him but did not make him more affectionate towards Theo. To feel "out of it" is not a comfortable, but it is a very maturing experience. Geoff sat

by and thought what a lot Theo knew ; what a lot mamma knew ; what an advantage grown-up people had ; and how inattentive to other people's feelings they were in using it. After luncheon, Theo frequently stayed to talk something over with Lady Markland ; to show her something ; now and then to help her with something which she did not feel equal to, and during these moments Geoff was supposed to "play." What he did, generally, was to resort to the stables and talk with the coachman and Black, whose conversation was perhaps not the best possible for the little lad, and who instructed him in horse-racing and other subjects of the kind. When Theo went away, Lady Markland would call for Geoff to walk down the avenue with her, accompanying the tutor to the gate. And when he had been shaken hands with and had taken his departure, then was to Geoff the best of the day. His mother and he, when it was fine, strolled about the park together for an hour, in something like the old confiding and equal friendship ; a pair of friends, though they were mother and son, and though Geoff was but ten and she twenty-seven. That moment was old times come back, and recalled what was already the golden age to Geoff, the time before anything had happened. He did not say before his father died, for his childish memory was acute enough to recollect that things had often been far from happy then. But he remembered the halcyon days of the first mourning ;

the complete peace ; the gradual relaxation of his mother's face ; the return of her dimples, and of her laughter. It had only been then, he remembered, that he had called her "pretty mamma !" her face had become so fresh, and so soft and round. But lately it had lengthened a little again ; and the eyes sometimes went miles off, which made him uneasy. "Why do your eyes go so far away ? do you see anything ?" he asked, sometimes ; and then she would come back to him with a start, perhaps with a flush of sudden colour, sometimes with a laugh, making fun of it. But Geoff did not feel disposed to make fun of it. It gave him a pang of anger to see her so ; and unconsciously, without knowing why, he was more indignant with Theo at these moments, than he was when Theo sat at table and talked about matters beyond Geoff's ken. What had Theo to do with that far-away look ? What could he have to do with it ? Geoff could not tell ; he was aware there was no sense in his anger, but yet he was angry all the same.

And now, he sat waiting for Theo to come : waiting, but not wishing for him. Geoff was not so clever as the maids and old Soames ; he did not know what he was afraid of. He had never formulated to himself any exact danger ; and naturally he knew nothing of the seductions of that way upon which Warrender had been drawn without intending it ; without meaning any breach of Geoff's peace or of his

own. Geoff did not know at all what he feared. He felt that there was something going on which was against him ; and he had a kind of consciousness, like all the rest, that it was coming to a climax to-day. But he did not know what it was, nor what danger was impending over him. Perhaps Theo intended to stay longer ; to come to Markland altogether ; to interfere with the boy's evenings as he had done with his mornings. Or perhaps—but when he for a moment asked himself what he feared, his thoughts all fled away into vague alarms, infinitesimal in comparison with the reality, which was far too big, too terrible, for his mind to grasp. Mamma was afraid of it too, he had thought, this morning. She had looked, as the sky looks sometimes when the clouds are flying over it, and the wind is high and a storm is getting up : sometimes her face would be all overcast, and then her eyes had the look of a shower falling (though she did not shed any tears), and then there would be a clearing. She was afraid too. It was something that Theo was going to propose : some change that he wanted to carry out : and mamma was afraid of it too. This was in one way comforting, but in another more alarming : for it must be very serious indeed, if she, too, was afraid.

He roused himself from these uncomfortable thoughts, and began to pull his books about, and put his exercise upon the desk which Theo used, when he heard the sound

of Theo's arrival ; the heavy hoofs of the big black horse ; the voice of Soames in the hall ; the quick steady step coming in. The time had been when Geoff had thrown all his books on the table, and rushed out to witness the arrival, with an eager " Oh, Theo, you're five minutes late ! " or " Oh, Theo, I haven't done yet ! " For some time, however, he had left off doing this. Things were too serious for such vanities ; he lifted his head and held his breath, listening to the approaching footstep. A kind of alarm lest it should not be coming here at all, but straight to Lady Markland's room, made him pale for the moment. That would be too bad, to come here professedly for Geoff and to go instead to mamma ! it would be just like Theo ; but fortunately things were not quite so bad as that. The steps came straight to Geoff's door. Warrender entered looking—the boy could not tell how—flushed, weary-eyed : something as he had seen his father look in the morning after a late night. Excitement simulates many recollections, and this was the first thought that leaped to Geoff's little mind, with its little bit of painful experience. " I say, Theo ! " the boy cried ; and then stared and said no more.

" Well ! what is it you say ? I hope you are prepared to-day, not like last time."

" Last time ! but I was very well prepared ! It is you who forget. I knew all my lessons."

“You had better teach me, then, Geoff, for I don’t know all: no, nor half what I want to know. Oh, is this your exercise?” Warrender said, sitting down. He looked it over and corrected it with his pencil, hanging over it, seeming to forget the boy’s presence. When that was done he opened the book carelessly, anywhere, not at the place, as Geoff, who watched with keen eyes everything the young man was doing, perceived instantly. “Where did you leave off last time? Go on,” he said. Geoff began; but he was far too intent on watching Theo to know what he was doing; and as he construed with his eyes only, and not all of them, for he had to keep his companion’s movements in sight all the time, it is needless to say that Geoff made sad work of his Cæsar. And his little faculties were more and more sharpened with alarm, and more and more blunted in Latin, when he found that, stumble as he liked, Theo did not correct him nor say a word. He sat with his head propped on his hands, and when Geoff paused said, “Go on.” Either this meant something very awful in the shape of fault-finding when the culprit had come to the end of the lesson, the exemption now meaning dire retribution then, or else—there was something very wrong with Theo. Geoff’s little sharp eyes seemed to leap out of their sockets with excitement and suspense.

At last Warrender suddenly, in the midst of a dreadfully

boggled sentence, after Geoff had beaten himself on every side of these walls of words in bewildering endeavours to find a nominative, suddenly sprang up to his feet. "Look here," he said, "I think I'll give you a holiday to-day."

Geoff, much startled, closed his book upon his hand. "I had a holiday yesterday."

"Oh yes, to be sure! what has that to do with it? You can put away your books for to-day. As for being prepared, my boy, if my head had not been so bad——"

"Is your head bad, Theo?" Geoff put on a hypocritical look of solicitude to divert attention from his own delinquencies.

"I think it will split in two," said Warrender, pressing his hands upon his temples, in which indeed the blood was so swelling in every vein that they seemed ready to burst. He added a minute after, "You can run out and get a little air; and——" here he paused, and the boy stopped and looked up, knowing and fearing what was coming. "And," repeated Warrender, a crimson flush coming to his face which had been so pale, "I'll—go and explain to Lady Markland."

"Oh, if you're in a hurry to go, never mind, Theo! I'll tell mamma."

Warrender looked at Geoff with a blank but angry gaze. "I told you to run out and play," he said, his voice sound-

ing harsh and strange. "It's very bright out of doors. It will be better for you."

"And, Theo! what shall I learn for to-morrow?"

"To-morrow!" The child was really frightened by the look Theo gave him: the sudden fading out of the flush, the hollow look in his eyes. Then he flung down the book which all the time he had been holding mechanically in his hand. "Damn to-morrow!" he said.

Geoff's eyes opened wide with amazement and horror. Was Theo going mad? was that what it meant after all?

CHAPTER X.

A MINUTE after he was in the room where Lady Markland sat with her great writing table against the light. He did not know how he got there. It seemed impossible that it could have been by mere walking out of one room into another in the ordinary mechanical way. She rose up, dark against the light, when he went in, which was not at all her habit, but he was not sufficiently self-possessed to be aware of that. She turned towards him, which perhaps was an involuntary, instinctive precaution, for against the full daylight in the great window he could but imperfectly see her features. The precaution was unnecessary. His eyes were not clear enough to perceive what was before him. He saw his conception of her, serene in a womanly majesty far above his troubled state of passion, and was quite incapable of perceiving the sympathetic trouble in her face. She held out her hand to him before he could say anything, and said, with a little catch in her breath, "Oh, Mr. Warrender! I—Geoff—we were not sure whether we should see you to-day."

This was a perfectly unintentional speech and quite uncalled for ; for nobody could be more regular, more punctual, than Warrender. It was the first thing she could find to say.

“ Did you think I could stay away ? ” he asked, in a low and hurried tone, which was not at all the beginning he had intended. Then he added, “ But I have given Geoff a holiday, if you can accord me a little time,—if I may speak to you.”

“ Geoff is not like other boys,” she said, with a nervous laugh, still standing with her back to the light. “ He does not rejoice in a holiday like most children ; you have made him love his work.”

“ It is not about Geoff,” he said. “ I have—something to say to you, if you will hear me. I—cannot be silent any longer.”

“ Oh,” she said, “ you are going to tell me—I know what it is you are going to say—that this cannot continue. I knew that must come sooner or later. Mr. Warrender, you don’t need to be told how grateful I am ; I thank you, from the bottom of my heart. You have done so much for us. It was clear that it could not—go on for ever.” She put out her hand for her chair, and drew it closer, and sat down, still with her back to the window ; and now even in his preoccupation with his own overwhelming excitement

he saw that she trembled a little, and that there was agitation in her tone.

“Lady Markland, it is not that. It is more than that. The moment has come when I must—when I cannot keep it up any longer. Ah!” for she made a little movement with her hand as if to impose silence. “Must it be so? must I go unheard?” He came closer to her, holding out his hands in the eloquence of nature, exposing his agitated countenance to the full revelation of the light. “It is not much, is it, in return for a life—only to be allowed to speak, once: for half an hour, for five minutes—once—and then to be silent.” Here he paused for breath—still holding out his hands in a silent appeal. “But if that is my sentence I will accept it,” he said.

“Oh, Mr. Warrender, do not speak so. Your sentence! from me, that am so deeply in your debt, that never can repay—but I know you never thought of being repaid.”

“You will repay me now, tenfold, if you will let me speak.”

She put out her hand towards a chair, pointing him to it, and gave him an agitated smile. “Of course you shall speak, whatever you wish or please—as if to your mother, or your elder sister, or an old, old friend.”

She put up this little barrier of age instinctively, hastily snatching at the first defensive object she could find. And

he sat down as she bade him, but now that he had her permission said nothing,—nothing with his tongue, but with his clasped hands and with his eyes so much, that she covered hers with an involuntary movement, and uttered a little agitated cry. For the moment he was incapable of anything more.

“Mr. Warrender,” she said tremulously, “don’t, oh, don’t say what will make us both unhappy. You know that I am your—friend; you know that I am a great deal older than you are; Geoff’s mother, not a woman to whom—not a woman open to—not a——”

“I will tell you,” he said, “I know better; this one thing I know better. A woman as far above me as heaven is above earth, whom I am not worth a look or a word from. Do you think I don’t know that? You will say I ought not to have come, knowing what I did, that there was no woman but you in the world for me, and that you were not for me, nor ever would have any thought of me. I should have taken care of myself, don’t you think? But I don’t think so,” he added, almost with violence. “I have had a year of paradise. I have seen you every day, and heard you speak, and touched your hand. To-morrow, I will curse my folly that could not be content with that. But to-day, I am mad and I cannot help myself. I can’t be silent, though it is my only policy. Morning and night

I think of nothing but you. When I go to sleep, and when I wake, and even when I dream, I can't think of anything but only of what you say. That is what I am going over and over all day long,—every little word that you say.”

He poured this forth with a haste and fluency utterly unlike his usual mode of speech, never taking breath, never taking his eyes from her, a man possessed ; while she, shrinking back in her chair, her eyes cast down, her hands nervously clasping and unclasping each other, listened, beaten down by the tempest of an emotion such as she had never seen before, such as she could scarcely understand. She had been wooed long ago, lightly wooed, herself almost a child ; the whole matter little more than a frolic, though it turned into a tragedy ; but she did not know and had never met with anything like this. He paused a little to recover his breath, to moisten his parched lips, which were dry and hot with excitement, and then he resumed.

“ You talk of a mother, a sister, a friend. I think you want to mock me, Lady Markland. If you were to say a woman I ought to be content to worship, then I could understand you. I know I ought to have been content. Except that I have gone distracted and can't be silent, can't keep quiet. Oh, forgive me for it. Here is my life which is all yours, and my heart to put your foot on if you please ; all of me belongs to you ; I wish no better, only

forgive me for saying it—just once, once!” In his vehemence he got down on his knees—not by way of kneeling to her, only to get nearer, to come within reach. He touched her hand as if it had been the sceptre of mercy. “Speak to me,” he said, “speak to me! even if to tell me that I am a castaway!”

Lady Markland got up quickly, with a look of pain at him, as if she would have fled. “How could you be a castaway?” she cried. “Oh, Mr. Warrender, have pity on me! What can I say? Why should not we live, as we have been doing, in peace and quiet? Why should these dreadful questions be raised? Listen to me a little. Can friends not be friends without this? I am old, I am married! There never could be any question of—— Oh, listen to me! All this that you have been telling me is pity: yes, it is pity. You are so sorry for me. You think I am helpless and want—some one to take care of me, like other women. Stop, stop! it is not so! You must hear me out. I am not so helpless; and you are young; and some one better than me, some fresh girl, some one like yourself—— Theo!” This name came from her lips like a cry, because he had drawn nearer as she drew away from him, and had got her hand in both his and was kissing it desperately, as if he never would let it go. She never had called him by this name, and yet it was so usual in the

house that it did not sound as does a man's Christian name suddenly pronounced by the woman he loves, like a surrender and end of all contention. But she did not, even when she made that cry, withdraw her hand from him. She covered her face with the other, and stood swaying slightly backward away from him, a figure full of reluctance, pain, almost terror; yet without either word or gesture that should send him away.

"Some one," he cried, "like myself! I want no one, nothing in the world, but you! It is not I that have raised the question, it is something stronger than I. Pity! Oh, how dare you! how dare you!" He kissed her hand with a kind of fury between every word. "I sorry for the woman whom I worship—thinking she needs me! Good heavens! are you such a woman as you are and know so little? Or is it true about women that they don't know love, or want love, but only something tame, something quiet, what you call affection?" He stopped with his voice full of scorn, notwithstanding the paroxysm of passion, and looked up at her, though on his knees, in the superiority which he felt. "You want a friend that will be tame and live in peace and quiet; and I, you think, want a fresh girl, like myself. Do you mean to insult us both, Lady Markland? Yes, strike! Order me away from you; but don't mock me! don't mock me!" Then out of scorn and superiority he sank

again into the suppliant. "I will be tame, if you like; anything that you like. Only don't send me away!"

She drew her hand away from him, at last, and sank into her chair, with her heart in such a commotion, that she scarcely heard what he was saying for the loud beating in her ears. Then she made a stand again, having been, as it were, beaten from the first parallels; carried away by that fiery charge. She recovered herself a little; controlled the hurrying pulses; called back her strength. She said with a trembling voice, "Oh, let us be calm, if we can! Think a little of my position, and yours. Oh, Theo! think, besides, what I have said, that I am old. How can I bid you go, I who owe to you—you will not let me say it, but I feel it in my heart—so much, so much, of the comfort of my life! I tell you again, you should have said what you have been saying to a girl who would have put her hand in yours and that would have been all——" He put out his hand to take hers once more, but this time she refused him.

"Sit there and let us talk. If I had been that girl!—but I am not, I never can be. I am a woman who have had to act for myself. I am Geoff's mother. I must think of him and what has to be done for him. How can you say I mock you? We are two reasonable beings. We must think; we cannot be carried away by—by—by fancy, by what you call——"

Her voice broke, she could not go on, with the hurrying of her blood, the scrutiny of his looks, the passion in him which infected her. She waved her hand to him to sit down, to be calm, to listen, but she had no voice to speak.

“I am not reasonable,” he replied, “no, don’t think it; there is no reason in me. Afterwards, I will hear all there is to say. You shall make conditions, explanations, anything you please. Now is not the time for it. Tell me, am I to go or stay?” He was hoarse, while she was dumb. With both the question had gone far beyond the bounds of that reason to which she had appealed. “That is the only thing,” he repeated. “Tell me: am I to go or stay?”

Looking forward to this, it had seemed that there was so much to be said: on his side all the eloquence of passion; on hers the specious arguments of a woman who thinks she may still be able to withhold and restrain. All these possibilities had fled. They looked at each other, almost antagonists, because of being so much the reverse. She drew back, holding herself apart, unwilling to accept that necessity of decision; not knowing how to escape from it; holding her hands clasped together that he might not secure them; her heart fluttering in her throat; her head throbbing with pain and excitement. Ah, if she had been that girl! If he had sought one like himself! He felt it too, even in the scorn with which he repulsed the suggestion; and for a

moment it hung on the balance of a thought, on the turn of a look, whether his patience might not give way; whether his fastidious temper might not take fire at the aspect of that reluctance with which she held away from him, kept back, would not yield. But, on the other hand, that very reluctance, was it not a subtle attraction, a charm the more; giving a sweetness beyond all speaking to the certainty that, underneath all that resistance, the real citadel was won? After this momentary armistice and pause, in which they both seemed to regain their hurried breath, and the mist of the combat dispelled a little, he threw himself down by her again, and got both the clasped hands into his own, saying with something between supplication and authority, "I am to stay?"

"I cannot bid you go," she said, trembling, almost inaudible; and in this way the long battle came to an end in a moment. They looked at each other, scarcely believing it; asking each other, could it be so? Even he scarcely ventured to presume that it was so, though he had forced it and taken the decision into his own hands.

There ensued a half hour or so of bewildered happiness, in which it seemed, to him at least, that the world had turned into a different sphere, and to her that there was in life a sweetness which had come to her too late, of which she could never taste the true flavour, nor forget the bitter-

ness behind; yet which was sweet and wonderful; too wonderful, almost, to believe. She delivered herself over to listen, to behold the flood of the young man's rapture. It filled her with a kind of admiration and almost terror. She was like his mother, though with a difference. She had not known what love was. It was wonderful to her to see it, to know that she was the object of it; but as the warm tide touched her, invaded her being, carrying her away, there was something of fear mingled with her yielding to that delight. She had been so certain that she would not yield; and yet had made so poor a resistance! It was fortunate that he was so lost, on his side, in the wonder of the new bliss, and had so much to pour forth of triumph and ecstasy, that he accepted the silence on her part without comment even in his own mind. It was too completely un hoped for, too extraordinary, what had already happened, that he should ask for more. Her passive position, her reticence, but added to the rapture. She was his almost against her will, constrained by the torrent of love which was irresistible, which had carried all her defences away. This gave her a sort of majesty in the young man's dazzled eyes. He was giddy with joy and pride. It had seemed to him impossible that he could ever win this queen of his every thought; and it became her, as a queen still, to stand almost aloof, reluctant, although in all the sweetness of

consent she had been made to yield. It was her part, too, in nature and according to all that was most seemly, to bring him back to the consideration of that invading sea of common life which surrounded his golden isle of happiness. She put up her hand as if to stop his mouth. "Oh, Theo, there are so many things which we must think of. It cannot be all happiness as you suppose. You are not thinking how many troublesome things I bring with me."

"Let trouble be for to-morrow," he cried; "nothing but joy on this white day."

She looked at him with a shiver, yet a smile. "Ah, you are so young! your heart has no ghosts like mine."

"Speak respectfully of my heart, for it is yours. The ghosts shall be laid and the troubles will fly away. What are ghosts to you and me? One may be subject to them, but two can face the world."

"O dreamer," she cried, but the reflection of the light in his face came into hers, almost against her will.

"Not dreamer: lover, a better word. Don't spend your strength for nothing, my lady and mistress. Do you really believe that you can make me afraid, to-day?"

She shook her head, not answering, which indeed he scarcely left her time to do, he had so much to say. His very nature seemed changed, the proud, fastidious, taciturn Warrender babbling like a happy boy, in the sudden over-

flow of a bliss which was too much for him. But while he ran on, a louder voice than hers interrupted him,—the bell that meant the commonest of all events, the bell for luncheon. It fell into the soft retirement of that paradise, which was something of a fool's paradise to Theo, scaring and startling the pair. She made a start from his side with a guilty blush, and even he for a moment paused with something like a sense of alarm. They looked at each other as if they had been suddenly cited to appear before a tribunal and answer for what they had done. Then he broke into a breathless laugh. "I shall have to leave you. I can't face that ordeal. Oh, what a falling off is here—luncheon! must I leave everything for that?"

"Yes, go, go—it is too much," she murmured, like a culprit whose accomplice may be saved, but who herself must face the judge. "I could not bear it; I could not hold up my head, if you were there."

"One moment!" She was leaning towards him, when Geoff's hasty steps were heard in the hall and his voice that seemed to sound sharp in her very ears, "Where's mamma?" Lady Markland fell back with a face like a ghost, covering it with her hands. Warrender felt as if a sudden flame was lit in his heart. He seized her almost with violence. "I will come back to-night, when he is in bed. Be in the avenue. I must see you again to-day."

“I will, Theo.”

“At nine o'clock.” He pulled away the hand which still was over her eyes. “You are mine, remember, mine first. I shall count the minutes till I come back. Mine first, mine always.”

“Oh, Theo, yes! for the love of heaven go!”

Was that how to conclude the first meeting of happy lovers? Warrender rushed through the hall, with his blood on fire, almost knocking over Geoff, who presented himself, very curious and sharp-eyed, directly in the way.

“Oh, I say, Theo!” cried Geoff. “Where are you going, Theo? that's lunch! lunch is on the table. Don't you hear the bell? Can't you stay?”

Warrender waved his hand, he could make no reply. He could have taken the child by the collar and flung him far away into the unknown, if that had been practicable. Ghosts, she had said: Geoff was no ghost, but he was insupportable; not to be seen with composure at that tremendous moment. The young man rushed down the steps and struck across the drive at a pace like a race-horse, though he was only walking. He forgot even the big black, munching his hay tranquilly in the stable and thinking no harm.

CHAPTER XI.

LADY MARKLAND came out of her room a little after, paler than usual, with a great air of stateliness and gravity, conscious to her finger points of the looks that met her, and putting on an aspect of severity which was very unusual to her. Geoff seized and clung to her arm as he was wont, and found it trembling. He had begun to pour forth his wonder about Theo even before he made this discovery.

“Why, Theo has gone away! He wouldn’t stop for lunch. I shouted to him, but he never paid any attention. Is he ill, or is he in trouble, or what’s the—— Why, mamma! you are all trembling!”

“Nonsense, Geoff, I have been—sitting with the window open: and it is a little cold to-day.”

“Cold!” Geoff was so struck by the absurdity of the statement that he stopped to look at her. “Ah,” he said, “you have not been running up and down to the stables or you never would think that.”

“No, I have been sitting—writing.”

“Oh!” said the child again, “were you writing all the time Theo was there? I thought you were talking to Theo. He gave me a holiday because he had something he wanted to say to you.”

“I have told you a great many times, Geoff, that you should not call Mr. Warrender Theo. It is much too familiar. You must not presume because he is so very kind to you——”

“Oh, he doesn’t mind,” said Geoff lightly. “What was he saying to you, mamma?”

By this time they were at table, that is, she was at the bar, seated indeed as a concession to her weakness, about to be tried for her life before those august judges, Geoff and old Soames, both of whom had their attention fixed on her with an intentness which the whole bench could scarcely equal. She held her head very high, but she did not dare to lift up her eyes.

“Will you have this, or some of the chicken?” she asked, with a voice of solemnity not quite adapted to the question.

“I say, mamma, was it about me? or was it some trouble he was in?”

“My dear Geoff, let us attend to our own business. The chicken is better for you. And why have you been

running up and down to the stables? I thought I had said that I objected to the stables."

By dint of thus carrying the war into the enemy's country, she was able to meet her boy's keen eyes, which were sharp with curiosity, "like needles," as old Soames said. Soames, the other of her judges, gave his verdict without hesitation. "She have given him the sack," he said confidentially to the housekeeper, as soon as he could spare a moment. "And a very good thing too." The housemaids had come to the same conclusion, seeing Theo's hurried exit, and the rate at which he walked down the avenue. The news ran through the house in a moment. "My lady has given him the sack." The old servants were glad, because there would thus be no change; and the young ones were sorry for the same reason, and partly, too, because of their sympathy for the young lover dismissed, whose distracted departure without his horse went to their tender hearts.

Geoff had to enter into an explanation as to why he had sought the stables as soon as he was dismissed from his books,—an explanation which involved much; for it had already been pointed out to him on various occasions that the coachman and Black were not improving society. Geoff had to confess that it was dull when he had a holiday, that he didn't know where to go, that Black and the coach-

man were more fun than—any one else—with an expressive glance over his shoulder at old Soames, all which pleas went like so many arrows to Lady Markland's heart. Had she been so neglecting her boy that Black and the coachman had become his valued allies? She who believed in her heart that up to this moment her life had been devoted to Geoff.

The day passed to her like a day in a fever. Geoff liked it, on the whole. There was no Theo to linger after lunch and interfere with his possession of his mother. The long afternoon was all his, and Lady Markland, though she was, he thought, dull, and sometimes did not hear what he said, letting her attention stray, and her eyes go far away, over his head, was yet very tender, more affectionate than ever, anxious to inquire into all his wishes and to find out everything he wanted. He talked to her more than he had done at a stretch for a long time, and made it so apparent how completely he calculated upon her as always his companion that Lady Markland's guilty soul was troubled within her. She faltered once, "But, Geoff, you know you will have to go to school, they all say, and then to Oxford, when you are a man." "Yes, and you can come and live close by college," the boy said. "Many boys' mothers do, Mr. Sargent told me." Her heart sank more and more as he opened up his plans before her. It was all quite simple

to Geoff. He did not dream of any change in himself, and what change could ever come to her? Presently the manner in which the child calculated upon her, ignoring every personal claim of hers, awoke a little spark in Lady Markland's breast. A little while ago she would herself have said (nay, this morning she would have said it) that she had no life but in him, that for her there was no future save Geoff's future. Even now it seemed guilt in her that she should have calculations of her own.

And as for saying anything to him on the subject, how could she do it? It was impossible. Had he been a young man, with some acquaintance with life, she thought it would not have been so hard; or had he been a mere child, to whom she could have said that Theo was to be his new papa. But ten; a judge and a critic; a creature who knew so much and so little. Half a dozen times she cleared her throat to begin, to lead the conversation back to Theo, to make some attempt at disclosure: but another look at his face chilled the words on her lips. She could not do it: how could she ever do it? They went out and had a long drive together; they strolled about the park afterwards before dinner, the boy hanging as was his habit upon her arm, pressed close to her, talking—about everything in heaven and earth: but never loosening that claim which was supreme, that proprietorship in her which she

had never contested till now, never herself doubted. Geoff meant to be very good to his mother, her protector, her support, as soon as he should be big enough. She was to be his chief companion, always with him, his alone, all his, as she was now. Any other reading of life was not possible to him. He felt sure there was something about Theo which he had not been told, some story which he would get mamma to tell him sooner or later, but never that this story could interfere with himself and his mother; that was impossible, beyond the range of the boy's wildest misgivings.

As for Lady Markland, she was more than silenced, she was overawed by this certainty. She let him run on, her own thoughts drifting away, pulled up now and then by an importunate, repeated question, then wandering again, but not far, only to this impossibility of making Geoff understand. How should she convey to him the first germ of the fact that mother and son are not one; that they separate and part in the course of nature; that a woman in the flower of her life does not necessarily centre every wish in the progress of a little boy? How to tell him this, how to find a language which could express it, in which such a horrible fact could be told! To herself it was terrible, a thing foreign to all her tenets, to all her principles. Even now that she had done it and bound herself for ever, and raised this wall between herself and her child, between her-

self and her past life, it was terrible to her. If she had ever been certain of anything in her life, it had been that such a step was impossible. Marriage, for her who was already married ; a new life to come in place of the old ; a state of affairs in which Geoff should no longer be first, in which, in fact, it would be better, an ease to her, that Geoff should be away ! Oh, horrible thought ! an ease to her to be without Geoff ! She had lived for him, she had said and felt that he was everything to her, the sole object of her love and her life. And now he was an embarrassment, and it would be well for her if he could be got away.

In this confusion of mind mingled with impulses to flight, with impulses of going and throwing herself on Theo's mercy, begging him to give her up, for she could not do it the day passed. Geoff clung to her and talked, talked incessantly all the day through, giving her his opinions about Theo as well as about everything else ; and she listened hearing some things—that most distinctly as it may be believed—but not all, nor near all ; weary, was it possible ? of her own child ; of the ceaseless voice in her ears. She was conscious of urging him to go to bed, as she would not have thought of doing in other circumstances ; urging him against his will, telling him that he was getting later and later, that it made him pale and nervous, that he must go—all because she was anxious to escape, because she had

promised to meet—— Could a woman sink into lower humiliation, a woman a mother, not a foolish girl? At last she could escape breathlessly, tying a black veil over her head ; stealing out, saying a nervous word to Soames about the beautiful moonlight. Even Soames had to see her humiliation. She had to linger, as if she were looking at the moonlight, while Soames stood upon the steps—and with shame and confusion to cross the space before the door, which was all one flood of light marked only by her little shadow, small and clinging to her feet. She could have wished that there should never be moonlight more, so shamed and mortified and humiliated did she feel. The darkness would have been better ; the darkness would have hidden her at least. In this condition of shame and pain she went along, gliding into what shadow the young trees could throw, brushing against the bushes underneath. And then suddenly, all in a moment, there was calm ; ah, more than calm, a refuge from all trouble, a sudden escape from herself and all things that were oppressing her ; without any word said, a sudden meeting in the shade of the trees, and two where there had been but one,—a young lover, and a woman who, Heaven help her, was young too, and could still drop her burden off her shoulders and for a moment forget everything, except the arm that supported her, and the whisper close to her ear, and the melting of all her bonds, the melting of

her very being into his, the heavenly ease and forgetfulness, the *Vita Nuova* never known before.

It seemed not herself all laden with shame, but another woman, who raised her head, and said to him, shaking as it were her bondage from her : " This is not becoming for you and me. Let us go in. Whatever we have to encounter together, we must not do it in secret. I must not linger about here, Theo, like one of my maids."

" Yet stay a moment," he said. Perhaps the maids have the best of it. The sweet air of the night, the magical light so near them, the contact and close vicinity, almost unseen of each other, added an ethereal atmosphere to the everlasting, always continued tale.

'Twas partly love and partly fear,
And partly 'twas a bashful art,
That I might rather feel than see
The swelling of her heart.

After a time, they emerged into the moonlight, slowly moving towards the house, she leaning upon his arm, he stooping over her, a suggestive posture. Soames upon the doorsteps could not believe his eyes. He would have shut up before now, if he had not seen my lady go out. To admire the moonlight ! it did not seem to Soames a very sensible occupation ; but when he saw her coming back, not alone, wonder and horror crept over him. He watched

them with his mouth open, as well as his eyes, and when he went downstairs and told Black, who had made the horses comfortable for the night, to go and bring out Mr. Warrender's horse, a shock ran through the entire house. After all! but then it was possible that he had always intended to come back and ride his horse home.

Black walked about (very unwillingly and altogether indifferent to the beauty of the moonlight) for nearly an hour before Warrender came out. The young man's aspect then was very unlike that of the morning. Happiness beamed from him as he walked, and Lady Markland came out to the door to see him start, and called good-night as he rode away. "Good-night, till to-morrow," he said, turning back as long as he could see her, which was a tempting of providence on the part of a man who was not a great rider, and with a big horse like the black, and so fresh, and irritated to be taken out of the stable at that hour of the night. The servants exchanged looks as my lady walked back with eyes that shone as they had never shone before, and something of that glory about her, that dazzling and mist of self-absorption which belongs to no other condition of the mind. She went back into the room and shut the door, and sat down where she had been sitting, and delivered herself over to those visions which are more enthralling than the reality; those mingled recollections and anticipations

which are the elixir of love. She had forgotten all about herself; herself as she was before that last meeting. Her age, her gravity, the falseness of the position, the terrible Geoff, all floated away from her thoughts. They were filled only with what *he* had been saying and doing, as if she had been that "fresh girl" of whom she had spoken to him. She forgot that she was not that girl. She forgot that she was four years (magnified this morning into a hundred) and a whole life in advance of Theo. She thought only—nay, poor lady, assailed after her time by this love-fever, taking it late and not lightly! she thought not at all, but surrendered herself to that overwhelming wave of emotion which, more than almost anything else, has the power of filling up all the vacant places of life. Her troublous thoughts, her shame, her sense of all the difficulties in her way, went from her in that new existence. They were all there unchanged, but for the moment she thought of them no more.

It was some time after this, when she went upstairs with her candle through the stilled and darkened house, the light in her hand showing still that confused sweet shining in her eyes, the smile that lurked about the corners of her mouth. A faint sound made her look up as she went towards the gallery upon which all the bedrooms opened. Standing by the banister, looking down into the dark hall, was Geoff, a little white figure, his colourless hair ruffled by

much tossing on his bed, his eyes dazzled by the light. "Geoff!" She stood still and her heart seemed to stop beating. To see him there was as if a curtain had suddenly fallen, shutting out all the sweet prospects before her, showing nothing but darkness and danger instead.

"Geoff! Is it you out of bed at this hour?"

"Yes, it is me," he said, in a querulous tone; "there is no one else so little in the house; of course it is me."

"You are shivering with cold; have you——" Her breath seemed to go from her as she came up to him and put her arm round him. "Have you been here long, Geoff?"

"I couldn't sleep," said the child, "and I heard a noise. I saw Theo. Has Theo been back here with you? What did Theo want here so late at night?"

He did not look at her, but stared into the candle with eyes opened to twice their size.

"Come into my room," she said. "You are so cold; you are shivering. Oh, Geoff! if you make yourself ill, what shall I do?"

He let her lead him into her room, wrap him in a fur cloak, and kneel down beside him to chafe his feet with her hands; this helped her in the dreadful crisis which had come so suddenly, which she had feared beyond anything

else in the world. "You must have been about a long time or you could not have got so cold, Geoff."

"Yes, I have been about a long time. I thought you would come up directly, after Theo went away." He looked at her very gravely as she knelt with her face on a level with his. He had filled the place of a judge before, without knowing it; but now Geoff was consciously a judge, and interrogating—one who was too much like a criminal, who avoided the looks of that representative of offended law. "Theo stayed a long time," he said, "and then he rode away. I suppose he came to get his horse." How he looked at her! Her eyes were upon his feet, stretched out on the sofa, which she was rubbing; but his eyes burned into her, through her downcast eyelids, making punctures in her very brain.

"He did come for his horse." She could hardly hear the words she was saying, for the tumult of her heart in her ears; "but that was not all, Geoff."

For a long minute no more was said; it seemed like an hour. The mother went on rubbing the child's feet mechanically, then bent down upon them and kissed them. No Magdalen was ever more bowed with shame and trouble. Her voice was choked; she could not speak a word in her own defence. It had been happiness, but oh, what a price to pay!

At last Geoff said, with great gravity, "Theo was always very fond of you."

"I think so, Geoff," she answered, faltering.

"And now you are fond of him."

She could say nothing. She put her head down upon the little white feet and kissed them, with what humility, with what compunction! her eyes dry and her cheeks blazing with shame.

"It's not anything wrong, mamma?"

"No, Geoff, oh no, my darling! they say not: if only you don't mind."

The brave little eyes blinked and twinkled to get rid of unwelcome tears. He put his hand upon her head and stroked it, as if it had been she that was the child. "I do mind," he said. She thought, as she felt the little hand upon her head, that the boy was about to call upon her for a supreme sacrifice; but for a moment there was nothing more. Afterwards he repulsed her a little, very slightly, but yet it was a repulse. "I suppose," he said, "it cannot be helped, mamma? My feet are quite warm now, and I'll go to bed."

"Geoff, is that all you have got to say to me? It can make no difference, my darling, no difference. Oh, Geoff, my own boy, you will always be my first——"

Would he, could he be her first thought? She paused,

conscience-stricken, raising for the first time her eyes to his. But a child does not catch such an unconscious admission. He took no notice of it. His chief object, for the moment, was not to cry, which he felt would be beneath his dignity. His little heart was all forlorn. He had no clear idea of what it was, or of what was going to happen, but only a vague certainty that mamma and Theo were to stand more and more together, and that he was "out of it." He could not talk of grown-up things like them; he would be sent to play as he had been this morning. He who had been companion, counsellor, everything to her, he would be sent to play. The dreary future seemed all summed up in that. He slid out of her arms with his little bare feet on the carpet, flinging the fur cloak from him. "I was a little cold because the door was open, but I'm quite warm now, and I'm sleepy too. And it's long, long past bedtime, don't you think, mamma? I wonder if I was ever as late before?"

He looked at her when he asked that question, and suddenly before them both, a little vague and confused to the child, to her clear as if yesterday, came the picture of that night when Geoff and she had watched together, he at her feet, curled into her dress, while his father lay dying. Oh, *he* had no right to reproach her, no right! and yet the pale, awful face on the pillow, living, yet already wrapt in

the majesty of death, rose up before her. She gave a great cry and clasped Geoff in her arms. She was still kneeling, and his slight little white figure swayed and trembled with the sudden weight. To have that face like a spectre rise up before her, and Geoff's countenance averted, his little eyes twitching to keep in the tears, was there anything in the world worth that? Magdalen! ah, worse than Magdalen! for she poured out her tears for what was past, whereas all this shame was the price at which she was going to buy happiness to come.

And yet it was nothing wrong.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. WARRENDER and Chatty left the Warren in the end of the week in which these events had taken place. They had a farewell visit from the rector and Mrs. Wilberforce, which no doubt was prompted by kindness, yet had other motives as well. The Warren looked its worst on the morning when this visit was paid. It was a gray day, no sun visible, the rain falling by intervals, the sky all neutral tinted, melting in the gray distance into indefinite levels of damp soil and shivering willows,—that is, where there was a horizon visible at all. But in the Warren there was no horizon, nothing but patches of whitish gray seen among the branches of the trees, upon which the rain kept up such an endless, dismal patter as became unendurable after a time—a continual dropping, the water dripping off the long branches, drizzling through the leaves with incessant monotonous downfall. The Wilberforces came picking their way through the little pools which alternated with dry patches along all the approaches to the house, their wet

umbrellas making a moving glimmer of reflection in the damp atmosphere. Inside, the rooms were all dark, as if it had been twilight. Boxes stood about in the hall, packed and ready, and there were those little signs of neglect in the usual garnishing of the rooms which is so apt to occur when there is a departure. Chatty, with her hat on, stood arranging a few very wet flowers in a solitary vase, as if by way of keeping up appearances, the usual decorations of this kind being all cleared away. "Theo is so little at home," she said, by way of explanation, "he would get no good of them." Afterwards when she thought of it, Chatty was sorry that she had mentioned her brother at all.

"Ah, Theo! We have been hearing wonderful things of Theo," said Mrs. Wilberforce, as Mrs. Warrender approached from the drawing-room to meet them and bid them enter. "I have never been so surprised in my life; and yet I don't know why I should be surprised. Of course it makes his conduct all quite reasonable when we look back upon it in that light."

"Who speaks of conduct that is reasonable?" said Mrs. Warrender. "It is kinder than reason to come and see us this melancholy day: for it is very discouraging to leave home under such skies."

"But you don't need to leave in such a hurry, surely.

Theo would never press you: and besides, I suppose with a larger house so close at hand they would not live here."

"There is nobody going to live here that I know of, except Theo," said his mother. ("Let me take off your cloak," cried Chatty;) "notwithstanding the packing and all the fuss the servants love to make, we may surely have some tea. I ought to ask you to come and sit down by the fire. Though it is June, a fire seems the only comfortable thing one can think of." Mrs. Warrender was full of suppressed excitement, and talked against time that her visitors might not insist upon the one topic of which she was determined nothing should be said. But the rector's wife was not one whom it was easy to balk.

"A fire would be cosy," she said; "but I suppose now the Warren will be made to look very different. With all the will in the world to change, it does need a new start, doesn't it, a new beginning, to make a real change in a house?"

This volley was ineffective from the fact that it called forth no remark. As Mrs. Warrender had no answer to make, she took refuge in that which is the most complete of all—silence: and left her adversary to watch, as it were, the smoke of her own guns, dispersing vaguely into the heavy air.

“We are going to London, first,” Mrs. Warrender said. “No, not for the season, it is too late; but if any little simple gaieties should fall in Chatty’s way——”

“Little simple gaieties are scarcely appropriate to London in June,” said the rector, with a laugh.

“No, if we were to be received into the world of fashion, Chatty and I—but that doesn’t seem very likely. We all talk about London as if we were going to plunge into a vortex. Our vortex means two or three people in Kensington, and one little bit of a house in Mayfair.”

“That might be quite enough to set you going,” said Mrs. Wilberforce. “It only depends upon whom the people are; though now, I hear that in London there are no invitations more sought after, than to the rich parvenu houses,—people that never were heard of till they grew rich; and then they have nothing to do but get a grand house in Belgravia, and let it be known how much money they have. Money is everything, alas, now.”

“It always was a good deal, my dear,” observed the rector mildly.

“Never in my time, Herbert! Mamma would no more have let us go to such houses! It is just one of those signs of the time which you insist on ignoring, but which one day—— This new connection will be a great thing for

Chatty, dear Mrs. Warrender. It is such a nice thing for a girl to come out under good auspices."

"Poor Chatty, we cannot say she is coming out," said her mother, "and the Thynnes, I have always understood, were dull people, not fashionable at all."

"Oh, you don't think for a moment that I meant the Thynnes! She has been very quiet, to be sure; but now, of course, with a young husband—and I am sure Chatty does not look more than nineteen; I always say she is the youngest looking girl of her age. And as she has never been presented, what is she but a girl coming out? But I do think I would wait till she had her sister-in-law to go out with. It may be a self-denial for a mother, but it gives a girl such an advantage!"

"But Chatty is not going to have a husband either young or old," said Mrs. Warrender, with a laugh which was a little forced. "Ah, here is the tea. I wish we had a fire too, Joseph, though it is against rules."

"I'll light you a fire, mum," said Joseph, "in a minute. None of us would mind the trouble, seeing as it's only for once, and the family going away."

"That is very good of you not to mind," said his mistress, laughing. "Light it, then, it will make us more cheerful before we go."

"Ah, Joseph," said the rector's wife, "you may well be

kind to your good old mistress, who has always been so considerate to you. For new lords, new laws, you know, and when the new lady comes——”

Joseph, who was on his knees lighting the fire, turned round with the freedom of an old servant. “There ain’t no new ladies but in folks’ imagination,” he said. “The Warren ain’t a place for nothing new.”

“Joseph!” cried his mistress sharply; but she was glad of the assistance thus afforded to her. And there was a little interval during which Mrs. Wilberforce was occupied with her tea. She was cold and damp, and the steaming cup was pleasant to see; but she was not to be kept in silence even by this much-needed refreshment. “I should think,” she resumed, “that the boy would be the chief difficulty. A step-mother is a difficult position; but a step-father, and one so young as dear Theo!”

“Step-fathering succeeds better than step-mothering,” said the rector, “so far as my experience goes. Men, my dear, are not so exacting; they are more easily satisfied.”

“What nonsense, Herbert! They are not brought so much in contact with the children, perhaps, you mean; they are not called on to interfere so much. But how a mother could trust her children’s future to a second husband—— For my part I would rather die.”

“Let us hope you will never need to do so, my dear,” said the rector, at which little pleasantry Mrs. Warrender was glad to laugh.

“Happily none of us are in danger,” she said. “Chatty must take the warning to heart and beware of fascinating widowers. Is it true about the Elms—that the house is empty and every one gone?”

“Thank heaven! it is quite true; gone like a bubble burst, clean swept out, and not a vestige left.”

“As every such place must go sooner or later,” said Mrs. Wilberforce. “That sort of thing may last for a time, but sooner or later——”

“I think,” said the rector, “that our friend Cavendish had, perhaps, something to do with it. It appears that it is an uncle of his who bought the house when it was sold three years ago, and these people wanted something done to the drainage, I suppose. I advised Dick to persuade his uncle to do nothing, hoping that the nuisance—for, I suppose, however wicked you are, you may have a nose like other people—might drive them out; and so it has done apparently,” Mr. Wilberforce said, with some complacency, looking like a man who deserved well of his kind.

“They might have caught fever, too, like other people. I wonder if that is moral, to neglect the drains of the wicked?”

“No,” said Mrs. Wilberforce firmly; “they have not noses like other people. How should they, people living in that way? The sense of smell is essentially a belonging of the better classes. Servants never smell anything. We all know that. My cook sniffs and looks me in the face and says, ‘I don’t get anything, m’m,’ when it is enough to knock you down! And persons of *that* description living in the midst of every evil—! Not that I believe in all that fuss about drains,” she added, after a moment. “We never had any drains in the old times, and who ever heard of typhoid fever *then*?”

“But if they had been made very ill?” said Chatty, who, up to this time, had not spoken. “I don’t think surely Mr. Cavendish would have done that.”

She was a little moved by this new view. Chatty was not interested in general about what was said, but now and then a personal question would rouse her. She thought of the woman with the blue eyes, so wide open and red with crying, and then of Dick with his laugh which it always made her cheerful to think of. Chatty had in her mind no possible link of connection between these two: but the absence of any power of comprehending the abstract in her made her lay hold all the more keenly of the personal, and the thought of Dick in the act of letting in poisonous gases upon that unhappy creature filled her with horror. She

was indignant at so false an accusation. "Mr. Cavendish," she repeated with a little energy, "never would have done that."

"It is all a freak of those scientific men," said Mrs. Wilberforce. "Look at the poor people, they can do a great deal more, and support a great deal more, than we can : yet they live among bad smells. I think they rather like them. I am sure my nursery is on my mind night and day, if there is the least little whiff of anything ; but the children are as strong as little ponies—and where is the drainage there?"

With this triumphant argument she suddenly rose, declaring that she knew the brougham was at the door, and that Mrs. Warrender would be late for the train. She kissed and blessed both the ladies as she took leave of them. "Come back soon, and don't forget us," she said to Chatty ; while to Mrs. Warrender she gave a little friendly pat on the shoulder. "You won't say anything, not even to true friends like Herbert and me ? but a secret like that can't be kept, and though you mayn't think so, everybody knows."

"Do you think that is true, mamma?" Chatty asked when the wet umbrellas had again gone glimmering through the shrubberies and under the trees, and the travellers were left alone.

"That everybody knows ? It is very likely. There is

no such thing as a secret in a little world like ours ; everybody knows everything. But still they cannot say that they have it by authority from you and me. It is time enough to talk of it when it is a fact, if it is to be."

"But you have not any doubt of it, mamma?"

"I have doubt of everything till it is done ; even," she said, with a smile as the wheels of the brougham cut the gravel and came round with a little commotion to the door, "of our going away : though I allow that it seems very like it now."

They did go away, at last, leaving the Warren very solitary, damp, and gray, under the rain,—a melancholy place enough for Theo to return to. But he was not in a state of mind to think of that or of any of his home surroundings grave or gay. Chatty put her head out of the window to look behind her at the melancholy yet dear old house, with tears in her innocent eyes, but Mrs. Warrender, feeling that at last she had shaken herself free from that bondage, notwithstanding the anxiety in her heart for her son, had no feeling to spare for the leave-taking. She waved her hand to Mrs. Bagley at the shop, who was standing out at her door with a shawl over her cap to see the ladies go by. Lizzie stood behind her in the doorway saying nothing, while her grandmother curtsied and waved her hand and called out her wishes for a good journey, and

a happy return. Naturally Chatty's eyes sought those of the girl, who looked after her with a sort of blank longing as if she too would fain have gone out into the world. Lizzie's eyes seemed to pursue her as they'drove past,—poor Lizzie, who had other things in her mind, Chatty began to think, beside the fashion books; and then there came the tall red mass of the Elms, with all its windows shut up, and that air of mystery which its encircling wall and still more its recent history conferred upon it. The two ladies looked out upon it, as they drove past, almost with awe.

“Mamma,” said Chatty, “I never told you. I saw the—the lady, just when she was going away.”

“What lady?” asked Mrs. Warrender, with surprise.

“I don't think,” said Chatty, with a certain solemnity, “that she was any older, perhaps not so old as I. It made my heart sick. Oh, dear mother, must there not be some explanation, some dreadful, dreadful fate, when it happens that one so young——”

“Sometimes it may be so—but these are mysteries which you, at your age, Chatty, have no need to go into.”

“At my age—which is about the same as hers,” said Chatty; “and—oh, mamma, I wanted in my heart to stop her, to bring her to you. She had been crying—she had such innocent-looking, distracted eyes—and Lizzie said——”

“Lizzie! what had Lizzie to do with it?”

“I promised to tell no one, but you are not any one, you are the same as myself. Lizzie says she knew her long ago, that she is the same as a child still, not responsible for what she is doing—fond of toys and sweets like a child.”

“My dear, I am sorry that Lizzie should have kept up such a friend. I believe there are some poor souls that if an innocent girl were to do what you say, stop them and bring them to her mother, might be saved, Chatty. I do believe that: but not—not that kind.”

The tears by this time were falling fast from Chatty's eyes. “I wonder,” she said, “if I shall ever see her again.”

“Never, I hope; for you could do nothing for her. Shut the window, my dear, the rain is coming in. Poor Theo, how wet he will get coming home! I wonder if he will have the thought to change everything now that there is no occasion to dress, now that we are away.”

“Joseph will give him no peace till he does,” said Chatty, happily diverted, as her mother had intended, from sadder thoughts. “And don't you think she will make him stay to dinner on such a day? Don't you think she must care a great deal for him, mamma?”

“She must care for him or she would not have listened to him. Poor Theo!” said the mother, with a sigh.

“But he cares very much for her: and he is happy,” said Chatty, with a certain timidity, a half question; for to her inexperience there were very serious drawbacks, though perhaps not such as might have occurred to a more reasonable person. Mrs. Warrender had to change this subject, too, which Chatty showed a disposition to push too far, by making an inquiry into the number of their bags and parcels, and reminding her daughter that they were drawing near the station. It was a very forlorn little station, wet and dismal, with a few men lounging about, the collars of their coats up to their ears, and Mrs. Warrender’s maid standing by her pile of boxes, having arrived before them. It had been an event long looked for, much talked of, of late, but it was not a cheerful going away.

But the rain had gone off by the time they reached town, and a June day has a power of recovering itself, such as youth only possesses. But no, that is an error, as Mrs. Warrender proved. She had been leaning back in her corner very quiet, saying little, yet with an intense sense of relief and deliverance. She came in to London with as delightful a consciousness of novelty and freedom as any boy coming to seek his fortune. Chatty’s feelings were all very mild in comparison with her mother’s. She was greatly pleased to see the clouds clear off, and the humid sweetness of the skies, which even the breath of the

great city did not obscure. "After all, Theo will have a nice evening for his drive home," she said, unexcited. Though it was all very agreeable, Chatty did not know of anything that might await her in town. She knew more or less, she believed, what awaited her,—a few parties, a play or two, the Row in the morning, the pictures, a pleasant little glimpse of the outside of that fashionable life which was said to be "such a whirl," which she had no expectation, nor any desire to see much of. There was no likelihood that she and her mother would be drawn into that whirl. If all the people they knew asked them to dinner, or even to a dance, which was not to be thought of, there would still be no extravagant gaiety in that. Driving from the railway to Half Moon Street was as pleasant as anything—to a girl of very highly raised expectations, it might have been the best of all: but Chatty did not anticipate too much, and would not be easily disappointed. She neither expected nor was afraid of any great thing that might be coming to her. Her quiet heart seemed beyond the reach of any touch of fate.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON the mantelpiece of the little lodging-house drawing-room in Half Moon Street, supported against the gilt group that decorated the timepiece, was a note containing an invitation. "Why, here is the whirl beginning already," Mrs. Warrender said. "Don't you feel that you are in the vortex, Chatty?" Her mother laughed, but was a little excited even by this mild matter; but Chatty did not feel any excitement. To the elder woman, the mere sense of the population about her, the hurry in the street, the commotion in the air, was an excitement. She would have liked to go out at once, to walk about, to get into a hansom like a man, and drive through the streets, and see the lights and the glimmer of the shops, and the crowds of people. To be within reach of all that movement and rapidity went into her veins like wine. After the solitude and silence of so many years,—nothing but the rustle of the leaves, the patter of the rain, the birds or the winds in the branches, and the measured voices indoors, to vary the quiet,—the roar of Piccadilly

mingling with everything was a sort of music to this woman. To many others, perhaps the majority, the birds and breezes would be the thing to long for ; but Mrs. Warrender was one of the people who love a town and all that seems like a larger life in the collection together of many human lives. Whether it is so or not is another question, or if the massing together of a multitude of littles ever can make a greatness. It seems to do so, which is enough for most people ; and though the accustomed soul is aware that no desert can be more lone than London, to the unaccustomed its very murmur sounds like a general consent of humanity to go forth and do more than in any other circumstances. It is the constitution of the ear which determines what it hears. For Chatty took the commotion rather the other way. She said, "One can't hear one's self speak," and wanted to close the windows. But Mrs. Warrender liked the very noise.

The dinner to which they were invited was in Curzon Street, in a house which was small in reality, but made the most of every inch of its space, and which was clothed and curtained and decorated in a manner which made the country people open their eyes. The party was very small, their hostess said ; but it would have been a large party at the Warren, where all the rooms were twice as big. Chatty was a little fluttered by her first party in London ; but this did not appear in her aspect, which was always com-

posed and simple, not demanding any one's regard, yet giving to people who were *blasé* or tired of much attraction (as sometimes happens) a sense of repose and relief. She must have been more excited, however, than was at all usual with her ; for though she thought she had remarked everybody in the dim drawing-room,—where the ladies in their pretty toilets and the men in their black coats stood about in a perplexing manner, chiefly against the light, which made it difficult to distinguish them, instead of sitting down all round the room, which in the country would have seemed the natural way,—it proved that there was one very startling exception, one individual, at least, whom she had not remarked. She went down to dinner with a gentleman, whose name of course she did not make out, and whose appearance, she thought, was exactly the same as that of half the gentlemen in the procession down the narrow staircase. Chatty, indeed, made disparaging reflections to herself as to society in general, on this score ; the thought flashing through her mind that in the country there was more difference between even one curate and another (usually considered the most indistinguishable class), than between these men of Mayfair. She was a little bewildered, too, by the appearance of the dining-room, for at that period the *diner à la Russe* was just beginning to establish itself in England, and a thicket of flowers upon the table was novel

to Chatty, filling her first with admiration, then with a little doubt whether it would not be better to see the people more distinctly on the other side. Dinner had gone on a little way, and her companion had begun to put the usual questions to her about where she had been, and where she was going, questions to which Chatty, who had been nowhere, and had not as yet one other invitation (which feels a little humiliating when you hear of all the great things that are going on), could make but little reply, when in one of the pauses of the conversation, she was suddenly aware of a laugh, which made her start slightly, and opened up an entirely new interest in this as yet not very exciting company. It was like the opening of a window to Chatty, it seemed to let in pure air, new light. And yet it was only a laugh, no more. She looked about her with a little eagerness: and then it was that she began to find the flowers and the ferns, which had filled her with enthusiasm a moment before, to be rather in the way.

“I suppose you go to the Row every morning,” said her entertainer. “Don’t you find that always the first thought when one comes to town? You ride, of course. Oh, why not in the Row? there is nothing alarming about it. A little practice, that is all that is wanted, to know how to keep your horse in hand. But you hunt? then you are all right——”

“Oh no, we never hunted.” It struck Chatty with a little surprise to be talked to as if she had a stud at her command. Should she tell him that this was a mistake; that there were only two horses beside Theo’s, and that Minnie and she had once had a pony between them—which was very different from hunting, or having nerve to ride in the Row? Chatty found afterwards that horses and carriages, and unbounded opportunities for amusing yourself, and a familiar acquaintance with the entire peerage, were always taken for granted in conversation whenever you dined out; but at first she was unacquainted with this peculiarity and did not feel quite easy in her mind about allowing it to be supposed that she was so much greater a person. Her little hesitations, however, as to how she should reply and the pauses she made when she heard that laugh arrested the current of her companion’s talk, and made it necessary for her, to her own alarm, to originate a small observation which, as often happens to a shy speaker, occurred just at the time when there was a momentary lull in the general talk. What she said was, “Do you ride often in the Row?” in a voice which though very soft was quite audible. Chatty retired into herself with the sensation of having said something very ridiculous when she caught a glance or two of amusement, and heard a suppressed titter from somebody on the other side of the fashionable young man to whom

she had addressed this very innocent question. She thought it was at her they were laughing, whereas the fact was that Chatty was supposed by those who heard her to be a satirist of more than usual audacity, putting a coxcomb to deserved but ruthless shame. Naturally she knew nothing of this, and blushed crimson at her evidently foolish remark, and retired in great confusion into herself, not conscious even of the stumbling reply. She was almost immediately conscious, however, of a face which suddenly appeared on the other side of the table round the corner of a bouquet of waving ferns, lit up with smiles of pleasure and eager recognition. "Oh, Mr. Cavendish! then it was you," she said, unawares; but the tumult of the conversation had arisen again, and it seemed very doubtful whether her exclamation could have reached his ear.

When the gentlemen came upstairs, Chatty endeavoured to be looking very naturally the other way; not to look as if she expected him; but Dick found his way to her immediately. "I can't think how I missed you before. I should have tried hard for the pleasure of taking you down, had I known you were here," he said, with that look of interest which was the natural expression in his eyes when he addressed a woman. "When did you come to town, and where are you? I do not know anything that has been

going on, I have heard nothing of you all for so long. There must be quite a budget of news."

Chatty faltered a little, feeling that Mr. Cavendish had never been so intimate in the family as these questions seemed to imply. "The Wilberforces were quite well when we left," she said, with the honesty of her nature, for to be sure it was the Wilberforces rather than the Warrenders who were his friends.

"Oh, never mind the Wilberforces," he said, "tell me something about you."

"There is something to tell about us, for a wonder," said Chatty. "My sister Minnie is married: but perhaps you would hear of that."

"I think I saw it in the papers, and was very glad——" here he stopped and did not finish his sentence. A more experienced person than Chatty would have perceived that he meant to express his satisfaction that it was not she: but Chatty had no such insight.

"Yes, he has a curacy quite close, for the time: and he will have an excellent living, and it is a very nice marriage. We came to town for a little change, mamma and I."

"That is delightful news. And Theo? I have not heard from Theo for ages. Is he left behind by himself?"

"Oh! Theo is very well. Theo is—— Oh, I did not mean to say anything about that."

Chatty did not know why she was so completely off her guard with Dick Cavendish. She had almost told him everything before she was aware.

“Not in any trouble, I hope. Don’t let me put indiscreet questions.”

“It is not that. There is nothing indiscreet, only I forgot that we had not meant to say anything.”

“I am so very sorry,” cried Cavendish. “You must not think I would ask anything you don’t wish to tell me.”

“But I should like to tell you,” said Chatty, “only I don’t know what mamma will say. I will tell her it came out before I knew: and you must not say anything about it, Mr. Cavendish.”

“Not a syllable, not even to your mother. It shall be something between you and me.”

The way in which this was said made Chatty’s eyes droop for a moment: but what a pleasure it was to tell him! She could not understand herself. She was not given to chatter about what happened in the family, and Dick was not so intimate with Theo that he had a right to know; but still it was delightful to tell him. “We don’t know whether to be glad or sorry,” she said. “It is that perhaps Theo, after a while, is going to marry.”

“That is always interesting,” said Dick; but he took the revelation calmly. “What a lucky fellow! No need

to wait upon fortune like the rest of us. To marry—whom? Do I know the lady? I hope she is all that can be desired.”

“Oh, Mr. Cavendish, that is just the question. There is mamma coming, perhaps she will tell you herself, which would be so much better than if you heard it from me.”

Mrs. Warrender came up at this moment very glad to see him, and quite willing to disclose their number in Half Moon Street, and to grant a gracious permission that he should call and be “of use,” as he offered to be. “I am not a gentleman at large, like Warrender, I am a toiling slave, spending all my time in Lincoln’s Inn. But in the evening I can spare a little time—and occasionally at other moments,” he added, with a laugh, “when I try. A sufficient motive is the great thing. And of course you will want to go to the play, and the opera, and all that is going on.”

“Not too much,” said Mrs. Warrender. “The air of London is almost enough at first; but come, and we shall see.”

She said nothing, however, about Theo, nor was there any chance of saying more. But when Cavendish took Chatty downstairs to put her in the carriage (only a cab, but that is natural to country people in town), he hazarded a whisper as they went downstairs, “Remember there is

still something to tell me." "Oh yes," she replied, "but mamma herself, I am sure——" "No," he said, "she has nothing to do with it. It is between you and me." This little conference made her wonderfully bright and smiling when she took her place beside her mother. She did not say anything for a time, but when the cab turned into Piccadilly, with its long lines of lights,—an illumination which is not very magnificent now, and was still less magnificent then, but very new and fine to Chatty, accustomed to little more guidance through the dark than that which is given by the light of a lantern or the oil lamp in Mrs. Bagley's shop,—she suddenly said, "Well! London is very pleasant," as if that was a fact of which she was the first discoverer.

"Is it not?" said her mother, who was far more disinterested and had not had her judgment biassed by any whisper on the stairs. "I am very glad that you like it, Chatty. That will make my pleasure complete."

"Oh, who could help liking it, mamma?" She blushed a little as she said this, but the night was kind and covered it; and how could Mrs. Warrender divine that this gentle enthusiasm related to the discovery of what Chatty called a friend among so many strangers, and not to the mere locality in which this meeting had taken place? Who could help liking it? To be talked to *like that*, with eyes that said

more than even the words, with that sudden look of pleasure, with the delightful little mystery of a special confidence between them, and with the prospect of meetings hereafter,—who could tell how many?—of going to the play. Chatty laughed under her breath with pleasure, at the thought. It was a most admirable idea to come to London. After all, whatever Minnie might say, there was nobody for understanding how to make people happy like mamma!

Dick's sensations were not so innocent nor so sweet. He walked home to his chambers, smoking his cigar, and chewing the cud of fancy, which was more bitter than sweet. What right had he to bend over that simple girl, to lay himself out to please her, to speak low in her ear? Dick knew unfortunately too well what was apt to come of such a beginning. Without being more of a coxcomb than was inevitable, he was aware that he had a way of pleasing women. And he had a perception that Chatty was ready to be pleased, and that he himself wished—oh, very much, if he dared—to please her. In these circumstances it was perfectly evident that he should peremptorily take himself out of all possibility of seeing Chatty. But this was utterly contrary to the way in which he had greeted her, and in which he had immediately flung himself into the affairs of the family. It was his occupation while he walked home to defend and excuse himself for this to himself. In the first

place, which was perfectly true, he had not known at all that the Warrenders were to be of the party ; he had thus fallen into the snare quite innocently, without any fault of his. Had he known, he might have found an excuse and kept away. But then he asked himself, why in the name of heaven should he have kept away? Was he so captivating a person that it would be dangerous to Miss Warrender to meet him—once ; or such a fool as to be unable to meet a young lady whom he admired—once : without harm coming to it? To be sure he had gone farther : he had thrown himself, as it were, at the feet of the ladies, with enthusiasm, and had made absurd offers of himself to be “of use.” There could be no doubt that in the circumstances this was mad enough, and culpable too ; but it was done without premeditation, by impulse, as he was too apt to act, especially in such matters ; and it could be put a stop to. He was pledged to call, it was true ; but that might be once, and no more. And then there was the play, the opera, to which he had pledged himself to attend them ; once there could not do much harm, either. Indeed, so long as he kept, which he ought to do always, full control over himself, what harm could it at all do to be civil to Theo Warrender’s mother and sister, who were, so to speak, after a sort, old friends? He was not such an ass (he said to himself) as to think that Chatty was at his disposal if he should lift up

his finger ; and there was her mother to take care of her ; and they were not people to be asking each other what he “meant,” as two experienced women of society might do. Both mother and daughter were very innocent ; they would not think he meant anything except kindness. And if he could not take care of himself, it was a pity ! Thus in the course of his reflections Dick found means to persuade himself that there was nothing culpable in pursuing the way which was pleasant, which he wanted to pursue ; a result which unfortunately very often follows upon reflection. The best way in such an emergency is not to reflect, but to turn and fly at once. But that, he said to himself, not without some complaisance, would be impulse, which he had just concluded to be a very bad thing. It was impulse which had got him into the scrape, he must trust to something more stable to get him out.

In the course of his walking, and, indeed, before these thoughts had gone very far, he found himself at the corner of Half Moon Street, and turned along with the simple purpose of seeing which was No. 22. There were lights in several windows, and he lingered a moment wondering which might be Chatty's. Then with a stamp of his foot, and a laugh of utter self-ridicule, which astounded the passing cabmen (for in any circumstances he was not surely such a confounded sentimental ass as *that*), he turned on his heel

and went straight home without lingering anywhere. It was hard upon him that he should be such a fool ; that he should not be able to restrain himself from making idiotic advances, which he could never follow out, and for a mere impulse place himself at the mercy of fate ! But he would not be led by impulse now in turning his back. It should be reason that should be his guide ; reason and reflection and a calm working out of the problem, how far and no farther he could with safety go.

And yet if it had been so that he could have availed himself of the anxiety of his family to get "a nice girl" to take an interest in him ! Where could there be a nicer girl than Chatty ? There were prettier girls, and as for beauty, that was not a thing to be spoken of at all in the matter. Beauty is rare, and it is often (in Dick's opinion) attended by qualities not so agreeable. It was often inanimate, he thought, apt to rest upon its natural laurels, to think it did enough when it consented to look beautiful. He did not go in, himself, for the sublime. But to see the light come over Chatty's face as if the sun had suddenly broken out in the sky ; to see the pleased surprise in her eyes as she lifted them quickly, without any affectation, in all the sweetness of nature. She was not clever either ; all that she said was very simple. She was easily pleased, not looking out for wit as some girls do, or insisting upon much

brilliancy in conversation. In short, if he had been writing a poem or a song about her (with much secret derision he recognised that to be the sort of thing of which in the circumstances foolish persons were capable), the chief thing that it occurred to him any one could say would be that she was Chatty. And quite enough too! he added, to himself, with a curious warmth under his waistcoat, which was pleasant. Wasn't there a song that went like that? Though this was fair, and that was something else, and a third was so-and-so, yet none of them was Mary Something-or-other. He was aware that the verse was not very correctly quoted, but that was the gist of it; and a very sensible fellow, too, was the man who wrote it, whoever he might be.

With this admirable conclusion, showing how much reason and reflection had done for him, Dick Cavendish wound up the evening—and naturally called at 22 Half Moon Street next day.

CHAPTER XIV.

DICK CAVENDISH called at Half Moon Street next day: and found the ladies just returned from a walk, and a little tired and very glad to see a friendly face, which his was in the most eminent degree. They had been out shopping, that inevitable occupation of women, and they had been making calls, and informing their few acquaintances of their arrival. Mrs. Benson, at whose house the dinner had been, was one of the few old friends with whom Mrs. Warrender was in habits of correspondence, and thus had known of their coming beforehand. Dick found himself received with the greatest cordiality by Mrs. Warrender, and by Chatty with an air of modest satisfaction which was very sweet. Then Mrs. Warrender was desirous to have a little guidance in their movements, and took so sincerely his offer to be of use that Dick found no means at all of getting out of it. Indeed, when it came to that, he was by no means so sure that it was so necessary to get out of it, as when he had begun his reflections on the subject. He even proposed—why not?—that

they should all go to the play that very evening, there being nothing else on hand. In those days the theatre was not so popular an institution as at present, and it was not necessary to engage places for weeks in advance. This sudden rush, however, was too much for the inexperienced country lady. "We are not going to be so prodigal as that," she said, "it would deprive us of all the pleasure of thinking about it; and as everything is more delightful in anticipation than in reality——"

"Oh, mamma!" said Chatty, shocked by this pessimistic view.

"And what am I to do with myself all the evening?" said Dick, with mock dismay, "after anticipating this pleasure all day? If anticipation is the best part of it, you will allow that disappointment after is doubly——"

"If you have nothing better to do, stay and dine with us," Mrs. Warrender said. This proposal made Chatty look up with pleasure, and then look down again lest she should show, more than was expedient, how glad she was. And Dick, who had reflected and decided that to call once and to go to the theatre once could do no harm, accepted with enthusiasm, without even pausing to ask himself whether to dine with them once might be added without further harm to his roll of permissions. The dinner was a very commonplace, lodging-house dinner, and Chatty got

out her muslin work afterwards, and had a quiet industrious evening, very much like her evenings at home. She was like a picture of domestic happiness impersonified, as she sat in the light of the lamp with her head bent, the movement of her arm making a soft rustle as she worked. She wore a muslin gown after the fashion of the time, which was not in itself a beautiful fashion, but pretty enough for the moment, and her hair, which was light brown, fell in little curls over her soft cheek. She looked up now and then, while the others talked, turning from one to another, sometimes saying a word, most frequently giving only a smile or look of assent. Let us talk as we will of highly educated women and of mental equality and a great many other fine things : but as a matter of fact, this gentle auditor and sympathiser, intelligent enough to understand without taking much part, is a more largely accepted symbol of what the woman ought to be, than anything more prominent and individual. Just so Eve sat and listened when Adam discoursed with the angel, putting by in her mind various questions to ask when that celestial but rather long-winded visitor was gone. Perhaps this picture is not quite harmonious with the few facts in our possession in respect to our first mother, and does scant justice to that original-minded woman : but the type has seized hold upon the imagination of mankind. Dick thought of it vaguely, as he looked (having secured a

position in which he could do so without observation) at this impersonation of the woman's part. He thought if another fellow should look in for a talk, which was his irreverent way of describing to himself the visit of the angel, it would be highly agreeable to have her there listening, and to clear up the knotty points for her when they should be alone. He had little doubt that Eve would have an opinion of her own, very favourable to *his* way of stating the subject, and would not mind criticising the other fellow, with a keen eye for any little point of possible ridicule. He kept thinking this as he talked to Mrs. Warrender, and also that the little cluster of curls was pretty, and the bend of her head, and, indeed, everything about her; not striking, perhaps, or out of the common, but most soothing and sweet.

And next evening, having had those pleasures of anticipation which Mrs. Warrender thought so much of, he went with them to the play, and spent an exceedingly pleasant evening, pointing out such people as he knew (who were anybody) to Mrs. Warrender between the acts, and enjoying the sight of Chatty's absorption in the play, which made it twice as interesting to himself. The play was one in which there was a great deal of pretty love-making along with melodramatic situations of an exciting kind. The actors, except one, were not of sufficient reputation to interest any reader save those with a special inclination to the study of the stage.

But though the performance was not on the very highest level, there was a great deal in it that thrilled this young man and woman sitting next to each other, and already vaguely inclined towards each other in that first chapter of mutual attraction which is, perhaps, in its vagueness and irresponsibility, the most delightful of all. Dick would have laughed at the idea of feeling himself somehow mixed up with the lover on the stage, who was not only a good actor, but a much handsomer fellow than he was; but Chatty had no such feeling, and with a blush and quiver felt herself wooed in that romantic wooing, with a half sense that the lights should be lowered and nobody should see, and at the same time an enchantment in the sight which only that sense of a personal share in it could have given.

After this beginning Dick's reflections went to the wind. He felt injured when he found that, not knowing their other friends in town, he had no invitation to accompany them, when those persons did their duty by their country acquaintances, and asked them, one to dinner, another—oh, happiness to Chatty—to a dance. But it did not turn out unmingled happiness for Chatty after all, though she got a new dress for it, in which she looked prettier (her mother thought, who was no flattering mother) than she had ever done in her life. Mrs. Warrender saw the awakening in Chatty's face which gave to her simple good looks a some-

thing higher, a touch of finer development ; but the mother neither deceived herself as to the cause of this, nor was at all alarmed by it. Dick was a quite suitable match for Chatty ; he was well connected, he was not poor, he was taking up his profession, if somewhat late, yet with good prospects. If there had been escapades in his youth, these were happily over, and as his wild oats had been sown on the other side of the Atlantic, no one knew anything about them. Why, then, should she be alarmed to see that Chatty opened like a flower to the rising of this light which in Dick, too, was so evident as to be unmistakable ? In such circumstances as these the course of true love would be the better of a little obstacle or two ; the only difficulty was that it might run too smooth. Mrs. Warrender thought that, perhaps, it was well to permit such a little fret in the current as this dance proved to be. She could have got Dick an invitation had she pleased, but was hard-hearted and refrained. And Chatty did not enjoy it. She said (with truth) that there was very little room for dancing ; that to sit outside upon the stairs with a gentleman you didn't know, among a great many other girls and men whom you didn't know, was not her idea of a ball ; and that if this was the London way, she liked a dance in the country much better. The time when she did enjoy it was next day, when she gave her impressions of it to Dick, who exulted

as having not been there secretly over Mrs. Warrender, who would not have him asked. Chatty grew witty in the excitement of her little revenge on society, and on fate which had drifted her into that strange country, without the ever-ready aid to which she had grown accustomed of "some one she knew." "Yes, I danced," she said, "now and then, as much as we could. It was not Lady Ascot's fault, mamma; she introduced a great many gentlemen to me, but sometimes I could not catch their names, and when I did, how was I to remember which was Mr. Herbert and which was Mr. Sidney, when I had never seen either of them before? and gentlemen," she said, with a little glance (almost saucy: Chatty had developed so much) at Dick, "are so like each other in London."

At which Dick laughed, not without gratification, with a secret consciousness that though this little arrow was apparently levelled at him, he was the exception to the rule, the one man who was recognisable in any crowd. "Yes," he said, "we should wear little labels with our names. I have heard that suggested before."

"They put down initials on my programme. I don't know what half of them mean: and I suppose they came and looked for me when the dance was going to begin, or perhaps in the middle of the dance, or towards the end; they didn't seem to be very particular," proceeded Chatty,

with a certain exhilaration in the success of her description. "And how were they to find me among such a lot of girls? I saw two or three prowling about looking for me."

"And never made the smallest sign?"

"Oh, it is not the right thing for a girl to make any sign, is it, mamma? One can't say, Here I am! If they don't manage to find you, you must just put up with it, though you may see them prowling all the time. It is tiresome when you want very much to dance; but when you are indifferent——"

"The pleasures of society are all for the indifferent," said Dick; "everything comes to you, so the wise people say, when you don't care for it: but my brothers, who are dancing men, don't know how malicious ladies are, who make fun of their prowling. I shall remember it next time when I can't find my partner, and imagine her laughing at me in a corner."

"The amusement is after," said Chatty, with candour. "I think it funny now when I think of it, but it seemed stupid at the time. I don't think I shall care to go to a dance in London again."

But as she said these words there escaped a mutual glance from two pairs of eyes, one of which said in the twitching of an eyelash, "Unless I am there!" while the other, taken unawares, gave an answer in a soft flash, "Ah,

if you were there!" But there was nothing said: and Mrs. Warrender, though full of observation, never noticed this telegraphic, or shall we say heliographic, communication at all.

This little hindrance only made them better friends. They made expeditions to Richmond, where Dick took the ladies out on the river; to Windsor and Eton, where Theo and he had both been to school. Long before now he had been told the secret about Theo, which in the meantime had become less and less of a secret, though even now it was not formally made known. Lady Markland! Dick had been startled by the news, though he declared afterwards that he could not tell why: for that it was the most natural thing in the world. Had not they been thrown together in all kinds of ways; had not Theo been inevitably brought into her society, almost compelled to see her constantly?

"The compulsion was of his own making," Mrs. Warrender said. "Perhaps Lady Markland, with more experience, should have perceived what it was leading to."

"It is so difficult to tell what anything is leading to, especially in such matters. What may be but a mutual attraction one day becomes a bond that never can be broken the next."

Dick's voice changed while he was speaking. Perhaps he was not aware himself of the additional gravity in it,

but his audience was instantly aware of it. That was the evening they had gone to Richmond; the softest summer evening, twilight just falling; Chatty, very silent, absorbed (as appeared) in the responsibilities of steering; the conversation going on entirely between her mother and Dick, who sat facing them, pulling long, slow, meditative strokes. Even when one is absorbed by the responsibilities of the steerage, one can enter into all the lights and shades of a conversation kept up by two other people, almost better than they can do themselves.

“That is true in some cases. Not in Theo’s, I think. It seems to me that he gave himself over from the first. I am not sure that I think her a very attractive woman.”

“Oh yes, mamma!” from Chatty, in an undertone.

“I am not talking of looks. She has a good deal of power about her, she will not be easily swayed; and after having suffered a great deal in her first marriage I think she has very quickly developed the power of acting for herself which some women never attain.”

“So much the better,” said Dick. “Theo doesn’t want a puppet of a wife.”

“But he wants a wife who will give in to him,” said Mrs. Warrender slightly shaking her head.

“I suppose we all do that, in theory: then glide into domestic servitude and like it, and find it the best for us.”

“Let us hope you will do that,” she said, with a smile ; “but not Theo, I fear. He has been used to be made much of. The only boy, they say, is always spoiled. You have brothers, Mr. Cavendish,—and he has a temper which is a little difficult.”

“Oh, mamma,” from Chatty again. “Theo is always kind.”

“That does not make much difference, my dear. When a young man is accustomed to be given in to, it is easy to be kind. But when he meets for the first time one who will not give in, who will hold her own—I do not blame her for that: she is in a different position from a young girl.”

“And how is it all to be settled?” asked Dick ; “where are they to live? how about the child?”

“All these questions make my heart sink. He is not in the least prepared to meet them. Her name even ; she will of course keep her name.”

“That always seems a little absurd : that a woman should keep her own name, as they do more or less everywhere but in England—yes ; well, a Frenchwoman says *née* So-and-so ; an Italian does something still more distinct than that, I am not quite clear how she does it. That’s quite reasonable I think : for why should she wipe out her own individuality altogether when she marries? But

to keep one husband's name when you are married to another——”

“It is because of the charm of the title. I suppose when a woman has been once called my lady, she objects to come down from those heights. But I think if I were a man, I should not like it, and Theo will not like it. At the same time there is her son, you know, to be considered. I don't like complications in marriages. They bring enough trouble without that.”

“Trouble!” said Dick, in a tone of lively protest, which was a little fictitious. And Chatty, though she did not say anything, gave her mother a glance.

“Yes, trouble. It breaks as many ties as it makes. How much shall I see of Theo, do you think, when this marriage takes place? and yet by nature you would say I had some right to him. Oh, I do not complain. It is the course of nature. And Minnie is gone; she is entering into all the interests of the Thynnes, by this time: and a most bigoted Thynne she will be, if there are any special opinions in the family. I don't know them well enough to know. Fancy giving up one's child to become bigoted to another family, whom one doesn't even know!”

“It seems a little hard, certainly. The ordinary view is that mothers are happy when their daughters marry.”

“Which is also true in its way: for the mother has a

way of being older than her daughter, Mr. Cavendish, and knows she cannot live for ever ; beside, marriage being the best thing for a woman, as most people think, it should be the mother's duty to do everything she can to secure it for her daughter. Yes, I go as far as that—in words," Mrs. Warrender added, with a little laugh.

"But not for her son?"

"I don't say that : no, not at all. I should rejoice in Theo's marriage, but for the complications, which I think he is not the right person to get through, with comfort. You, now, I think," she added, cheerfully, "might marry Lady——Anybody, with a family of children, and make it succeed."

"Thank you very much for the compliment. I don't mean to try that mode of success," he said quickly.

"Neither did Theo mean it until he was brought in contact with Lady Markland : and who can tell but you too—Oh yes, marriage almost always makes trouble ; it breaks as well as unites ; it is very serious ; it is like the measles when it gets into a family." Mrs. Warrender felt that the conversation was getting much too significant, and broke off with a laugh. "The evening is delightful, but I think we should turn homewards. It will be quite late before we get back to town."

Dick obeyed without the protest he would have made

half an hour before. He resumed the talk when he was walking up with the ladies to the hotel, where they had left their carriage. "One laughs, I don't know why," he said, "but it is very serious in a number of ways. A man when he is in love doesn't ask himself whether he's the sort of man to make a girl happy. There are some things, you know, which a man has to give up too. Generally, if he hesitates, it seems a sort of treason; and often he cannot tell the reason why. Now Theo will have a number of sacrifices to make."

"He is like Jacob, he will think nothing of them for the love he bears to Rachel," said Theo's mother. "I wish that were all."

"But I wish I could make you see it from a man's point of view." Dick did not himself know what he meant by this confused speech. He wanted to make some sort of plea for himself, but how, or in what words, he did not know. She paused for a moment expecting more, and Chatty, on the other side of her mother, felt a little puncture of pain, she could scarcely tell why. "There are some things which a man has to give up too." What did he mean by that? A little vague offence which flew away, a little pain which did not, a sort of needle point, which she kept feeling all the rest of the evening, came to Chatty from this conversation. And Mrs. Warrender paused, thinking

he was going to say more. But he said no more, and when he had handed them into the carriage, broke out into an entirely new subject, and was very gay and amusing all the way home.

The two ladies did not say a syllable to each other on this subject, neither had they said anything to each other about Dick, generally, except that he was very nice, that it was kind of him to take so much trouble, and so forth. Whether experienced mothers do discuss with their daughters what So-and-so meant, or whether he meant anything, as Dick supposed, is a question I am not prepared to enter into. But Mrs. Warrender had said nothing to Chatty on the subject, and did not now: though it cannot be said that she did not ponder it much in her heart.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ladies were in town three weeks, which brought them from June into July, when London began to grow hot and dusty, and the season to approach its close. They were just about to leave town, though whether to continue their dissipations by going to the seaside, or to return to Highcombe and put their future residence in order, they had not as yet made up their minds. Cavendish gave his vote for the seaside. "Of course you mean to consult me, and give great weight to my opinion," he said. "What I advise is the sea, and I will tell you why: I am obliged to go to Portsmouth about some business. If you were at the Isle of Wight, say, or Southsea——"

"That would be very pleasant: but we must not allow ourselves to be tempted, not even by your company," said Mrs. Warrender, who began to fear there might be enough of this. "We are going home to set our house in order, and to see if, perhaps, Theo has need of us. And then the Thynnes are coming home."

“Is it Miss Warrender who has developed into the Thynnes?”

“Indeed it is; that is how everybody inquires for her now. I have got quite used to the name. That is one of the drawbacks of marrying one’s daughters, which I was telling you of. One’s Minnie becomes in a moment the Eustace Thynnes!”

They were not a smiling party that evening, and Mrs. Warrender’s little pleasantry fell flat. It flew, perhaps, across the mind of all, that Chatty might be changed, in a similar way, into the Cavendishes. Dick grew hot and cold when the suggestion flashed through him. Then it was that he recollected how guilty he had been, and how little his reflections had served him. He who had determined to call but once, to go with them once to the play, had carried out his resolution so far that the once had been always. And now the time of recompense was coming. The fool’s paradise was to be emptied of its tenants. He went away very gloomy, asking himself many troubled questions. It was not that he had been unaware, as time went on, what it was that went along with it,—a whole little drama of simple pleasure, of days and evenings spent together, of talks and expeditions. Innocent? Ah, more than innocent, the best and sweetest thing in his life, if—— But that little monosyllable makes all the difference. It

was coming to an end now, they were going away; and Dick had to let them go, without any conclusion to this pretty play in which he had played his part so successfully. Oh, he was not the first man who had done it! not the first who had worn a lover's looks and used all a lover's assiduities, and then—nothing more. Perhaps that was one of the worst features in his behaviour to himself. To think that he should be classed with the men who are said to have been amusing themselves! and Chatty placed in the position of the victim, on whose behalf people were sorry or indignant! When he thought that there were some who might presume to pity her, and who would say of himself that he had behaved ill, the shock came upon him with as much force as if he had never thought of it before; although he had thought of it, and reflected upon how to draw out of the intercourse which was so pleasant, before he gave himself up to it, with an abandon which he could not account for, which seemed now like desperation. Desperation was no excuse. He saw the guilt of it fully, without self-deception, only when he had done all the harm that was possible, had yielded to every temptation, and now found it impossible to go any further. To repent in these circumstances is not uncommon; there is nothing original in it. Thousands of men have done it before him,—repented when they could sin no more. For a

moment it flashed across his mind to go and throw himself on Mrs. Warrender's mercy and tell her all, and make what miserable excuse he could for himself. Was it better to do that, to part for ever from Chatty, or to let them think badly of him, to have it supposed that he had trifled or amused himself, or whatever miserable words the gossips chose to use, and yet leave a door open by which he might some time, perhaps, approach her again? Some time! after she had forgotten him, after his unworthiness had been proved to her, and some other fellow, some happier man who had never been exposed to such a fate as had fallen upon him, some smug Pharisee (this fling at the supposed rival of the future was very natural and harmed nobody) had cut him out of all place in her heart! It was so likely that Chatty would go on waiting for him, thinking of him, for years perhaps, the coxcomb that he was!

"I said very suddenly that we must go home," said Mrs. Warrender, after he had left them. "You did not think me hard, Chatty? It seemed to me the best."

"Oh no, mamma," said Chatty, with a slight faltering.

"We have seen a great deal of Mr. Cavendish, and he has been very nice, but I did not like the idea of going to the Isle of Wight."

"Oh no, mamma," Chatty repeated, with more firmness. "I did not wish it at all."

“I am very glad you think with me, my dear. He has been very nice; he has made us enjoy our time in town much more than we should have done. But of course, that cannot last for ever, and I do really think now that we should go home.”

“I have always thought so,” said Chatty. She was rather pale, and there was a sort of new-born dignity about her, with which her mother felt that she was unacquainted. “It has been very pleasant, but I am quite ready. And then Minnie will be coming back as you said.”

“Yes.” Then Mrs. Warrender burst into a laugh which might as well have been a fit of crying. “But you must prepare yourself to see not Minnie, but the Eustace Thynnes,” she said. And then the mother and daughter kissed each other and retired to their respective rooms, where Chatty was a long time going to bed. She sat and thought, with her pretty hair about her shoulders, going over a great many things, recalling a great many simple little scenes and words said,—which were but words after all,—and then of a sudden the tears came, and she sat and cried very quietly, even in her solitude making as little fuss as possible, with an ache of wonder at the trouble that had come upon her, and a keen pang of shame at the thought that she had expected more than was coming, more perhaps than had ever been intended. A man is not ashamed of

loving when he is not loved, however angry he may be with himself or the woman who has beguiled him; but the sharpest smart in a girl's heart is the shame of having given what was not asked for, what was not wanted. When those tears had relieved her heart, Chatty put up her hair very neatly for the night, just as she always did, and after a while slept,—much better than Dick.

He came next day, however, for a final visit, and the day after to see them away, without any apparent breach in the confidence and friendship with which they regarded each other. There might be, perhaps, a faint almost imperceptible difference in Chatty, a little dignity like that which her mother had discovered in her, something that was not altogether the simple girl, younger than her years, whom Mrs. Warrender had brought to town. On the very last morning of all, Dick had also a look which was not very easy to be interpreted. While they were on their way to the station he began suddenly to talk of Underwood and the Wilberforces, as if he had forgotten them all this time, and now suddenly remembered that there were such people in the world. “Did I ever tell you,” he said, “that one of the houses in the parish belongs to an uncle of mine, who bought it merely as an investment, and let it?”

“We were talking of that,” said Mrs. Warrender. “Mr. Wilberforce hoped you had persuaded your uncle to leave

the drainage alone in order to make a nuisance and drive undesirable tenants away."

He laughed in a hurried, breathless way, then said quickly, "Is it true that the people who were there are gone?"

"Quite true. They seem to have melted away without any one knowing, in a single night. They were not desirable people."

"So I heard: and gone without leaving any sign?"

"Have they not paid their rent?" said Mrs. Warrender.

"Oh, I don't mean to say that. I know nothing about that. My uncle——" and here he stopped, with an embarrassment which, though Mrs. Warrender was an unsuspecting woman, attracted her notice. "I mean," said Cavendish, perceiving this, and putting force upon himself, "he will of course be glad to get rid of people who apparently could do his property no good."

And after this his spirits seemed to rise a little. He told them that he had some friends near Highcombe, who sometimes in the autumn offered him a few days' shooting. If he got such an invitation this autumn might he come? "It is quite a handy distance from London, just the Saturday-to-Monday distance," he added, looking at Mrs. Warrender with an expression which meant a great deal, which had in it a question, a supplication. And she was so imprudent a woman! and no shadow of Minnie at hand to restrain

her. It was on her very lips to give the invitation he asked. Some good angel of a class corresponding in the celestial world to that of Minnie in this, only stopped her in time, and gave a little obliqueness to the response.

“I hope we shall see you often,” she said, which was pleasant but discouraging, and then began to talk about the Eustace Thynnes, who were at present of great use to her as a diversion to any more embarrassing subject of conversation. Chatty scarcely spoke during this drive, which seemed to her the last they should take together. The streets flying behind them, the scenes of the brief drama falling back into distance, the tranquillity of home before, and all this exciting episode of life becoming as if it had never been, occupied her mind. She had settled all that in her evening meditation. It was all over; this was what she said to herself. She must not allow even to her own heart any thought of renewal, any idea that the break was temporary. Chatty was aware that she had received all his overtures, all his amiabilities (which was what it seemed to come to) with great and unconcealed pleasure. To think that he had nothing but civility in his mind all the time gave a blow to her pride, which was mortal. She did not wear her pride upon her sleeve, though she had worn her heart upon it. Her nature indeed was full of the truest humility; but there was a latent pride which, when

it was reached, vibrated through all her being. No more, she was saying to herself. Oh, never more. She had been deceived, though most likely he had never wished to deceive her. It was she who had deceived herself; but that was not possible, ever again.

“We have not thanked you half enough,” said Mrs. Warrender, as he stood at the door of the railway carriage. “I will tell Theo that you have been everything to us. If you are as good to all the mothers and sisters of all your old schoolfellows——”

“You do me a great wrong,” he said, “as if I thought of you as the mother of——” His eyes strayed to Chatty, who met them with a smile which was quite steady. She was a little pale, but that was all. “Some time,” he added hastily, holding Mrs. Warrender’s hand, “I may be able to explain myself a little better than that.”

“Shall I say if you are as kind to all forlorn ladies astray in London?”

Dick’s face clouded over as if (she thought) he were about to cry. Men don’t cry in England, but there is a kind of mortification, humiliation, a sense of being persistently misunderstood, and of having no possibility of mending matters, which is so insupportable that the lip must quiver under it, even when garnished with a moustache. “I hope you don’t really think that of me,” he cried. “Don’t!

there is no time to tell you how very different—But surely you know—something more than that——”

The train was in motion already and Chatty had shaken hands with him before. She received the last look of his eyes, half indignant, appealing, though in words it was to her mother he was speaking ; but made no sign. And it was only Mrs. Warrender who looked out of the window and waved her hand to him, as he was left behind. Chatty—Chatty who was so gentle, so little apt to take anything upon her, even to judge for herself, was it possible that on this point she was less soft-hearted than her mother? This thought went through him like an arrow as he stood and saw the carriages glide away in a long curving line. She was gone and he was left behind. She was gone, was it in resentment, was it in disdain? thinking of him in his true aspect as a false lover, believing him to have worn a false semblance, justly despising him for an attempt to play upon her. Was this possible? He thought (with that oblique sort of literary tendency of his) of Hamlet with the recorder. Can you play upon this pipe?—and yet you think you can play upon me! As a matter of fact there could nothing have been found in heaven or earth less like Hamlet than Chatty Warrender ; but a lover has strange misperceptions. The steady soft glance, the faint smile, not like the usual warm beaming of her simple face, seemed to him to express

a faculty of seeing through and through him which is not always given to the greatest philosophers. And he stood there humiliated to the very dust by this mild creature, whom he had loved in spite of himself, to whom even in loving her he had attributed no higher gifts, perhaps had even been tenderly disrespectful of as not clever. Was she the one to see through him now?

If she only knew! but when Dick, feeling sadly injured and wounded, came to this thought, it so stung him that he turned round on the moment, and, neglecting all the seductions of waiting cabmen, walked quickly, furiously, to Lincoln's Inn, which he had been sadly neglecting. If she knew everything! it appeared to Dick that Chatty's clear dove's eyes (to which he all at once had attributed an insight and perception altogether above them) would slay him with the disdainful dart which pierces through and through subterfuge and falsehood. That he should have ventured, knowing what he knew, to approach her at all with the semblance of love: that he should have dared,—oh, he knew, well he knew, how, once the light of clear truth was let down upon it, his conduct would appear,—not the mere trifler who had amused himself and meant no more, not the fool of society, who made a woman think he loved her, and “behaved badly,” and left her *planté là*. What were these contemptible images to the truth! He

shrank into himself as he pursued these thoughts and skulked along. He felt like a man exposed and ashamed, a man whom true men would avoid. "Put in every honest hand a whip,"—ah no, that was not wanted. Chatty's eyes, dove's eyes, too gentle to wound, eyes that knew not how to look unkindly, to conceal a sentiment, to veil a falsehood—one look from Chatty's eyes would be enough.

Chatty knew nothing of the tragic terror which had come upon him at the mere apprehension of this look of hers. She had no thought of any tragedy, except that unknown to men which often becomes the central fact in a life such as hers; the tragedy of an unfinished chapter in life, the no-ending of an episode which had promised to be the drama in which almost every human creature figures herself (or himself) as the chief actor, one time or other. The drama indeed had existed, it had run almost all its course, for the time it lasted it had been more absorbing than anything else in the world. The greatest historical events beside it had been but secondary. Big London, the greatest city in the world, had served only as a little bosquet of evergreens in a village garden might have done, as the background and scene for it. But it had no end; the time of the action was accomplished, the curtain had fallen, and the lights had been put out, but the comedy had come to no conclusion. Comedy-tragedy; it does not matter much

which words you use. The scenes had all died away in incompleteness, and there had been no end. To many a gentle life such as that of Chatty might be, this is all that ever happens beyond the level of the ordinary and common. It was with a touch of insight altogether beyond her usual intellectual capacity that she realised this as she travelled very quietly with her mother from London to Highcombe, not a very long way. Mrs. Warrender was very silent too. She had meant the visit to town to be one of pleasure merely,—pleasure for herself, change after the long monotony, and pleasure to her child who had never known anything but that monotony. It was not, this little epoch of time only three weeks long, to count for anything. It was to be a holiday and no more. And lo! with that inexplicableness, that unforeseenness which is so curious a quality of human life, it had become a turning point of existence, the pivot perhaps upon which Chatty's being might hang. Mrs. Warrender was not so decided as Chatty. She saw nothing final in the parting. She was able to imagine that secondary causes, something about money, some family arrangements that would have to be made, had prevented any further step on Dick's part. To her the drama indeed was not ended: the curtain had only fallen legitimately upon the first act without prejudice to those which were to follow. She did not talk, for Chatty's silence, her un-

usual dignity, her retirement into herself, had produced a great effect upon her mother; but her mind was not moved as Chatty's was, and she was able to think with pleasure of the new home awaiting them, and of what they were to find there. The Eustace Thynnes! she said to herself, with a laugh, thanking Providence within herself that there had been no Minnie to inspect the progress of the relations between Dick and Chatty, and probably to deliver her opinion very freely on that subject and on her mother's responsibility. Then there was the more serious chapter of Theo and his affairs which must have progressed in the meantime. Mrs. Warrender caught herself up with a little fright as she thought of the agitation and doubt which wrapped the future of both her children. It was a wonderful relief to turn to the only point from which there was any amusement to be had, the visit of the Eustace Thynnes.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE return of the Warrenders to their home was not the usual calm delight of settling again into one's well-known place. The house at Highcombe was altogether new to their experiences, and meant a life in every way different, as well as different surroundings. It was a tall red brick house, with a flight of steps up to the door, and lines of small, straight, twinkling windows facing immediately into the street, between which and the house there was no interval even of a grass plot or area. The garden extended to the right with a long stretch of high wall, but the house had been built at a period when people had less objection to a street than in later times. The rooms within were of a good size but not very high; some of them were panelled to the ceiling with an old-fashioned idea of comfort and warmth. The drawing-room was one of these, a large oblong room to the front with a smaller one divided from it by folding-doors, which looked out upon the garden. It possessed, as its great distinction, a pretty marble mantel-

piece, which some one of a previous generation had brought from Italy. It is sad to be obliged to confess that the panelling here had been painted, a warm white, like the colour of a French salon, with old and dim pictures of no particular merit let in here and there,—pictures which would have been more in keeping with the oak of the original than with the present colour of the walls. The house had been built by a Warrender, in the end of the seventeenth century, and though it had been occupied by strangers often, and let to all sorts of people, a considerable amount of the furniture, and all the decorations, still belonged to that period. The time had not come for the due appreciation of these relics of ancestral taste. Chatty thought them all old-fashioned, and would gladly have replaced them by fresh chairs and tables from the upholsterers: but this was an expense not to be thought of, and, perhaps, even to eyes untrained in any rules of art, there was something harmonious in the combination. Something harmonious, too, with Chatty's feelings was in the air of old tranquillity and long established use and wont. The stillness of the house was as the stillness of ages. Human creatures had come and gone, as the days went and came, sunshine coming in at one moment, darkness falling the next, nothing altering the calm routine, the established order. Pains and fevers and heartbreaks, and death itself, would disappear and leave no

sign, and all remain the same in the quaint rose-scented room. The quiet overawed Chatty, and yet was congenial. She felt herself to have come "home" to it, with all illusions over. It was not just an ordinary coming back after a holiday,—it was a return, a settling down for life.

It would be difficult to explain how it was that this conviction had taken hold of her so strongly. It was but a month since she had left the Warren with her mother, with some gentle anticipations of pleasure, but none that were exaggerated or excessive. All that was likely to happen, as far as she knew, was that dinner party at Mrs. Benson's, and a play or two, and a problematical ball. This was all that the "vortex" meant about which her mother had laughed; she had not any idea at that time that the vortex would mean Dick Cavendish. But now that she fully understood what it meant, and now that it was all over, and her agitated little bark had come out of it, and had got upon the smooth calm waters again, there had come to Chatty a very different conception both of the present and the past. All the old quiet routine of existence seemed to her now a preface to that moment of real life. She had been working up to it vaguely without knowing it. And now it had ended, and this was the Afterwards. She had come back—after. These words had to her an absolute meaning. Perhaps it was want of

imagination which made it so impossible for her to carry forward her thoughts to any possible repetition, any sequel of what had been ; or perhaps some communication, unspoken, unintended, from the mind of Cavendish had affected hers and given a certainty of conclusion, of the impossibility of further development. However that might be, her mind was entirely made up on this subject. She had lived (for three weeks), and it was over. And now existence was all Afterwards. She found scarcely any time for her habitual occupations while she was in London, but now there would be time for everything. Afterwards is long, when one is only twenty-four, and it requires a great deal of muslin work and benevolence to fill it up in a way that will be satisfactory to the soul ; but still, to ladies in the country it is a very well known state, and has to be faced, and lived through all the same. To a great many people life is all afternoon, though not in the sense imagined by the poet : not the lotus-eating drowsiness and content, but a course of little hours that lead to nothing, that have no particular motive except that mild duty which means doing enough trimming for your new set of petticoats and carrying a pudding or a little port wine to the poor girl who is in a consumption in the lane behind your house. This was the Afterwards of Chatty's time, and she settled down to it, knowing it to be the course of nature. Nowadays,

matters have improved: there is always lawn tennis and often ambulance lectures, and far more active parish work. But even in those passive days it could be supported, and Chatty made up her mind to it with a great, but silent courage. But it made her very quiet, she who was quiet by nature. The land where it is always afternoon chills at first and subdues all lively sentiments. The sense of having no particular interest, took possession of her mind as if it had been an absorbing interest, and drew a veil between her and the other concerns of life.

This was not at all the case with Mrs. Warrender, who came home with all the agreeable sensations of a new beginning, ready to take up new lines of existence, and to make a cheerful centre of life for herself and all who surrounded her. If any woman should feel with justice that she has reached the Afterwards, and has done with her active career, it should be the woman who has just settled down after her husband's death to the humbler house provided for her widowhood apart from all her old occupations and responsibilities. But in reality there was no such sentiment in her mind. "You'll in your girls again be courted." She had hanging about her the pleasant reflection of that wooing, never put into words, with which Dick Cavendish had filled the atmosphere, and which had produced upon the chief object of it so very different an effect;

and she had the less pleasurable excitement of Theo's circumstances, and of all that was going on at Markland, a romance in which her interest was almost painful, to stimulate her thoughts. The Eustace Thynnes did not count for much, for their love-making had been very mild and regular, but still, perhaps, they aided in the general quickening of life. She had three different histories thus going on around her, and she was placed in a new atmosphere, in which she had to play a part of her own. When Chatty and she sat down together in the new drawing-room for the first time with their work and their plans, Mrs. Warrender's talk was of their new neighbours and the capabilities of the place. "The rector is not a stupid man," she said, in a reflective tone. The proposition was one which gently startled Chatty. She lifted her mild eyes from her work, with a surprised look.

"It would be very sad for us if he was stupid," she said.

"And Mrs. Barham still less so. What I am thinking of is society, not edification. Then there is Colonel Travers, whom we used to see occasionally at home, the brother, you know, of ——. An old soldier is always a pleasant element in a little place. The majority will of course be women like ourselves, Chatty."

"Yes, mamma, there are always a great many ladies about Highcombe."

Mrs. Warrender gave forth a little sigh. "In a country neighbourhood we swamp everything," she said; "it is a pity. Too many people of one class are always monotonous: but we must struggle against it, Chatty."

"Dear mamma, isn't ladies' society the best for us? Minnie always said so. She said it was a dreadful thing for a girl to think of gentlemen."

"Minnie always was an oracle. To think of gentlemen whom you were likely to fall in love with, and marry, perhaps—but I don't think there are many of that class here."

"Oh no," said Chatty, returning to her work, "at least I hope not."

"I am not at all of your opinion, my dear. I should like a number of them; and nice girls too. I should not wish to keep all these dangerous personages for you."

"Mamma!" said Chatty, with a soft reproachful glance. It seemed a desecration to her to think that ever again—that ever another——

"That gives a little zest to all the middle-aged talks. It amuses other people to see a little romance going on. You were always rather shocked at your light-minded mother, Chatty."

"Mamma! it might be perhaps very sad for—for those most concerned, though it amused you."

"I hope not, my darling. You take things too seriously.

There is, to be sure, a painful story now and then, but very rarely. You must not think that men are deceivers ever, as the song says."

"Oh no," said Chatty, elevating her head with simple pride, though without meeting her mother's eyes, "that is not what I would say. But why talk of such things at all? why put romances, as you call them, into people's heads? People may be kind and friendly without anything more."

Mrs. Warrender here paused to study the gentle countenance which was half hidden from her, bending over the muslin work, and for the first time gained a little glimpse into what was going on in Chatty's heart. The mother had long known that her own being was an undiscovered country for her children; but it was new to her and a startling discovery that perhaps this innocent creature, so close to her, had also a little sanctuary of her own, into which the eyes most near to her had never looked. She marked the little signs of meaning quite unusual to her composed and gentle child—the slight quiver which was in Chatty's bent head, the determined devotion to her work which kept her face unseen—with a curious confusion in her mind. She had felt sure that Dick Cavendish had made a difference in life to Chatty; but she had not thought of this in any but a hopeful and cheerful way. She was more startled now than she dared say. Had there been any explanation between

them which she had not been told of? Was there any obstacle she did not know? Her mind was thrown into great bewilderment, too great to permit of any exercise of her judgment suddenly upon the little mystery—if mystery there was.

“I did not mean to enter into such deep questions,” she said, in a tone which she felt to be apologetic. “I meant only a little society to keep us going. Though we did not go out very much in London, still there was just enough to make the blank more evident if we see nobody here.”

Chatty's heart protested against this view: for her part she would have liked that life which had lasted three weeks to remain as it was, unlike anything else in her experience, a thing which was over, and could return no more. Had she not been saying to herself that all that remained to her was the Afterwards, the long gray twilight upon which no other sun would rise? In her lack of imagination, the only imagination she had known became more absolute than any reality, a thing which once left behind would never be renewed again. She felt a certain scorn of the attempt to make feeble imitations of it, or even to make up for that light which never was on sea or shore, by any little artificial illuminations. A sort of gentle fury, a wild passion of resistance, rose within her at the thought of making up for it. She did not wish to make up for it: the blank

could not be made less evident whatever any one might do or say. But all this Chatty shut up in her own heart. She made no reply, but bent her head more and more over her muslin work, and worked faster and faster, with the tears collecting, which she never would consent to shed, hot and salt behind her eyes.

Mrs. Warrender was silent too. She was confounded by the new phase of feeling, imperfectly revealed to her, and filled with wonder, and self-reproach, and sympathy. Had she been to blame to leave her child exposed to an influence which had proved too much for her peace of mind?—that was the well-worn conventional phrase, and it was the only one that seemed to answer the occasion, too much for her peace of mind! The mother, casting stealthy glances at her daughter, so sedulously, nervously busy, could only grope at a comprehension of what was in Chatty's mind. She thought it was the uncertainty, the excitement of suspense, and all that feverish commotion which sometimes arises in a woman's mind when the romance of her life comes to a sudden pause and silence follows the constant interchange of words and looks, and the doubt whether anything more will ever follow, or whether the pause is to be for ever, turns all the sweeter meditations into a whirl of confusion and anxiety and shame. A mother is so near that the reflection of her child's sentiments gets

into her mind, but very often with such prismatic changes, and oblique catchings of the light, that even sympathy goes wrong. Mrs. Warrender thus caught from Chatty the representation of an agitated soul in which there was all the sensitive shame of a love that is given unsought, mingled with a tender indignation against the offender who perhaps had never meant— But the mother on this point took a different view, and there rose up in her mind on the moment, a hundred cheerful, hopeful plans to bring him back and to set all right. Naturally there was not a word said on the subject, which was far too delicate for words ; but this was how Mrs. Warrender followed, as she believed, with an intensity which was full of tenderness, the current of her daughter's thoughts.

And yet these were not Chatty's thoughts at all. If she felt any excitement it was against those plans for cheering her, and the idea that any little contrivances of society could ever take the place of what was past—conjoined with a sort of jealousy of that past, lest any one should interfere with it, or attempt to blur the perfect outline of it as a thing which had been, and could be no more, nor any copy of it. This was what the soul most near her own did not divine. They sat together in the silence of the summer parlour, the cool sweet room full of flowers, with the July sun shut out, but the warm air coming in, so full of mutual

love and sympathy, and yet with but so disturbed and confused an apprehension each of each. After some time had passed thus, without any disturbance, nothing but the softened sounds of morning traffic in the quiet street, a slow cart passing, an occasional carriage, the voices of the children just freed from school, there came the quick sound of a horse's hoofs, a pause before the door, and then the bell echoing into the silence of the house.

"That must be Theo," cried Mrs. Warrender. "I was sure he would come to-day. Chatty, after luncheon, will you leave us a little, my dear? Not that we have any secrets from you: but he will speak more freely, if he is alone with me."

"I should have known that, mamma, without being told."

"Dear Chatty, you must not be displeased. You know many things more than I had ever thought."

"Displeased, mamma!"

"Hush, Chatty, here is my poor boy."

Her poor boy! the triumphant lover, the young man at the height of his joy and pride. They both rose to meet him, eager, watching to take the tone which should be most in harmony with his. But Mrs. Warrender had a pity in her heart for Theo which she did not feel for Chatty—perhaps because in her daughter's case her sympathy was more complete.

CHAPTER XVII.

WARRENDER met his mother and sister with a face somewhat cloudy, which, however, he did his best to clear as he came in, in response to their pleasure at the sight of him. It did not become him in his position to look otherwise than blessed : but a man has less power of recognising and adapting himself to this necessity than a woman. He did his best, however, to take an interest in the house, to have all its conveniencies pointed out to him, and the beauty of the view over the garden, and the coolness of the drawing-room in which they sat. What pleased him still more, however, or at least called forth a warmer response, was the discovery of some inconveniencies which had already been remarked. "I am very glad you told me," he said. "I must have everything put right for you, mother. A thing that can be put right by bricks and mortar is so easy a matter."

"It is the easiest way, perhaps, of setting things right," she said, not without an anxious glance ; "but even bricks

and mortar are apt to lead you further than you think. You remember Mr. Briggs, in *Punch*?"

"They will not lead me too far," said Theo. "I am all in the way of renovation and restoration. You should see—or rather, you should not see, for I am afraid you would be shocked—our own house——"

"What are you doing? No, I should not be shocked. I never was a devotee of the Warren. I always thought there were a great many improvements I could make."

"Oh, mamma!"

"You must remember, Chatty, I was not born to it, like you. What are you doing? Are you building? Your letters are not very explicit, my dear."

"You shall see. I cannot describe. I have not the gift." Here the cloud came again over Theo's face, the cloud which he had pushed back on his entrance as if it had been a veil. "We have let in a little light at all events," he said, "that will always be something to the good. Now, mother, let me have some lunch; for I cannot stay above an hour or so. I have to see Longstaffe. There has been a great deal to do."

"Mr. Longstaffe, I am sure, will not give you any trouble that he can help."

"He is giving me a great deal of trouble," said the young man, with lowering brows. Then he cleared up

again with an effort. "You have not told me anything about your doings in town."

"Oh, we did a great deal in town." Here Mrs. Warrender paused for a moment, feeling that neither did the auditor care to hear, nor the person concerned in those doings care to have them told. Between these two, her words were arrested. Chatty's head was more than ever bent over her muslin, and Theo had walked to the window, and was looking out with the air of a man whose thoughts were miles away. No one said anything more for a full minute, when he suddenly came back, so to speak, and said, with a sort of smile—

"So you were very gay?" as if in the meantime she had been pouring forth an account of many gaieties into his ear. So far as Theo was concerned, it was evidently quite unnecessary to say any more, but there was now the other silent listener to think of, who desired that not a word should be said, yet would be equally keen to note and put a meaning to the absence of remark. Between the two, the part of Mrs. Warrender was a hard one. She said, which, perhaps, was the last thing she ought to have said: "We saw a great deal of your friend Mr. Cavendish."

"Ah, Dick! yes, he's about town I suppose—pretending to do law, and doing society. Mother, if you want me to stay to luncheon——"

“I will go and see after it,” said Chatty. She gave her mother a look, as she put down her work. A look—what did it mean, a reproach for having mentioned him? an entreaty to ask more about him? Mrs. Warrender could not tell. When they were left alone, her son’s restlessness increased. He felt, it was evident, the dangers of being left with her *tête-à-tête*.

“I hope you didn’t see too much of him,” he said hastily, as if picking up something to defend himself. “Cavendish is a fellow with a story, and no one knows exactly what it is.”

“I am sure he is honourable and good,” said Mrs. Warrender, and then she cried, “Theo! don’t keep me in this suspense—there is something amiss.”

He came at once, and sat down opposite to her, gazing at her across the little table. “Yes,” he said with defiance, “you have made up your mind to that beforehand. I could see it in your eyes. What should be amiss?”

“Theo, you do me wrong. I had made up my mind to nothing beforehand—but I am very anxious. I know there must be difficulties. What are your negotiations with Mr. Longstaffe? Is it about settlements?—is it——”

“Longstaffe is an old fool, mother: that is about what it is.”

“No, my dear. I am sure he is a kind friend, who has your interests at heart.”

“Whose interests?” he said, with a harsh laugh. “You must remember there are two sides to the question. I should say that the interests of a husband and wife were identical, but that is not the view taken by those wretched little pettifogging country lawyers.”

“Dear Theo, it is never, I believe, the view taken by the law. They have to provide against the possibility of everything that is bad—they must suppose that it is possible for every man to turn out a domestic tyrant.”

“Every man!” he said, with a smile of scorn: “do you think I should be careful about that? They may bind me down as much as they please. I have held out my hands to them ready for the fetters. What I do grudge,” he went on, as if, the floodgates once opened, the stream could not be restrained, “is all that they are trying to impose upon her, giving her the appearance of feelings entirely contrary to her nature—making her out to be under the sway of—That’s what I can’t tolerate. If I knew her less, I might imagine—but thank God, I am sure on that point,” he added, with a sharpness in his voice which did not breathe conviction to his mother’s ear.

She laid her hand upon his arm, soothing him. “You must remember, that in the circumstances a woman is not

her own mistress. Oh, Theo, that was always the difficulty I feared. You are so sensitive, so ready to start aside like a restive horse, so intolerant of anything that seems less than perfect."

"Am I so, mother?" He gathered her hand into his, and laid down his head upon it, kissing it tremulously. "God bless you for saying so. My own mother says it—a fastidious fool, always looking out for faults, putting meanings to everything—starting at a touch, like a restive horse."

How it was that she understood him, and perceived that to put his faults in the clearest light was the best thing she could do for him, it would be hard to tell. She laid her other hand upon his bent head. "Yes, my dear, yes, my dear! that was always your fault. If your taste was offended, if anything jarred—though it might be no more than was absolutely essential, no more than common necessity required."

"Mother, you do me more good than words can say. Yes, I know, I know—I never have friends for that cause. I have always wanted more, more——"

"More than any one could give," she said softly. "Those whom you love should be above humanity, Theo: their feet should not tread the ground at all. I have always been afraid, not knowing how you would take it when necessary commonplaces came in."

“I wonder,” he said, raising his head, “whether mothers are always as perfect comforters as you are. That was what I wanted : but nobody in the world could have said it but you.”

“Because,” she said, carrying out her rôle unhesitatingly, though to her own surprise and without knowing why, “only your mother could know your faults, without there being the smallest possibility that any fault could ever stand between you and me.”

His eyes had the look of being strained and hot; yet there seemed a little moisture in the corners, a moisture which corresponded with the slight quiver in his lip, rather than with the light in his eyes. He held her hand still in his and caressed it almost unconsciously. “I am not like you in that,” he said. Alas no ! he was not like her in that : though the accusation of being fastidious, fantastic, intolerant of the usual conditions of humanity, was, for the moment, the happiest thing that could be said to him, yet a fault ! a fault would stand between him and whosoever was guilty of it, mother even—love still more. A fault : he was determined that she should be perfect, the woman whom he had chosen. To keep her perfect he was glad to seize at that suggestion of personal blame, to acknowledge that he himself was impatient of every condition, intolerant even of the bonds of humanity. But if there ever should

arise the time when the goddess should be taken from her pedestal, when the woman should be found fallible like all women, heaven preserve poor Theo then. The thought went through Mrs. Warrender's mind like a knife. What would become of him? He had given himself up so unreservedly to his love, he had sacrificed his own fastidious temper in the first place, had borne the remarks of the county, had supported Geoff, had allowed himself to be laughed at and blamed. But now if he should chance to discover that the woman for whom he had done all this was not in herself a piece of perfection—— His mother felt her very heart sink at the thought. No one was perfect enough to satisfy Theo; no one was perfect at all so far as her own experience went. And when he made this terrible discovery, what would he do?

In the meantime they went to luncheon, and there was talk of the repairs wanted in the house, and of what Theo was doing "at home." He was very unwilling, however, to speak of "home," or of what he had begun to do there. He told them indeed of the trees that had been cut down, over which Chatty made many exclamations, mourning for them; but even Chatty was not vigorous in her lamentations. They sat and talked, not interested in anything they were saying, the mother seated between them, watching each, herself scarcely able to keep up the thread of coherent

conversation, making now and then incursions on either side from which she was obliged to retreat hurriedly ; referring now to some London experience which Chatty's extreme dignity and silence showed she did not want to be mentioned, or to something on the other side from which Theo withdrew with still more distinct reluctance to be put under discussion. It was not till this uncomfortable meal was over that Theo made any further communication about his own affairs. He was on his way to the door, whither his mother had followed him, when he turned round as if accidentally. "By the bye," he said, "I forgot to tell you. *She* will be here presently, mother. She wanted to lose no time in seeing you."

"Lady Markland!" said Mrs. Warrender, with a little start.

He fixed his eyes upon her severely. "Who else? She is coming about three. I shall come back, and go home with her."

"Theo, before I meet your future wife—— You have never given me any details. Oh, tell me what has happened and what is going to happen. Don't leave me to meet her in ignorance of everything."

"What is it you want to know?" he said, with his sombre air, setting his back against the wall. "You know all that I know."

“Which is no more than that she has accepted you, Theo.”

“Well, what more would you have? That is how it stands now, and may for months for anything I can tell.”

“I should have thought it would have been better to get everything settled quickly. Why should there be any delay?”

“Ah, why? You must ask that of Mr. Longstaffe,” he said, and turned away.

Mrs. Warrender was much fluttered by the announcement of this visit. She had expected no doubt to meet Lady Markland very soon, to pay her perhaps a solemn visit, to receive her so to speak as a member of the family, which had been an alarming thought. For Lady Markland, though always grateful to her, and on one or two occasions offering something that looked like a close, confidential friendship, had been always a great lady in the opinion of the squire's wife, a more important person than herself, intimacy with whom would carry embarrassments with it. She had not been even, like other people in her position, familiarly known in the society of the county. Her seclusion during her husband's lifetime, the almost hermit life she led, the pity she had called forth, the position as of one apart from the world which she had

maintained, all united to place Lady Markland out of the common circle on a little eminence of her own. She had been very cordial, especially on the last evening they had spent together, the summer night when she had come to fetch Geoff. But still they had never been altogether at their ease with Lady Markland. Mrs. Warrender went back into the drawing-room, and looked round upon it with eyes more critical than when she had regarded it in relation to herself, wondering if Lady Markland would think it a homely place, a residence unworthy her future husband's mother. She made some little changes in it instinctively, put away the work on which she had been engaged, and looked at Chatty's little workbox with an inclination to put that too out of the way. The rooms at Markland were not so fine as to make such precautions necessary ; yet there was a faded splendour about them very different from the limitation and comfortable prim neatness of this. When she had done all that it was possible to do, she sat down to wait for her visitor, trying to read though she could not give much attention to what she read. "Lady Markland is to be here at three," she said to Chatty, who was slightly startled for a moment, but much less than her mother, taking a strip of muslin out of her box, and beginning to work at it as if this was the business of life and nothing else could excite her more. The blinds were all

drawn down for the sunshine, and the light came in green and cool though everything was blazing out-of-doors. These lowered blinds made it impossible to see the arrival though Mrs. Warrender heard it acutely—every prance of the horses, every word Lady Markland said. It seemed a long time before, through the many passages of the old-fashioned house, the visitor appeared. She made a slight pause on the threshold, apparently waiting for an invitation, for a special reception. Mrs. Warrender, with her heart beating, had risen, and stood with her hands clasped in tremulous expectation. They looked at each other for a moment across the parlour maid, who did not know how to get out of the room from between the two ladies, neither of whom advanced towards the other. Then Mrs. Warrender went hurriedly forward with extended hands.

“Theo told me you were coming. I am very glad to see you.” They took each other’s hands, and Mrs. Warrender bent forward to give the kiss of welcome. They were two equal powers, meeting on debatable ground, fulfilling all the necessary courtesies. Not like this should Theo’s mother have met his wife. It should have been a young creature whom she could have taken into her arms, who would have flung herself upon the breast of his mother, or at her knees, like a child of her own. Instead of this,

they were two equal powers, if, indeed, Lady Markland were not the principal, the one to give and not receive. Mrs. Warrender felt herself almost younger, less imposing altogether than the new member of the family, to whom it should have been her part to extend a tender patronage, to draw close to her, and set at her ease. Things were better when this difficult first moment was over. It was suitable and natural that Lady Markland should give to Chatty that kiss of peace—and then they all seated themselves in a little circle. “You have just arrived,” Lady Markland said.

“Yesterday. We have scarcely settled down.”

“And you enjoyed your stay in town? Chatty at least—Chatty must have enjoyed it.” Lady Markland turned to her with a soft smile.

“Oh yes, very much,” said Chatty, almost under her breath.

And then there was a brief pause, after which, “I hope Geoff is quite well,” Mrs. Warrender said.

“Quite well, and I was to bring you his love.” Lady Markland hesitated a little, and said, “I should like, if I might—to consult you about Geoff.”

“Surely,” Mrs. Warrender replied, and again there was a pause.

In former times, Chatty would not have perceived the

embarrassment of her two companions: but she had learned to divine since her three weeks' experience. She rose up quietly. "I think, mamma, you will be able to talk better if I go away."

"I don't know, my dear," said Mrs. Warrender, with a slight tremulousness. Lady Markland did not say anything. She retained the advantage of the position, not denying that she wished it, and Chatty accordingly, putting down her work, went away. Mrs. Warrender felt the solemnity of the interview more and more; but she did not know what to say.

Presently Lady Markland took the initiative. She rose and approached nearer to Mrs. Warrender's side. "I want you to tell me," she said, herself growing for the first time a little tremulous, "if you dislike this very much—for Theo."

"Dislike it! oh, how can you think so? His happiness is all I desire, and if you——"

"If I can make him happy? that is a dreadful question, Mrs. Warrender. How can any one tell that? I hope so; but if I should deceive myself——"

"That was not what I meant: there is no happiness for him, but that which you can give: if you think him good enough—that was what I was going to say."

"Good enough! Theo? Oh then, you do not know

what he is, though he is your son ; and so far I am better than you are."

"Lady Markland, you are better in a great many ways. It is this that frightens me. In some things you are so much above any pretensions of his. He has so little experience, he is not rich, nor even is he clever (though he is very clever) according to the ways of the world. I seem to be disparaging my boy. It is not that, Lady Markland."

"No ; do you think I don't understand ? I am too old for him ; I am not the kind of woman you would have chosen, or even that he would have chosen, had he been in his right senses."

"It is folly to say that you are old. You are not old ; you are a woman that any man might be proud to love. And his love—has been a wonder to me to see," said his mother, her voice faltering, her eyes filling. "I have never known such adoration as that."

"Ah, has it not !" cried the woman who was the object of it, a sudden melting and ineffable change coming over her face. "That was what gave me the courage," she said, after a moment's pause. "How could I refuse ? It is not often, is it, that a man—that a woman"—here her voice died away in a confusion and agitation which melted all Mrs. Warrender's reluctance. She found herself with her

arms round the great lady, comforting her, holding her head against her own breast. They shed some tears together, and kissed each other, and for a moment came so close that all secondary matters that could divide them seemed to fade away.

“But now,” said Lady Markland, after this little interval, “he is worried and disturbed again, by all the lawyers think it right to do. I should like to spare him all that, but I am helpless in their hands. Oh, dear Mrs. Warrender, you will understand. There are so many things that make it more difficult. There is—Geoff.”

Mrs. Warrender pressed her hands and gave her a look full of sympathy; but she said nothing. She did not make a cheerful protest that all these things were without importance, and that Geoff was no drawback, as perhaps it was hoped she might do. Lady Markland drew back a little, discouraged—waiting for some word of cheer which did not come.

“You know,” she said, her voice trembling, “what my boy has been to me: everything! until this new light that I never dreamed of, that I never had hoped for, or thought of. You know how we lived together, he and I. He was my companion, more than a child, sharing every thought You know——”

“Lady Markland, you have had a great deal of

trouble, but how much with it—a child like that, and then——”

“And then—Theo! Was there ever a woman so blessed—or so—— Oh, help me to know what I am to do between them! You can understand better than any of the young ones. Don't you see,” said Lady Markland, with a smile in which there was a kind of despair, “that though I am not old, as you say, I am on your level rather than on his, that *you* can understand better than he?”

If it were possible that a woman who is a mother could cease to be that in the first place and become a friend, first of all a sympathiser in the very difficulties that overwhelm her son, that miracle was accomplished then. The woman whom she had with difficulty accepted as Theo's future wife became, for a moment, nearer to her in this flood of sympathy than Theo himself. The woman's pangs and hindrances were closer to her experience than the man's. To him, in the heat of his young passion, nothing was worth considering that interfered with the perfect accomplishment of his love. But to her—the young woman, who had to piece on the present to the past, who though she might have abandoned father and mother could never abandon her child—the other woman's heart went out with a pang of fellow-feeling. Mrs. Warrender, like most

women, had an instinctive repugnance to the idea of a second marriage at all, but that being determined and beyond the reach of change, her heart ached for the dilemma which was more painful than any which enters into the possibilities of younger life. As Lady Markland leant towards her, claiming her sympathy, her face full of sentiments so conflicting, the joy of love and yet the anguish of it, and all the contrariety of a heart torn in two, the youthfulness, when all was said, of this expressive countenance, the recollection that, after all, this woman who claimed to be on her own level was not too old to be her child, seized upon Mrs. Warrender. Nothing that is direct and simple can be so poignant as those complications in which right and wrong and all the duties of human life are so confused that no sharply cut division is possible. What was she to do? She would owe all her heart to her husband, and what was to remain for her child? Geoff had upon her the first claim of nature; her love, her care, were his right—but then Theo? The old mother took the young one into her arms, with an ache of sympathy. “Oh, my dear, what can I say to you? We must leave it to Providence. Things come round when we do not think too much of them, but do our best.”

How poor a panacea, how slight a support! and yet in how many cases all that one human creature can say to

another! To do our best and to think as little as possible, and things will come round! The absolute mind scorns the mild consolation. To Theo it would have been an irritation, a wrong, but Theo's betrothed received it with humbler consciousness. The sympathy calmed her, and that so moderate, so humble, voucher of experience that things come round. Was it really so? was nothing so bad as it appeared? was it true that the way opened before you little by little in treading it, as she who had gone on so much farther on the path went on to say? Lady Markland regained her composure as she listened.

"You are speaking to me like a true mother," she said. "I have never known what that was. Help me, only help me! even to know that you understand me is so much—and do not blame me."

"Dear Lady Markland——"

"I have a name," she said, with a smile which was full of pain, as if marking another subject of trouble, "which is my own, which cannot be made any question of. Will you call me Frances? It would please him. They say it would be unusual, unreasonable, a thing which is never done—to give up—— Is that Theo? Dear Mrs. Warrender, I shall be far happier, now that I know I have a friend in you."

She grasped his mother's hands with a hurried gesture,

and an anxious, imploring look. Then gave a hasty glance into the glass, and recovered in a moment her air of gentle dignity, her smile. It was this that met Theo when he came in eager, yet doubtful, his eyes finding her out, with a rapid question, the instant that he entered. Whatever her troubles might be, none of them were made apparent to him.

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