# AT HIS GATES.

A Novel.

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## CHAPTER I.

The drawing-room within was very different from the wild conflict of light and darkness outside. There was music going on at one end, some people were reading, some talking. There were flirtations in hand, and grave discussions. In short, the evening was being spent as people are apt to spend the evening when there is nothing particular going on. There had been a good deal of private yawning and inspection of watches throughout the evening, and some of the party had already gone to bed, or rather to their rooms, where they could indulge in the happiness of fancying themselves somewhere else—an amusement which is very popular and general in a country house.

But seated in an easy-chair by the fire was a tall man, carefully dressed, with diamond studs in his shirt, and a toilette which, though subdued in tone as a gentleman's evening dress must be, was yet too elaborate for the occasion. The fact that this new guest was a stranger to him, and that his father was seated by him in close conversation, made it at once apparent to Ned that it must be Golden. Clara was close to them listening with a look of eager interest to all they said. These three made a little detached group by one side of the fire. At the other corner sat Mrs Burton, with her little feet on a footstool, as near as possible to the fender. She had just said good-night to the dignified members of the party, the people who had to be considered; the others who remained were mere young people, about whose proceedings she did not concern herself. She was taking no part in the talk at the other side of the fire. She sat and warmed her little toes and pondered; her vivid little mind all astir and working, but uninfluenced by, and somewhat contemptuous of, what was going on around; and her chilly little person basking in the ruddy warmth of the fire.

Ned came up and stood by her when he came in. No one took any notice of him, the few per-

sons who remained in the room having other affairs in hand. Ned was fond of his mother, though she had never shown any fondness for him. She had done all for him which mere intellect could do. She had been very just to the boy all his life; when he got into scrapes, as boys will, she had not backed him up emotionally, it is true, but she had taken all the circumstances into account, and had not judged him harshly. She had been tolerant when his father was harsh. She had never lost her temper. He had always felt that he could appeal to her sense of justice—to her calm and impartial reason. This is not much like the confidence with which a boy generally throws himself upon his mother's sympathy, yet it was a great deal in Ned's case. And accordingly he loved his mother. Mrs Burton, too, loved him perhaps more than she loved any one. She was doing her best to break his heart; but that is not at all uncommon even when parents and children adore each other. And then Ned was not aware that his mother had any share intentionally or otherwise in the cruel treatment he had received.

'Who is that?' he asked under his breath.

'A Mr Golden, a friend of your father's,' said Mrs Burton, lifting her eyes and turning them calmly upon the person she named. There was

no feeling in them of one kind or another, and yet Ned felt that she at least did not admire Mr Golden, and it was a comfort to him. He went forward to the fire, and placed himself, as an Englishman loves to do, in front of it. He stood there for ten minutes or so, paying no particular attention to the conversation on his right hand. His father, however, looked more animated than he had done for a long time, and Clara was bending forward with a faint rose-tint from the fire tinging the whiteness of her forehead and throat, and deeper roses glowing on her cheeks. Her blue eyes were following Mr Golden's movements as he spoke, her hair was shining like crisp gold in the light. She was such a study of colour, of splendid flesh and blood, as Rubens would have worshipped; and Mr Golden had discrimination enough to perceive it. He stopped to address himself to Clara. He turned to her, and gave her looks of admiration, for which her brother, bitterly enough biassed against him on his own account, could have 'throttled the fellow!' Ned grew more and more wrathful as he looked on. And in the mean time the late young ladies came fluttering to say good-night to their hostess; the young men went off to the smoking-room, where Ned knew he ought to accompany them, but did not, being

too fully occupied; and thus the family were left alone. Notwithstanding, however, his wrath and his curiosity, it was only the sound of one name which suddenly made the conversation by his side quite articulate and intelligible to Ned.

'I hear the Drummond has a pretty daughter; that is a new weapon for her, Burton. I wonder you venture to have such a family established at your gates.'

'The daughter is not particularly pretty; not so pretty by a long way as Helen was,' said Mr Burton. 'I don't see what harm she can do with poor little Norah. We are not afraid of her, Clara, are we?' and he looked admiringly at his daughter, and laughed.

As for Clara she grew crimson. She was not a girl of much feeling, but still there was something of the woman in her.

'I don't understand how we could be supposed to be afraid of Norah Drummond,' she said.

'But I assure you I do,' said Mr Golden. 'Pardon me, but I don't suppose you have seen the Drummond herself, the Drummond mamma—in a fury.'

'Father,' said Ned, 'is Mr Golden aware that the lady he is speaking of is our relation—and

friend? Do you mean to suffer her to be so spoken of in your house?'

'Hold your tongue, Ned.'

'Ned! to be sure it is Ned. Why, my boy, you have grown out of all recollection,' said Golden, jumping up with a great show of cordiality, and holding out his hand.

Ned bowed, and drew a step nearer his mother. He had his hands in his pockets; there were times, no doubt, when his manners left a great deal to be desired.

'Ah, I see! there are spells,' said Mr Golden, and he took his seat again with a hearty laugh—a laugh so hearty that there seemed just a possibility of strain and forced merriment in it. 'My dear Miss Burton,' he said, in an undertone, which however Ned could hear, 'didn't I tell you there was danger? Here's an example for you, sooner than I thought.'

'Mother,' said Ned, 'can I get your candle? I am sure it is time for you to go up-stairs.'

'Yes, and for Clara too. Run away, child, and take care of your roses; Golden and I have some business to talk over; run away. As for you, Ned, to-morrow morning I shall have something to say to you.'

'Very well, sir,' said Ned solemnly.

He lighted his mother's candle, and he gave her his arm, having made up his mind not to let her go. The sounds of laughter which came faintly from the smoking-room did not tempt him; if truth must be told, they tempted Clara much more, who stood for a moment with her candle in her hand, and said to herself, 'What fun they must be having!' and fretted against the feminine fetters which bound her. Such a thought would not have come into Norah's head, nor into Katie Dalton's, nor even into that of Lady Florizel, though it was a foolish little head enough; but Clara, who was all flesh and blood, and had been badly brought up, was the one of those four girls who probably would have impressed most deeply a journalist's fancy as illustrating the social problem of English young womanhood.

Ned led his mother not to her own room, but to his. He made her come in, and placed a chair for her before the fire. It is probable that he had sense enough to feel that had he asked her consent to his marriage with Norah Drummond he would have found difficulties in his way; but short of this, he had full confidence in the justice which indeed he had never had any reason to doubt.

'Do you like this man Golden, mother?' he asked. 'Tell me, what is his connection with us?'

'His connection, I suppose, is a business connection with your father,' said Mrs Burton. 'For the rest, I neither like him nor hate him. He is well enough, I suppose, in his way.'

'Mrs Drummond does not think so,' said Ned.

'Ah, Mrs Drummond! She is a woman of what are called strong feelings. I don't suppose she ever stopped to inquire into the motives of anybody who went against her in her life. She jumps at a conclusion, and reaches it always from her own point of view. According to her view of affairs, I don't wonder, with her disposition, that she should hate him.'

'Why, mother?'

'Well,' said Mrs Burton, 'I am not in the habit of using words which would come naturally to a mind like Mrs Drummond's. But from her point of view, I should say, she must believe that he ruined her husband—drove him to suicide, and then did all he could to ruin his reputation. These are things, I allow, which people do not readily forget.'

'And, mother, do you believe all this? Is it true?'

'I state it in a different way,' she said. 'Mr Golden, I suppose, thought the business could be redeemed, to start with. When he drew poor Mr

Drummond into active work in the concern, he did it in a moment when there was nobody else to refer to. And then you must remember, Ned, that Mr Drummond had enjoyed a good deal of profit, and had as much right as any of the others to suffer in the loss. He was ignorant of business, to be sure, and did not know what he was doing; but then an ignorant man has no right to go into business. Mr Golden is very sharp, and he had to preserve himself if he could. It was quite natural he should take advantage of the other's foolishness. And then I don't suppose he ever imagined that poor Mr Drummond would commit suicide. He himself would never have done it under similar circumstances—nor your father.'

'Had my father anything to do with this?' said Ned hoarsely.

'That is not the question,' said Mrs Burton. 'But neither the one nor the other would have done anything so foolish. How were they to suppose Mr Drummond would? This sort of thing requires a power of realising other people's ways of thinking which few possess, Ned. After he was dead, and it could not be helped, I don't find anything surprising,' she went on, putting her feet nearer the fire, 'in the fact that Mr Golden turned it to his advantage. It could not hurt

Drummond any more, you know. Of course it hurt his wife's feelings; but I am not clear how far Golden was called upon to consider the feelings of Drummond's wife. It was a question of life and death for himself. Of course I do not believe for a moment, and I don't suppose anybody whose opinion is worth considering could believe, that a poor, innocent, silly man destroyed those books—'

'Mother, I don't know what you are speaking of; but it seems to me as if you were describing the most devilish piece of villany——'

'People do employ such words, no doubt,' said Mrs Burton calmly; 'I don't myself. But if that is how it appears to your mind, you are right enough to express yourself so. Of course that is Mrs Drummond's opinion. I have something to say to you about the Drummonds, Ned.'

'One moment, mother,' he cried, with a tremor and heat of excitement which puzzled her perhaps more than anything she had yet met with in the matter. For why should Ned be disturbed by a thing which did not concern him, and which had happened so long ago? 'You have mentioned my father. You have said *they*, speaking of this man's infamous—— Was my father concerned?'

Mrs Burton turned, and looked her son in the face. The smallest little ghost of agitation—a

shadow so faint that it would not have showed upon any other face—glided over hers.

'That is just the point on which I can give you least information,' she said; and then, after a pause, 'Ned,' she continued, 'you are grown up; you are capable of judging for yourself. I tell you I don't know. I am not often deterred by any cause from following out a question I am interested in; but I have preferred not to follow up this. I put away all the papers, thinking I might some day care to go into it more deeply. You can have them if you like. To tell the truth,' she added, sinking her voice, betrayed into a degree of confidence which perhaps she had never given to human creature before, 'I think it is a bad sign that this man has come back.'

'A sign of what?'

Mrs Burton's agitation increased. Though it was the very slightest of agitations, it startled Ned, so unlike was it to his mother.

'Ned,' she said, with a shiver that might be partly cold, 'nobody that I ever heard of is so strong as their own principles. I do not know, if it came to me to have to bear it, whether I could bear ruin and disgrace.'

'Ruin and disgrace!' cried Ned.

'I don't know if I have fortitude enough.

Perhaps I could by myself; I should feel that it was brought about by natural means, and that blame was useless and foolish. But if we had to bear the comments in the newspapers, the talk of everybody, the reflections on our past, I don't know whether I have fortitude to bear it; I feel as if I could not.

'Mother, has this been in your mind, while I have been thinking you took so little interest? My poor little mamma!'

The wicked little woman! And yet all that she had been saying was perfectly true.

'Ned,' she said, with great seriousness, 'this dread, which I can never get quite out of my mind, is the reason why I have been so very earnest about the Merewethers. I have never, you know, supported your father's wish that you should go into the business. On the contrary, I have always endeavoured to secure you your own career. I have wished that you at least should be safe——'

'Safe!' he cried. 'Mother, if there is a possibility of disgrace, how can I, how can any of us, escape from it—and more especially I? And if there is a chance of ruin, why I should be as great a villain as that man is, should I consent to carry it into another house.'

'It is quite a different case,' she cried with

some eagerness, seeing she had overshot her mark. 'I hope there will be neither; and you have not the least reason to suppose that either is possible. Look round you; go with your father to the office, inspect his concerns as much as you please; you will see nothing but evidences of prosperity. So far as you know, or can know, your father is one of the most prosperous men in England. Nobody would have a word to say against you, and I shall be rich enough to provide for you. If there is any downfall at all, which I do not expect, nobody would ever imagine for a moment that you knew anything of it; and your career and your comfort would be safe.'

'O mother! mother!' Poor Ned turned away from her and hid his face in his hands. This was worse to him than all the rest.

'You ought to think it over most carefully,' she said; 'all this is perfectly clear before you. I may have taken fright, though it is not very like me. I may be fanciful enough' (Mrs Burton smiled at herself, and even Ned in his misery half smiled) 'to consider this man as a sort of raven, boding misfortune. But you know nothing about it; there is abundant time for you to save yourself and your credit; and this is the wish which, above everything in the world, I have most at

heart, that, if there is going to be any disaster,—I don't expect it, I don't believe in it; but mercantile men are always subject to misfortune,—you might at least be safe. I will not say anything more about it to-night; but think it over, Ned.'

She rose as she spoke and took up her candle, and her son bent over her and touched her little cold face with his hot lips. 'I will send you the papers,' she said as she went away. Strange little shadow of a mother! She glided along the passage, not without a certain maternal sentiment—a feeling that on the whole she was doing what was best for her boy. *She* could provide for him, whatever happened; and if evil came he might so manage as to thrust himself out from under the shadow of the evil. She was a curious problem, this woman; she could enter into Mr Golden's state of mind, but not into her son's. She could fathom those struggles of self-preservation which might lead a man into fraud and robbery; but she could not enter into those which tore a generous, sensitive, honourable soul in pieces. She was an analyst, with the lowest view of human nature, and not a sympathetic being entering into the hearts of others by means of her own.

No smoking-room, no jovial midnight party, received Ned that night. He sat up till the slow

November morning dawned reading those papers; and then he threw himself on his bed, and hid his face from the cold increasing light. A bitterness which he could not put into words, which even to himself it was impossible to explain, filled his heart. There was nothing, or at least very little, about his father in these papers. There was no accusation made against Mr Burton, nothing that any one could take hold of—only here and there a word of ominous suggestion which chilled the blood in his veins. But Golden's character was not spared by any one; it came out in all its blackness, more distinct even than it could have done at the moment these events occurred. Men had read the story at the time with their minds full of foregone conclusions on the subject—of prejudices and the heat of personal feeling. But to Ned it was history; and as he read Golden's character stood out before him as in a picture. And this man, this deliberate cold-blooded scoundrel, was sleeping calmly under his father's roof—a guest whom his father delighted to honour. Ned groaned, and covered his eyes with his hands to shut out the hazy November morning, as if it were a spy that might find out something from his haggard countenance. Sleep was far from his eyes; his brain buzzed with the unaccustomed crowd of

thoughts that whirled and rustled through it. A hundred projects, all very practicable at the first glance and impossible afterwards, flashed before him. The only thing that he never thought of was that which his mother had called the wish of her heart—that he should escape and secure his own career out of the possible fate that might be impending. This, of all projects, was the only one which, first and last, was impossible to Ned.

The first step which he took in the matter was one strangely different. He had to go through all the ordinary remarks of the breakfast-table upon his miserable looks; but he was too much agitated to be very well aware what people were saying to him. He watched anxiously till he saw his father prepare to leave the house. Fortunately Mr Golden was not with him. Mr Golden was a man of luxury, who breakfasted late, and had not so much as made his appearance at the hour when Mr Burton, who, above everything, was a man of business, started for the station. Ned went out with him, avoiding his mother's eye. He took from his father's hand a little courier's bag full of papers which he was taking with him.

'I will carry it for you, sir,' he said.

Mr Burton was intensely surprised; the days were long gone by when Ned would strut by his

side, putting out his chest in imitation of his father.

'Wants some money, I suppose!' Mr Burton—no longer the boy's proud progenitor, but a wary parent, awake to all the possible snares and traps which are set for such—said to himself.

They had reached the village before Ned had began to speak of anything more important than the weather or the game. Then he broke into his subject quite abruptly.

'Father,' he said, 'within the last few days I have been thinking of a great many things. I have been thinking that for your only son to set his face against business was hard lines on you. Will you tell me frankly whether a fellow like me, trained so differently, would be of real use to you? Could I help you to keep things straight, save you from being cheated?—do anything for you? I have changed my ideas on a great many subjects. This is what I want to know.'

'Upon my word, a wonderful conversion,' said his father with a laugh; 'there must be some famous reason for a change so sudden. Help *me* to keep things straight!—Keep ME from being cheated! You simpleton! you have at least a capital opinion of yourself.'

'But it was with that idea, I suppose, that

you thought of putting me into the business,' said Ned, overcoming with an effort his first boyish impulse of offence.

'Perhaps in the long-run,' said Mr Burton jocularly; 'but not all at once, my fine fellow. Your Greek and your Latin won't do you much service in the city, my boy. Though you have taken your degree—and a deuced deal of money that costs, a great deal more than it's worth—you would have to begin by singing very small in the office. You would be junior clerk to begin with at fifty pounds a year. How should you find that suit your plans, my fine gentleman Ned?'

'Was that all you intended me for?' asked Ned sternly. A rigid air and tone was the best mask he could put upon his bitter mortification.

'Certainly, at first,' said Mr Burton; 'but I have changed my mind altogether on the subject,' he added sharply. 'I see that I was altogether deceived in you. You never would be of any use in business. If you were in Golden's hands, perhaps—but you have let yourself be influenced by some wretched fool or other.'

'Has Mr Golden anything to say to your business?' asked Ned.

The question took his father by surprise.

'Confound your impudence!' he cried, after

a keen glance at his son and sputter of confused words, which sounded very much like swearing. 'What has given you so sudden an interest in my business, I should like to know? Do you think I am too old to manage it for myself?'

'It was the sight of this man, father,' said Ned, with boyish simplicity and earnestness, 'and the knowledge who he was. Couldn't I serve you instead of him? I pledge you my word to give up all that you consider nonsense, to settle steadily to business. I am not a fool, though I am ignorant. And then if I am ignorant, no man could serve you so truly as your son would, whose interests are the same as yours. Try me! I could serve you better than he.'

'You preposterous idiot!' cried Mr Burton, who had made two or three changes from anger to ridicule while this speech was being delivered. 'You serve me better than Golden!—Golden, by Jove! And may I ask if I were to accept this splendid offer of yours, what would you expect as an equivalent? My consent to some wretched marriage or other, I suppose, allowance doubled, home provided, and my blessing, eh? I suppose that is what you are aiming at. Out with it—how much was the equivalent to be?'

'Nothing,' said Ned. He had grown crimson;

his eyes were cast down, not to betray the feeling in them—a choking sensation was in his throat. Then he added slowly—'not even the fifty pounds a year you offered me just now—nothing but permission to stand by you, to help to—keep danger off.'

Mr Burton took the bag roughly out of his hand. 'Go home,' he said, 'you young ass; and be thankful I don't chastise you for your impudence. Danger!—I should think you were the danger if you were not such a fool. Go home! I don't desire your further company. A pretty help and defender you would be!'

And Ned found himself suddenly standing alone outside the station, his fingers tingling with the roughness with which the bag had been snatched from him. He stood still for half a minute, undecided, and then he turned round and strolled listlessly back along the street. He was very unhappy. His father was still his father, though he had begun to distrust, and had long given over expecting any sympathy from him. And the generous resolution which it had cost him so much pain to make, had not only come to nothing, but had been trampled under foot with derision. His heart was very sore. It was a

hazy morning, with a frosty, red sun trying hard to break through the mist; and everything moved swiftly to resist the cold, and every step rang sharp upon the road; except poor Ned's, who had not the heart to do anything but saunter listlessly and slowly, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes fixed wistfully upon nothing. Everything in a moment had become blank to him. He wondered why the people took the trouble to take off their hats to him—to one who was the heir of misery and perhaps of disgrace and ruin, as his mother had said. Ruin and disgrace! What awful words they are when you come to think of it—dreadful to look forward to, and still more dreadful to bear if any man could ever realise their actual arrival to himself!

Norah was standing at the open door of the Gatehouse. He thought for a moment that he would pass without taking any notice; and then it occurred to him in a strange visionary way that it might be the last time he should see her. He stopped, and she said a cold little 'Good morning' to him, without even offering her hand. Then a sudden yearning seized poor Ned.

'Norah,' he said, in that listless way, 'I wish you would say something kind to me to-day. I

don't know why I should be so anxious for it, but I think it would do me good. If you knew how unhappy I am——'

'Oh Ned, for heaven's sake don't talk such nonsense,' cried impatient Norah. '*You* unhappy, that never knew what it was to have anything go wrong! It makes me quite ill to hear you. You that have got everything that heart can desire; because you can't just exactly have your own way —about—me— Oh, go away; I cannot put up with such nonsense—and to me, too, that knows what real trouble means!'

Poor Ned made no protest against this impatient decision. He put on his hat in a bewildered way, with one long look at her, and then passed, and disappeared within his father's gates. Norah did not know what to make of it. She stood at the door, bewildered too, ready to wave her hand and smile at him when he looked round; but he never looked round. He went on slowly, listlessly, as if he did not care for anything—doing what both had told him—the father whom he had been willing to give up his life to—the girl who had his heart.

That afternoon he carried out their commands still more fully. He went away from his father's house. On a visit, it was said; but to go away

on a visit in the middle of the shooting season, when your father's house is full of guests, was, all the young men thought, the most extraordinary thing which, even in the freedom of the nineteenth century, an only son, deputy master of the establishment, had ever been known to do.

## CHAPTER II.

It was a long time before it was fully understood in Dura what had become of Ned. At first it was said he had gone on a visit, then that he had joined some of his college friends in an expedition abroad; but before spring it began to be fully understood, though nobody could tell how, that Ned had gone off from his home, and that though occasional letters came from him, his family did not always know where he was, or what he was about. There was no distinct authority for this, but the whole neighbourhood became gradually aware of it. The general idea was that he had gone away because Norah Drummond had refused him; and the consequence was that Norah Drummond was looked upon with a certain mixture of disapproval and envy by the youthful community. The girls felt to their hearts the grandeur of her position. Some were angry,

taking Ned's part, and declaring vehemently that she had 'led him on;' some were sympathetic, feeling that poor Norah was to be pitied for the tragical necessity of dismissing a lover; but all felt the proud distinction she had acquired by thus driving a man (they did not say boy) to despair. The boys, for the most part, condemned Ned as a muff—but in their hearts felt a certain pride in him, as proving that their side was still capable of a great act of decision and despair. As for Norah, when the news burst upon her, her kind little heart was broken. She cried till her pretty eyes were like an old woman's. She gave herself a violent headache, and turned away from all consolation, and denounced herself as the wickedest and cruellest of beings. It was natural that Norah should believe it implicitly. After that scene in the Rectory garden, when poor Ned, in his boyish passion, had half thrown the responsibility of his life upon her shoulders, there had been other scenes of a not unsimilar kind; and there was that last meeting at the door of the Gatehouse, when she had dismissed him so summarily. Oh, if he had only looked round, Norah thought; and she remembered, with a passing gleam of consolation, that she had intended to wave her hand to him. 'What shall I do? Oh,

what shall I do?' she said, 'if—anything should happen to him, mamma, I shall have killed him! If anybody calls me a murderess, I shall not have a word to say.'

'Not so bad as that, my darling,' Helen said, soothing her; but Helen herself was very deeply moved. This was the revenge, the punishment she had dreamt of. By her means, whom he had injured so deeply, Reginald Burton's only son had been driven away from him, and all his hopes and plans for his boy brought to a sudden end. It was revenge; but the revenge was not sweet. Christianity, heaven knows, has not done all for us which it might have done, but yet it has so far changed the theories of existence that the vague craving of the sufferer for punishment to its oppressors gives little gratification when it is fulfilled. Helen was humbled to the dust with remorse and compunction for the passing thought, which could scarcely be called an intention, the momentary, visionary sense of triumph she had felt in her daughter's power (as she believed) to disturb all the plans of the others. Now that was done which it had given her a vague triumph to think of; and though her tears were not so near the surface as Norah's, her shame and pain were deeper. And this was all the more the fact be-

cause she dared not express it. A word of sympathy from her (she felt) would have looked like nothing so much as the waving of a flag of triumph. And, besides, from Ned's own family there came no word of complaint.

The Dura people put the very best face upon it possible. Mrs Burton, who had never been known to show any emotion in her life, of course made none of her feelings visible. Her husband declared that 'my young fool of a son' preferred amusing himself abroad to doing any work at home. Clara was the only one who betrayed herself. She assured Katie Dalton, in confidence, that she never could bear to see that hateful Norah again—that she was sure it was all her fault. That Ned would never have looked at her had not she done everything in her power to 'draw him on' —and then cast him off because somebody better worth having came in her way. Clara's indignation was sharp and vehement. It was edged with her own grievance, which she was not too proud to refer to in terms which could not disguise her feelings. But she was the only one of her house who allowed that Ned's disappearance had any significance. His mother said nothing at all on the subject even to her husband and her child; but in reality it was the severest blow that fate

had ever aimed at her. Her hopes for his 'career' toppled over like a house of cards. The Merewethers, astounded at the apology which had to be sent in reply to their invitation to Ned for Christmas, suddenly slackened in their friendship. Lady Florizel ceased to write to Clara, and the Marchioness sent no more notes, weighted with gilded coronets, to her dear Mrs Burton. So far as that noble household was concerned, Ned's prospects had come to an end. The son of so rich a man, future proprietor of Dura, might have been accepted had he been on the spot to press his suit; but the Ladies Merewether were young and fair, and not so poor as to be pressed upon any one. So Lady Florizel and the parliamentary influence sunk into the background; and keenly to the intellectual machine, which served Mrs Burton instead of a heart, went the blow. This was the moment, she felt, in which Ned could have made himself 'safe,' and disentangled himself from the fatal web which instinct told her her husband was weaving about his feet. There was no confidence on business matters between Mr Burton and his wife; but a woman cannot be a man's constant companion for twenty years without divining him, and understanding, without the aid of words, something of what is going on in his mind. She

had felt, even before Golden's arrival, a certain vague sense of difficulty and anxiety. His arrival made her sure of it. He had been abroad, withdrawn from the observation of English mercantile society for all these years; but his talents as the pilot of a ship, desperately making way through rocks and sandbanks, were sufficiently well known; and his appearance was confirmation sure to Mrs Burton of all her fears. Thus she felt in her reticent, silent breast that her boy had thrown up his only chance. The son of the master of Dura could have done so much—the son of a bankrupt could do nothing. He might have withdrawn himself from all risk—established himself in a sure position—had he taken her advice; and he had not taken it. It was the hardest personal blow she had ever received. It did not move her to tears, as it would have done most women. She had not that outlet for her sorrow; but it disarranged the intellectual machinery for the moment, and made her feel incapable of more thinking or planning. Even her motherhood had thus its anguish, probably as deep an anguish as she was capable of feeling. She was balked once more—her labour was in vain, and her hopes in vain. She had more mind than all of her family put together, and she knew it; but here once

more, as so often in her experience, the fleshly part in which she was so weak overrode the mind, and brought its counsels to nought. It would be hard to estimate the kind and degree of suffering which such a conviction brought.

Time went on, however, as it always does; stole on, while people were thinking of other things, discussing Ned's disappearance and Norah's remorse, and Mr Nicholas's hopes of a living, and Mary's trousseau. When the first faint glimmer of the spring began, they had another thing to talk of, which was that Cyril Rivers had appeared on the scene again, often coming down from London to spend a day, and then so ingratiating himself with the Rectory people, and even with Nicholas, the bridegroom elect, that now and then he was asked to spend a night. This time, however, he was not invited to the great house; neither would Mrs Drummond ask him, though he was constantly there. She was determined that nobody should say she drew him on this time, people said. But the fact was that Helen's heart was sick of the subject altogether, and that she would have gone out of her way to avoid any one who had been connected with the Burtons, or who might be supposed to minister to that revenge of which she was so bitterly ashamed. While Cyril

Rivers went and came to Dura village, Mr Golden became an equally frequent visitor at the House. The city men in the white villas had been filled with consternation at the first sight of him; but latterly began to make stiff returns to his hearty morning salutations when he went up to town along with them. It was so long ago; and nothing positively had been proved against him; and it was hard, they said, to crush a man altogether, who, possibly, was trying to amend his ways. Perhaps they would have been less charitable had he been living anywhere else than at the great house. Gradually, however, his presence became expected in Dura; he was always there when there were guests or festivities going on. And never had the Burtons been so gay. They seemed to celebrate their son's departure by a double rush of dissipation. The idea of any trouble being near so pleasant, so brilliant a place was ridiculous, and whatever Mrs Burton's thoughts on the subject might have been, she said nothing, but sent out her invitations, and assembled her guests with her usual calm. The Rectory people were constantly invited, and so indeed were the Drummonds, though neither Norah nor her mother had the heart to go.

Things were in this gay and festive state when

Mr Baldwin suddenly one morning paid his daughter a visit. It was not one of his usual visits, accompanied by the two aunts, and the old man-servant and the two maids. These visits had grown rarer of late. Mrs Burton had so many guests, and of such rank, that to arrange the days for her father on which the minister of the chapel could be asked to dinner, and a plain joint provided, grew more and more difficult; while the old people grew more and more alarmed and indignant at the way Clara was going on. 'Her dress alone must cost a fortune,' her aunt Louisa said. 'And the boy brought up as if he were a young Lord; and the girl never to touch a needle nor an account-book in her life,' said Mrs Everest; and they all knew by experience that to 'speak to' Clara was quite futile. 'She will take her own way, brother, whatever you say,' was the verdict of both; and Mr Baldwin knew it was a true one. Nevertheless, there came a day when he felt it was his duty to speak to Clara. 'I have something to say to Haldane; and something to arrange with the chapel managers,' he said apologetically to his sisters; and went down all alone, in his black coat and his white tie with his hat very much on the back of his head, to his daughter's great house.

'I have got some business with Haldane and

with the chapel managers,' he said, repeating his explanation; 'and I thought as I was here, Clara, I might as well come on and see you.'

'You are very welcome always, papa.'

'But I don't know if I shall be welcome to-day,' he went on, 'because I want to speak to you, Clara.'

'I know,' she said, with a faint smile, 'about our extravagance and all that. It is of no use. I may as well say this to you at once. I cannot stop it if I would; and I don't know that I would stop it if I could.'

'Do you know,' he said, coming forward to her, and laying his hand on her shoulder; for though he wore his hat on the back of his head, and took the chair at public meetings, he was a kind man, and loved his only child. Do you know, Clara, that in the City—you may despise the City, my dear, but it is all-important to your husband—do you know they say Burton is going too fast? I wish I could contradict it, but I can't. They say he's in a bad way. They say——'

'Tell me everything, papa. I am quite able to bear it.'

'Well, my dear, I don't want to make you unhappy,' said Mr Baldwin, drawing a long breath, 'but people do begin to whisper, in the best-informed circles, that he is very heavily involved.'

'Well?' she said looking up at him. She too drew a long breath, her face, perhaps, paled by the tenth of the tint. But her blue eyes looked up undaunted, without a shadow in them. Her composure, her calm question, drove even Mr Baldwin, who was used to his daughter's ways, half out of himself.

'Well?' he cried. 'Clara, you must be mad. If this is so, what can you think of yourself, who never try to restrain or to remedy?—who never made an attempt to retrench or save a penny? If your husband has even the slightest shadow of embarrassment in his business, is this great, splendid house, full of guests and entertainments, the way to help him through?'

'It is as good a way as any other,' she said, still looking at him. 'Papa, you speak in ignorance of both him and me. I don't know his circumstances; he does not tell me. It is he that enjoys all this; not me. And if he really should be in danger, I suppose he thinks he had better enjoy it as long as he can; and that is my idea too.'

'Enjoy it as long as he can! Spend other people's money in every kind of folly and extravagance!' cried Mr Baldwin aghast. 'Clara, you must be mad.'

'No, indeed,' she said quietly. 'I am very much in my senses. I know nothing about other people's money. I cannot control Mr Burton in his business, and he does not tell me. But don't suppose I have not thought this all over. I have taken every circumstance into consideration, papa, and every possibility. If we should ever be ruined, we shall have plenty to bear when that comes. There is Clary to be taken into consideration too. If there were only two days between Mr Burton and bankruptcy I should give a ball on one of those days. Clary has a right to it. This will be her only moment if what you say is true.'

To describe Mr Baldwin's consternation, his utter amazement, the eyes with which he contemplated his child, would be beyond my power. He could not, as people say, believe his ears. It seemed to him as if he must be mistaken, and that her words must have some other meaning, which he did not reach.

'Clara,' he said, faltering, 'you are beyond me. I hope you understand yourself—what—you mean. It is beyond me.'

'I understand it perfectly,' she said; and then, with a little change of tone, 'You understand, papa, that I would not speak so plainly to any one but you. But to you I need not make any secret.

If it comes to the worst, Clary and I—Ned has deserted us—will have enough to bear.'

'You will always have your settlement, my dear,' said her father, quite cowed and overcome, he could not tell why.

'Yes. I shall have my settlement,' she said calmly; 'but there will be enough to bear.'

It was rather a relief to the old man when Clary came in, before whom nothing more could be said. And he was glad to hurry off again, with such astonishment and pain in his heart as an honest couple might have felt who had found a perverse fairy changeling in their child's cradle. He had thought that he knew his daughter. 'Clara has a cold exterior,' he had said times without number; 'but she has a warm heart.' Had she a heart at all? he asked himself; had she a conscience? What was she?—a woman or a—— The old man could have stopped on the way and wept. He was an honest old man, and a kind, but what kind of a strange being was this whom he had nourished so long in his heart? It was a relief to him to get among his chapel managers, and regulate their accounts; and then he took Mr Truston, the minister, by the arm, and walked upon him. 'Come with me and see Haldane,' he said. Mr Truston was the same man who had

wanted to be faithful to Stephen about the Magazine, but never had ventured upon it yet.

'I am afraid you are ill,' said the minister. 'Lean upon me. If you will come to my house and take a glass of wine.'

'No, no; with my daughter so near I should never be a charge to the brethren,' said Mr Baldwin. 'And so poor Haldane gets no better? It is a terrible burden upon the congregation in Ormond Road.'

'It must be indeed. I am sure they have been very kind; many congregations——'

'Many congregations would have thrown off the burden utterly; and I confess since they have heard that he has published again, and has been making money by his books——'

'Ah, yes; a literary man has such advantages,' said the minister with a sigh.

He did not want to favour the congregation in Ormond Road to the detriment of one of his own cloth; and at the same time it was hard to go against Mr Baldwin, the lay bishop of the denomination. In this way they came to the Gatehouse. Stephen had his proofs before him, as usual; but the pile of manuscripts was of a different complexion. They were no longer any pleasure to him. The work was still grateful, such as it was, and the

power of doing something; but to spend his life recording tea-meetings was hard. He raised his eyes to welcome his old friend with a certain doubt and almost alarm. He too knew that he was a burden upon the congregation in Ormond Road.

'My dear fellow, my dear Stephen!' the old man said, very cordially shaking his hand, 'why you are looking quite strong. We shall have him dashing up to Ormond Road again, Mrs Haldane, and giving out his text, before we know where we are.'

Stephen shook his head, with such attempt at smiling as was possible. Mr Baldwin, however, was not so much afraid of breaking bad news to him as he had been at the great house.

'It is high time you should,' he continued, rubbing his hands cheerfully; 'for the friends are falling sadly off. We want you there, or somebody like you, Haldane. How we are to meet the expenses next year is more than I can say.'

A dead silence followed. Miss Jane, who had been arranging Stephen's books in the corner, stopped short to listen. Mrs Haldane put on her spectacles to hear the better; and poor Mr Truston, dragged without knowing it into the midst of such a scene, looked around him as if begging everybody's forbearance, and rubbed his hands faintly too.

'The fact is, my dear Haldane—it was but for five years—and now we've come to the end of the second five—and you have been making money by your books, people say——'

It was some little time before Stephen could answer, his lips had grown so dry. 'I think—I know—what you mean,' he said.

'Yes. ' I am afraid that is how it must be. Not with my will—not with my will,' said Mr Baldwin; 'but then you see people say you have been making money by your books.'

'He has made sixteen pounds in two years,' said Miss Jane.

Stephen held up his hand hurriedly. 'I know how it must be,' he said. 'Everybody's patience, of course, must give way at last.'

'Yes—that is just about how it is.'

There was very little more said. Mr Baldwin picked up his hat, which he had put on the floor, and begged the minister to give him his arm again. He shook hands very affectionately with everybody; he gave them, as it were, his blessing. They all bore it as people ought to bear a great shock, with pale faces, without any profane levity. 'They take it very well,' he said, as he went out. 'They are good people. Oh, my dear Truston, I don't know a greater sign of the difference

between the children of this world and the children of the light than the way in which they receive a sudden blow.'

He had given two such blows within an hour; he had a right to speak. And in both cases, different as was the mien of the sufferers, the blow itself had all the appearance of a *coup de grâce*. It had not occurred to Mr Baldwin, when he made that classification, that it was his own child whom he had taken as the type of the children of wrath. He thought of it in the railway, going home; and it troubled him. 'Poor Clara! her brain must be affected,' he thought; he had never heard of anything so heathenish as her boldly-professed determination to give a ball, if need was, on the eve of her husband's bankruptcy, and for the reason that they would have a right to it. It horrified him a great deal more than if she had risked somebody else's money in trade and lost. Poor Clara! what might be coming upon her? But, anyhow, he reflected, she had her settlement, and that she was a child of many prayers.

Mrs Burton said nothing of this stroke which had fallen upon her. It made her fears into certainty, and she took certain steps accordingly, but told nobody. In Stephen's room at the Gatehouse there was silence, too, all the weary afternoon.

They had lost the half of their living at a blow. The disaster was too great, too sudden and overwhelming, to be spoken of; and to one of them, to him who was helpless and could do nothing, it tasted like the very bitterness of death.

## CHAPTER III.

Mrs Burton said nothing about her troubles to any one: she avoided rather than sought confidential intercourse with her husband. She formed her plans and declined to receive any further information on the subject. Her argument to herself was that no one could have any right to suppose she knew. When the crash came, if come it must, she would be universally considered the first of the victims. The very fact of her entertainments and splendours would be so much evidence that she knew nothing about it—and indeed what did she know? her own fears and suspicions, her father's hints of coming trouble—nothing more. Her husband had never said a warning word to her which betrayed alarm or anxiety. She stood on the verge of the precipice, which she felt a moral certainty was before her, and made her arrangements like a queen in the

plenitude of her power. 'There will be enough to bear,' she repeated to herself. She called all the county about her in these spring months before people had as yet gone to town. She made Dura blaze with lights and echo with music: she filled it full of guests. She made her entertainments on so grand a scale, that everything that had hitherto been known there was thrown into the shade. The excitement, so far as excitement could penetrate into her steady little soul, sustained and kept her up; or at least the occupation did, and the thousand arrangements, big and little, which were necessary. If her husband was ever tempted to seek her sympathy in these strange, wild, brilliant days which passed like a dream—if the burden on his shoulders ever so bowed the man down that he would have been glad to lean it upon hers, it is impossible to say; he looked at her sometimes wondering what was in her mind; but he was not capable of understanding that clear, determined intelligence. He thought she had got fairly into the whirl of mad dissipation and enjoyed it. She was playing into his hands, she was doing the best that could be done to veil his tottering steps, and divert public attention from his business misfortunes. He had no more idea why she was doing it, or with what deliberate

conscious steps she was marching forward to meet ruin, than he had of any other incomprehensible wonder in heaven or earth.

The Haldanes made no secret of the distress which had fallen upon them. It was a less loss than the cost of one of Mrs Burton's parties, but it was unspeakable to them who had no way of replacing it. By one of those strange coincidences, however, which occur so often when good people are driven to desperation, Stephen's publisher quite unexpectedly sent him in April a cheque for fifty pounds, the produce of his last book, a book which he had called 'The Window,' and which was a kind of moral of his summer life and thoughts. It was not, he himself thought, a very good book; it was a medley of fine things and poor things, not quite free from that personal twaddle which it is so difficult to keep out of an invalid's or a recluse's view of human affairs. But then the British public is fond of personal twaddle, and like those bits best which the author was most doubtful about. It was a cheap little work, published by one of those firms which are known as religious publishers; and nothing could be more unexpected, more fortunate, more consoling, than this fifty pounds. Mrs Haldane, with a piety which, perhaps, was a little contemptuous of

poor Stephen's powers, spoke of it, with tears in her eyes, as an answer to prayer; while Miss Jane, who was proud of her brother, tried to apportion the credit, half to Providence and half to Stephen; but anyhow it made up the lost allowance for the current year, and gave the poor souls time to breathe.

All this time the idea which had come into Dr Maurice's mind on the day of the picnic in October had been slowly germinating. He was not a man whose projects ripened quickly, and this was a project so delicate that it took him a long time to get it fully matured, and to accustom himself to it. It had come to full perfection in his mind when in the end of April Mrs Drummond received a letter from him, inviting Norah and herself to go to his house for a few days, to see the exhibitions and other shows which belong to that period of the year. This was an invitation which thrilled Norah's soul within her. She was at a very critical moment of her life. She had lost the honest young lover of her childhood, the boy whose love and service had grown so habitual to her that nobody but Norah knew how dreary the winter had been without him; and she was at present exposed to the full force of attentions much more close, much more subtle and skilful,

but perhaps not so honest and faithful. Norah had exchanged the devotion of a young man who loved her as his own soul, for the intoxicating homage of a man who was very much in love with her, but who knew that his prospects would be deeply injured, and his position compromised, did he win the girl whom he wooed with all the fascinations of a hero in a romance, and all the persistency of a mind set upon having its own way. His whole soul was set upon winning her; but what to do afterwards was not so clear, and Rivers, like many another adventurer in love and in war, left the morrow to provide for itself. But Norah was very reluctant to be won. Sometimes, indeed, capitulation seemed very near at hand, but then her lively little temper would rise up again, or some hidden susceptibility would be touched, or the girl's independent soul would rise in arms against the thought of being subjugated like a young woman in a book by this 'novel-hero!' What were his dark eyes, his speaking glances, his skilful inference of a devotion above words, to her? Had not she read about such wiles a thousand times? And was it not an understood rule that the real hero, the true lover, the first of men, was never this bewitching personage, but the plainer, ruder man in the background,

with perhaps a big nose, who was not very lovely to look upon? These thoughts contended in Norah with the fascinations of him whom she began to think of as the *contre-heros*. The invitation to London was doubly welcome to her, insomuch that it interrupted this current of thought and gave her something new to think about. She was fond of Dr Maurice: she had not been in town since she was a child: she wanted to see the parks and the pictures, and all the stir and tumult of life. For all these six years, though Dura was so near town, the mother and daughter had never been in London. And it looked so bright to Norah, bright with all the associations of her childhood, and full of an interest which no other place could ever have in its associations with the terrible event which ended her childhood. 'You will go, mamma?' she said, wistfully reading the letter a second time over her mother's shoulder. And Helen, who felt the need of an interruption and something new to think of as much as her child did, answered 'Yes.'

Dr Maurice was more excited about the approaching event than they were, though he had to take no thought about his wardrobe, and they had to take a great deal of thought; the question of Norah's frocks was nothing to his fussiness and

agitation about the ladies' rooms and all the arrangements for their comfort. He invited an old aunt who lived near to come and stay with him for the time of the Drummonds' visit, a precaution which seemed to her, as it seems to me, quite unnecessary. I do not think Helen would have had the least hesitation in going to his house at her age, though there had been no chaperon. It was he who wanted the chaperon: he was quite coy and bashful about the business altogether: and the old aunt, who was a sharp old lady, was not only much amused, but had her suspicions aroused. In the afternoon, before his visitors arrived, he was particularly fidgety. 'If you want to go out, Henry, I will receive your guests,' the old lady said, not without a chuckle of suppressed amusement; 'probably they will only arrive in time to get dressed before dinner. You may leave them to me.'

'You are very kind,' said the doctor, but he did not go away. He walked from one end of the big drawing-room to the other, and looked at himself in the mirror between the windows, and the mirror over the mantelpiece. And then he took up his position before the fireplace, where of course there was nothing but cut paper. 'How absurd are all the relations between men and women,' he

said, 'and how is it that I cannot ask my friend's widow, a woman in middle life, to come to my house—without——'

'Without having me?' said the aunt. 'My dear Henry, I have told you before—I think you could. I have no patience with the freedom of the present day in respect to young people, but, so far as this goes, I think you are too particular—I am sure you could——'

'You must allow me to be the best judge, aunt, of a matter that concerns myself,' said Dr Maurice, with gentle severity. 'I know very well what would happen: there would be all sorts of rumours and reports. People might not, perhaps, say there was anything absolutely wrong between us—Pray may I ask what you are laughing at?'

For the old lady had interrupted him by a low laugh, which it was beyond her power to keep in.

'Nothing, my dear, nothing,' she said, in a little alarm. 'I am sure I beg your pardon, Henry. I had no idea you were so sensitive. How old may this lady be?'

'The question is not about this lady, my dear aunt,' he answered in the dogmatic impatient tone which was so unlike him, 'but about any lady. It might happen to be a comfort to me to have a housekeeper I could rely on. It would be a great

pleasure to be able to contribute to the comfort of Robert Drummond's family, poor fellow. But I dare not. I know the arrangement would no sooner be made than the world would say all sorts of things. How old is Mrs Drummond? She was under twenty when they were married, I know—and poor Drummond was about my own age. That is, let me see, how long ago? Norah is about eighteen, between eighteen and nineteen. Her mother must be nearly, if not quite, forty, I should think——'

'Then, my dear Henry——' began the old lady.

'Why, here they are!' he said, rushing to the window. But it was only a cab next door, or over the way. He went back to his position with a little flush upon his middle-aged countenance. 'My dear aunt,' he resumed, with a slight tremor in his voice, 'it is not a matter that can be discussed, I assure you. I know what would happen; and I know that poor Helen—I mean Mrs Drummond — would never submit to anything that would compromise her as Norah's mother. Even if she were not very sensitive on her own account, as women generally are, as Norah's mother of course she requires to be doubly careful. And here am I, the oldest friend they have, as fond of

that child as if she were my own, and prevented by an absurd punctilio from taking them into my house, and doing my best to make her happy! As I said before, the relations between men and women are the most ridiculous things in the world.'

'But I do think, Henry, you make too much of the difficulties,' said the old aunt, busying herself with her work, and not venturing to say more.

'You must allow me to be the best judge,' he said, with a mixture of irritation and superiority. 'You may know the gossip of the drawing-rooms, which is bad enough, I don't doubt; but I know what *men* say.'

'Oh, then, indeed, my poor Henry,' said the old lady, with vivacity, eagerly seizing the opportunity to have one shot on her own side, 'I can only pray, Good Lord deliver you; for everybody knows there never was a bad piece of scandal yet, but it was a man that set it on foot.'

Aunt Mary thus had the last word, and retired with flying colours and in very high feather from the conflict; for at this moment the Drummonds arrived, and Dr Maurice rushed downstairs to meet them. The old aunt was a personage very well worth knowing, though she has very little to do with this history, and it was with

mingled curiosity and amusement that she watched for the entrance of Mrs Drummond and her daughter. It would be a very wise step for him anyhow to marry, she thought. The Maurice family were very well off, and there were not many young offshoots of the race to contend for the doctor's money. Was he contemplating the idea of a wife young enough to be his daughter? or had he really the good sense to think of a woman about his own age? Aunt Mary, though she was a woman herself, and quite ready to stand up for her own side, considered Helen Drummond, under forty, as about his own age, though he was over fifty. But as the question went through her mind, she shook her head. She knew a great many men who had made fools of themselves by marrying, or wishing to marry, the girl young enough to be their daughter; but the other class who had the good sense, &c., were very rare indeed.

There was, however, very little light thrown upon the subject by Aunt Mary's observations that evening. Mrs Drummond was very grave, almost sad; for the associations of the house were all melancholy ones, and her last visit to it came back very closely into her memory as she entered one room—the great old gloomy dining-room—where Norah, a child, had been placed by Dr

Maurice's side at table on that memorable occasion, while she, unable even to make a pretence of eating, sat and looked on. She could not go back now into the state which her mind had been in on that occasion. Everything was calmed and stilled, nay, chilled by this long interval. She could think of her Robert without the sinking of the heart—the sense of hopeless loneliness—which had moved her then. The wound had closed up: the blank, if it had not closed up, had acquired all the calmness of a long-recognized fact. She had made up her mind long since that the happiness which she could not then consent to part with, was over for her. That is the great secret of what is called resignation: to consent and agree that what you have been in the habit of calling happiness is done with; that you must be content to fill its place with something else, something less. Helen had come to this. She no longer looked for it—no longer thought of it. It was over for her, as her youth was over. Her heart was tried, not by active sorrow, but by a heavy sense of past pain; but that did not hinder her from taking her part in the conversation—from smiling at Norah's sallies, at her enthusiasm, at all the height of her delight in the pleasure Dr Maurice promised her. Norah was the principal

figure in the scene. She was surrounded on every side by that atmosphere of fond partiality in which the flowers of youth are most ready to unfold themselves. Dr Maurice was even fonder than her mother, and more indulgent; for Helen had the jealous eye which marks imperfections, and that intolerant and sovereign love which cannot put up with a flaw or a speck in those it cherishes. To Dr Maurice the specks and flaws were beauties. Norah led the conversation, was gay for every one, talked for every one. And the old aunt laughed within herself, and shook her head: 'He cannot keep his eyes off her; he cannot see anything but perfection in her,—but she is a mere excited child, and her mother is a beautiful woman,' said Aunt Mary to herself; 'man's taste and woman's, it is to be supposed, will be different to the end of time.' But after she had made this observation, the old lady was struck by the caressing, fatherly ways of her nephew towards this child. He would smooth her hair when he passed by her; would take her hand into his, unconsciously, and pat it; would lay his hand upon her shoulder; none of which things he would have ventured to do had he meant to present himself to Norah as her lover. He even kissed her cheek, when she said good-

night, with uncontrollable fondness, yet unmistakable composure. What did the man mean?

He had sketched out a very pretty programme for them for their three days. Next evening they were to go to the theatre; the next again, to an opera. Norah could not walk, she danced as she went up-stairs. 'The only thing is, will my dress do?' she said, as she hung about her mother in the pretty fresh room, new-prepared, and hung with bright chintz, in which Mrs Drummond was lodged. Could it have been done on purpose? For certainly the other rooms in the house still retained their dark old furniture; dark-coloured, highly-polished mahogany, with deep red and green damask curtains—centuries old, as Norah thought. Mrs Drummond was surprised, too, at the aspect of this room. She was more than surprised, she was almost offended, by the presence of the old aunt as chaperon. 'Does the man think I am such a fool as to be afraid of him?' she wondered, with a frown and a smile, but gave herself up to Norah's pleasure, rejoicing to see that the theatre and the opera were strong enough to defeat for the moment and drive from the field both Cyril and Ned. And the next day, and the next, passed like days of

paradise to Norah. She drove about in Dr Maurice's carriage, and laughed at her own grandeur, and enjoyed it. She called perpetually to her mother to notice ladies walking who were like themselves. 'That is what you and I should be doing, if it were not for this old darling of a doctor! trudging along in the sun, getting hot and red——'

'But think, you little sybarite, that is what we shall be doing to-morrow,' cried Helen, half amused and half afraid.

'No, the day after to-morrow,' said Norah, 'and then it will be delightful. We can look at the people in the carriages, and say, "We are as good as you;—we looked down upon you yesterday." And, mamma, we are going to the opera to-night!'

'You silly child,' Helen said. But to eyes that danced so, and cheeks that glowed so, what could any mother say?

It was the after-piece after that opera, however, which was what neither mother nor daughter had calculated upon, but which, no doubt, was the special cause of their invitation, and of the new chintz in the bedrooms, and of all the expense Dr Maurice had been at. Norah was tired when they got home. She had almost over-enjoyed

herself. She chatted so that no one could say a word. Her cheeks were blazing with excitement. When the two elder people could get a hearing, they sent her off to bed, though she protested she had not said half she had to say. 'Save it up for to-morrow,' said Dr Maurice, 'and run off and put yourself to bed, or I shall have you ill on my hands. Mrs Drummond, send her away.'

'Go, Norah, dear, you are tired,' said Helen.

Norah stood protesting, with her pretty white cloak hanging about her; her rose-ribbons a little in disorder; her eyes like two sunbeams. How fondly her old friend looked at her; with what proud, tender, adoring, fatherly admiration! If Aunt Mary had not been away in bed, then at least she must have divined. Dr Maurice lit her candle and took her to the door. He stooped down suddenly to her ear and whispered, 'I have something to say to your mother.' Norah could not have explained the sensation that came over her. She grew chill to her very fingers' ends, and gave a wondering glance at him, then accepted the candle without a word, and went away. The wonder was still in her eyes when she got upstairs, and looked at herself in the glass. Instead of throwing off her cloak to see how she looked, as is a girl's first impulse, she stared

blankly into the glass, and could see nothing but that surprise. What could he be going to talk about? What would her mother say?

Helen had risen to follow her daughter, but Dr Maurice came back, having closed the door carefully, and placed a chair for her. 'Mrs Drummond, can you give me ten minutes? I have something to say to you,' he said.

'Surely,' said Helen; and she took her seat, somewhat surprised; but not half so much surprised as Norah was, nor, indeed, so much as Dr Maurice was, now that matters had finally come to a crisis, to find himself in such an extraordinary position. Helen ran lightly over in her mind a number of subjects on which he might be going to speak to her; but the real subject never entered her thoughts. He did not sit down, though he had given her a chair. He moved about uneasily in front of her, changing his attitude a dozen times in a minute, and clearing his throat. 'He is going to offer me money for Norah,' was Helen's thought.

'Mrs Drummond,' he said—and his beginning confirmed her in her idea—'I am not a—marrying man, as you know. I am—past the age—when men think of such things. I am on the shady side of fifty, though not very far gone; and you are—about forty, I suppose?'

'Thirty-nine,' said Helen, with more and more surprise, and yet with the natural reluctance of a woman to have a year unjustly added to her age.

'Well, well, it is very much the same thing. I never was in love that I know of, at least not since;—and—and—that sort of thing, of course, is over for—you.'

'Dr Maurice, what do you mean?' cried Helen in dismay.

'Well, it is not very hard to guess,' he said doggedly. 'I mean that you are past the love-business, you know, and I—never came to it, so to speak. Look here, Helen Drummond, why shouldn't you and I, if it comes to that—marry? If I durst do it I'd ask you to come and live here, and let Norah be child to both of us, without any nonsense between you and me. But that can't be done, as you will easily perceive. Now, I am sure we could put up with one another as well as most people, and we have one strong bond between us in Norah—and—I could give her everything she wishes for. I could and I would provide for her when I die. You are not one to want pretences made to you, or think much of a sacrifice for your child's sake. I am not so vain but to allow that it might be a sacrifice—to us both.'

'Dr Maurice,' said Helen, half laughing, half sobbing, 'if this is a joke——'

'Joke! am I in the way of making such jokes? Why, it has cost me six months to think this joke out. There is no relaxation of the necessary bonds that I would not be ready to allow. You know the house and my position, and everything I could offer. As for settlements, and all business of that kind——'

'Hush,' she said. 'Stop!' She rose up and held out her hand to him. There were tears in her eyes; but there was also a smile on her face, and a blush which went and came as she spoke. 'Dr Maurice,' she said, 'don't think I cannot appreciate the pure and true friendship for Robert and me——'

'Just so, just so!' he interposed, nodding his head; he put his other hand on hers, and patted it as he had patted Norah's, but he did not again look her in the face. The elderly bachelor had grown shy—he did not know why; the most curious sensation, a feeling quite unknown to him was creeping about the region of his heart.

'And the love for Norah——' resumed Helen.

'Just so, just so.'

'Which have made you think of this. But—but—but——' She stopped; she had been run-

ning to the side of tears, when suddenly she changed her mind. 'But I think it is all a mistake! I am quite ready to come and stay with you, to keep house for you, to let you have Norah's company, when you like to ask us. I don't want any chaperon. Your poor, dear, good aunt! Dr Maurice,' cried Helen, her voice rising into a hysterical laugh, 'I assure you it is all a mistake.'

He let her hand drop out of his. He turned away from her with a shrug of his shoulders. He walked to the table and screwed up the moderator lamp, which had run down. Then he came back to his former position and said, 'I am much more in the world than you are; you will permit me to consider myself the best judge in this case. It is not a mistake. And I have no answer from you to my proposal as yet.'

Then Helen's strength gave way. The more serious view which she had thrust from her, which she had rejected as too solemn, came back. The blush vanished from her face, and so did the smile. 'You were his friend,' she said with quivering lips. 'You loved him as much as any one could, except me. Have you forgotten you are speaking to—Robert's wife?'

'Good lord!' cried Dr Maurice with sudden terror; 'but he is dead.'

'Yes, he is dead; but I do not see what difference that makes; when a woman has once been a man's wife, she is so always. If there is any other world at all, she must be so always. I hate the very name of widow!' cried Helen vehemently, with the tears glittering in her eyes. 'I abhor it; I don't believe in it. I am his wife!'

Dr Maurice was a man who had always held himself to be invincible to romantic or high-flown feelings. But somehow he was startled by this view of the question. It had not occurred to him before; for the moment it staggered him, so that he had to pause and think it over. Then he said, 'Nonsense!' abruptly. 'Mrs Drummond, I cannot think that such a view as this is worth a moment's consideration; it is against both reason and common sense.'

She did not make any reply; she made a movement of her hand, deprecating, expostulating, but she would not say any more.

'And Scripture, too,' said Dr Maurice triumphantly, 'it is quite against Scripture.' Then he remembered that this was not simply an argument in which he was getting the better, but a most practical question. 'If it is disagreeable to you, it is a different matter,' he said; 'but I had

hoped, with all the allowances I was ready to make, and for Norah's sake——'

'It is not disagreeable, Dr Maurice; it is simply impossible, and must always be so,' she said.

Then there was another silence, and the two stood opposite to each other, not looking at each other, longing both for something to free them. 'In that case I suppose there had better be no more words on the subject,' he said, turning half away.

'Except thanks,' she cried; 'thanks for the most generous thoughts, the truest friendship. I will never forget——'

'I do not know how far it was generous,' he said moodily, and he got another candle and lighted it for her, as he had done for Norah; 'and the sooner you forget the better. Good night.'

Good night! When he looked round the vacant room a moment after, and felt himself alone, it seemed to Dr Maurice as if he had been dreaming. He must have fallen down suddenly from some height or other—fallen heavily and bruised himself, he thought—and so woke up out of an odd delusion quite unlike him, which had arisen he could not tell how. It was a very

curious sensation. He felt sore and downcast, sadly disappointed and humbled in his own conceit. It had not even occurred to him that the matter might end in this way. He gave a long sigh, and said aloud, 'Perhaps it is quite as well it has ended so. Probably we should not have liked it had we tried it,' and then went up to his lonely chamber, hearing, as he thought, his step echo over all the vacant house. Yes, it was a vacant house. He had chosen that it should be years ago, and yet the feeling now was dreary to him, and it would never be anything but vacant for all the rest of his life.

## CHAPTER IV.

It was difficult for the two who had thus parted at night to meet again at the breakfast-table next morning without any sign of that encounter, before the sharp eyes of Aunt Mary, and Norah's youthful, vivacious powers of observation. Dr Maurice was the one who found the ordeal most hard. He was sullen, and had a headache, and talked very little, not feeling able for it. 'You are bilious, Henry; that is what it is,' the aunt said. But though he was over fifty, and prided himself on his now utterly prosaic character, the doctor felt wounded by such an explanation. He did not venture to glance at Helen, even when he shook hands with her; though he had a lurking curiosity within him to see how she looked, whether triumphant or sympathetic. He knew that he ought to have been gay and full of talk, to put the best face possible upon his down-

fall; but he did not feel able to do it; not to feel sore, not to feel small, and miserable, and disappointed, was beyond his powers. Helen was not gay either, nor at all triumphant; she felt the embarrassment of the position as much as he did; but in these cases it is the woman who generally has her wits most about her; and Mrs Drummond, who was conscious also of her child's jealous inspection, talked rather more than usual. Norah had demanded to know what the doctor had to say on the previous night; a certain dread was in her mind. She had felt that something was coming, something that threatened the peace of the world. 'What did he say to you, mamma?' she had asked anxiously. 'Nothing of importance,' Helen had replied. But Norah knew better; and all that bright May morning while the sunshine shone out of doors, even though it was in London, and tempted the country girl abroad, she kept by her mother's side and watched her with suspicious eyes. Had Norah known the real state of affairs, her shame and indignation would have known no bounds; but Helen made so great an effort to dismiss all consciousness from her face and tone, that the child was balked at last, and retired from the field. Aunt Mary, who had experience to back her, saw more clearly. Whatever

had been going to happen had happened, she perceived, and had not been successful. Thus they all breakfasted, watching each other, Helen being the only one who knew everything and betrayed nothing. After breakfast they were going to the Exhibition. It had been deferred to this day, which was to be their last.

'I do not think I will go,' said Dr Maurice; and then he caught Norah's look full of disappointment, which was sweet to him. '*You* want me, do you, child?' he asked. There was a certain ludicrous pathos in the emphasis which was almost too much for Helen's gravity, though, indeed, laughter was little in her thoughts.

'Of course I want you,' said Norah; 'and so does mamma. Fancy sending us away to wander about London by ourselves! That was not what you invited us for, surely, Dr Maurice? And then after the pictures, let us have another splendid drive in the carriage, and despise all the people who are walking! It will be the last time. You rich people, you have not half the pleasure you might have in being rich. I suppose, now, when you see out of the carriage window somebody you know walking, it does not make you proud?'

'I don't think it does,' said the doctor with a smile.

'That is because you are hardened to it,' said Norah. 'You can have it whenever you please; but as for me, I am as proud——'

'I wish you had it always, my dear,' said Dr Maurice; and this time his tone was almost lachrymose. It was so hard-hearted of Helen to deny her child these pleasures and advantages, all to be purchased at the rate of a small personal sacrifice on her part—a sacrifice such as he himself was quite ready to make.

'Oh, I should not mind that,' cried Norah; if I had it always I should get hardened to it too. should not mind; most likely then I should prefer walking, and think carriages only fit for old ladies. Didn't you say that one meets everybody at the Academy, mamma?'

'A great many people, Norah.'

'I wonder whom we shall meet,' said the girl; and a sudden blush floated over her face. Helen looked at her with some anxiety. She did not know what impression Cyril Rivers might have made on Norah's heart. Was it him she was thinking of? Mrs Drummond herself wondered, too, a little. She was half afraid of the old friends she might see there. But then she reflected to herself dreamily, that life goes very quickly in London, that six years was a long time, and that

her old friends might have forgotten her. How changed her own feelings were! She had never been fond of painters, her husband's brothers-in-arms. Now the least notable of them, the most painty, the most slovenly, would look somehow like a shadow of Robert. Should she see any of those old faces? Whom should she meet? Norah's light question moved many echoes of which the child knew nothing; and it was to be answered in a way of which neither of them dreamed.

The mere entrance into those well-known rooms had an indescribable effect upon Helen. How it all rushed back upon her, the old life! The pilgrimages up those steps, the progress through the crowd to that special spot where one picture was hung; the anxiety to see how it looked—if there was anything near that 'killed' it in colour, or threw it into the shade in power; her own private hope, never expressed to any one, that it might 'come better' in the new place. Dr Maurice stalked along by her side, but he did not say anything to her; and for her part, she could not speak—her heart and her eyes were full. She could only see the other people's pictures glimmering as through a mist. It seemed so strange to her, almost humiliating, that there was nothing of

her own to go to—nothing to make a centre to this gallery, which had relapsed into pure art, without any personal interest in it. By-and-by, when the first shock had worn off, she began to be able to see what was on the walls, and to come back to her present circumstances. So many names were new to her in those six years; so many that she once knew had crept out of sight into corners and behind doorways. She had begun to get absorbed in the sight, which was so much more to her than to most people, when Mr Rivers came up to them. He had known they were to be in town; he had seen them at the opera the previous night, and had found out a good deal about their plans. But London was different from Dura; and he had not ventured to offer his attentions before the eyes of all the world, and all the cousins and connections and friends who might have come to a knowledge of the fact that an unknown pretty face had attracted his homage. But of a morning, at the Royal Academy, he felt himself pretty safe; there every one is liable to meet some friend from the country, and the most watchful eyes of society are not on the alert at early hours. He came to them now with eager salutations.

'I tried hard to get at you at the opera last

night,' he said, putting himself by Norah's side; 'but I was with my own people, and I could not get away.'

'Were you at the opera last night?' said Norah, with not half the surprise he anticipated; for she was not aware of the facilities of locomotion in such places, nor that he might have gone to her had he so desired; and besides, she had seen no one, being intent upon the stage. Yet there was a furtive look about him now, a glance round now and then, to see who was near them, which startled her. She could not make out what it meant.

'Come, and I will show you the best pictures,' he said; and he took her catalogue from her hand and pointed out to her which must be looked at first.

They made a pretty group as they stood thus,—Norah looking up with her sunshiny eyes, and he stooping over her, bending down till his silky black beard almost touched her hair. She little, and he tall—she full of vivacity, light, and sunshine; he somewhat quiet, languishing, Byronic in his beauty. Norah was not such a perfect contrast to him as Clara was—Rubens to the Byron; but her naturalness, the bright, glowing intelligence and spirit about her—the daylight sweetness of her face, with which soul had as much to do as

feature, contrasted still more distinctly with the semi-artificiality of the hero. For even granting that he was a little artificial, he was a real hero all the same; his handsomeness and air of good society were unmistakable, his conversation was passable; he knew the thousand things which people in society know, and which, whether they understand them or not, they are in the habit of hearing talked about. All these remarks were made, not by Norah, nor by Norah's mother, but by Dr Maurice, who stood by and did not pretend to have any interest in the pictures. And this young fellow was the Honourable Cyril, and would be Lord Rivers. Dr Maurice kept an eye upon him, wondering, as Helen had done, Did he mean anything? what did he mean?

'But there is one above all which I must show you—every one is talking of it,' said Mr Rivers. 'Come this way, Miss Drummond. It is not easy to reach it; there is always such a crowd round it. Dr Maurice, bring Mrs Drummond; it is in the next room. Come this way.'

Norah followed him, thinking of nothing but the pictures; and her mother and Dr Maurice went after them slowly, saying nothing to each other. They had entered the great room, following the younger pair, when some one stepped out of

the crowd and came forward to Helen. He took off his hat and called her by her name—at first doubtfully, then with assurance.

'I thought I could not be mistaken,' he cried, 'and yet it is so long since you have been seen here.'

'I am living in the country,' said Helen. Once more the room swam round her. The new-comer's voice and aspect carried her back, with all the freshness of the first impression, to the studio and its visitors again.

'And you had just been in my mind,' said the painter. 'There is a picture here which reminds us all so strongly of poor dear Drummond. Will you let me take you to it? It is exactly in his style, his best style, with all that tenderness of feeling—It has set us all talking of you and him Indeed, none of his old friends have forgotten him; and this is so strangely like his work——'

'Where is it?—one of his pupils, perhaps,' said Helen. She tried to be very composed, and to show no emotion; but it was so long since she had heard his name, so long since he had been spoken of before her! She felt grateful, as if they had done her a personal service, to think that they talked of Robert still.

'This way,' said the painter; and just then

Norah met her, flying back with her eyes shining, her ribbons flying, wonder and excitement in her face.

Norah seized her mother by the hands, gasping in her haste and emotion. 'Oh, mamma, come; it is our picture,' she cried.

Wondering, Helen went forward. It was the upper end of the room, the place of honour. Whether it was that so many people around her carried her on like a body-guard making her a way through the crowd, or that the crowd itself, moved by that subtle sympathy which sometimes communicates itself to the mass more easily than to individuals, melted before her, as if feeling she had the best right to be there, I cannot tell. But all at once Helen found herself close to the crimson cord which the pressure of the throng had almost broken down, standing before a picture. One picture—was there any other in the place? It was the picture of a face looking up, with two upward-reaching hands, from the bottom of an abyss, full of whirling clouds and vapour. High above this was a bank of heavenly blue, and a white cloud of faintly indistinct spectators, pitiful angel forms, and one visionary figure as of a woman gazing down. But it was the form below in which the interest lay. It was worn and pale,

with the redness of tears about the eyes, the lips pressed closely together, the hands only appealing, held up in a passionate silence. Helen stood still, with eyes that would not believe what they saw. She became unconscious of everything about her, though the people thronged upon her, supporting her, though she did not know. Then she held out her hands wildly, with a cry which rang through the rooms and penetrated every one in them—'Robert!'—and fell at the foot of the picture, which was called 'Dives'—the first work of a nameless painter whom nobody knew.

It would be impossible to describe the tumult and commotion which rose in the room to which everybody hastened from every corner of the exhibition, thronging the doorways and every available corner, and making it impossible for some minutes to remove her. 'A lady fainted! Is that all?' the disappointed spectators cried. They had expected something more exciting than so common, so trifling an occurrence. 'Fortunately,' the newspapers said who related the incident, 'a medical man was present;' and when Helen came to herself, she found Dr Maurice standing over her, with his finger on her pulse. 'It is the heat, and the fatigue—and all that,' he said; and all through the rooms people repeated to each other

that it was the heat, and the dust, and the crowd, and that there was nothing so fatiguing as looking at pictures. 'Both body and mind are kept on the strain, you know,' they said, and immediately thought of luncheon. But Dr Maurice thought of something very different. He did not understand all this commotion about a picture; if his good heart would have let him, he would have tried to think that Helen was 'making a fuss.' As it was he laid this misfortune to the door of women generally, whom there was no understanding; and then, in a parenthesis, allowed that he might himself be to blame. He should not have agitated her, he thought; but added, 'Good Lord, what are women good for, if they have to be kept in a glass-house, and never spoken to? The best thing is to be rid of them, after all.'

I will not attempt to describe what Helen's thoughts were when she came to herself. She would not, dared not betray to any one the impression, which was more than an impression—the conviction that had suddenly come to her. She put up her hand, and silenced Norah, who was beginning, open-mouthed, 'Oh, mamma!' She called the old friend to her, who had attended the group down into the vestibule, and begged him to find out for her exactly who the painter was, and where he was to be heard of; and there she sat, still

abstracted, with a singing in her ears, which she thought was only the rustle of the thoughts that hurried through her brain, until she should be able to go home. It was while they were waiting thus, standing round her, that another event occurred, of which Helen was too much absorbed to take any but the slightest cognizance. She was seated on a bench, still very pale, and unable to move. Dr Maurice was mounting guard over her. Norah stood talking to Mr Rivers on the other side; while meanwhile the stream of the public was flowing past, and new arrivals entering every moment by the swinging doors. Norah had grown very earnest in her talk. 'We have the very same subject at home, the same picture,' she was saying; her eyelashes were dewy with tears, her whole face full of emotion. Her colour went and came as she spoke; she stood looking up to him with a thrill of feeling and meaning about her, such as touch the heart more than beauty. And yet there was no lack of beauty. A lady who had just come in, paused, having her attention attracted to the group, and looked at them all, as she thought she had a right to do. 'The poor lady who fainted,' she heard some one say. But this girl who stood in front had no appearance of fainting. She was all life, and tenderness, and fire. The woman who looked on admired her fresh, sweet

youthfulness, her face, which in its changing colour was like a flower. She admired all these, and made out, with a quick observant eye, that the girl was the daughter of the pale beautiful woman by the wall, and not unworthy of her. And then suddenly, without a pause, she called out, 'Cyril!' Young Rivers started as if a shot had struck him. He rushed to her with tremulous haste. 'Mother! you don't mean to say that you have come here alone?'

'But I do mean it, and I want you to take care of me,' she said, taking his arm at once. 'I meant to come early. We have no time to lose.'

Norah stood surprised, looking at the woman who was Cyril's mother; in a pretty pause of expectation, the blush coming and going on her face, her hand ready to be timidly put out in greeting, her pretty mouth half smiling already, her eyes watching with an interest of which she was not ashamed. Why should she be ashamed of being interested in Cyril's mother? She waited for the approach, the introduction—most likely the elder woman's gracious greeting. 'For she must have heard of me too,' Norah thought. She cast down her eyes, pleasantly abashed; for Lady Rivers was certainly looking at her. When she looked up again, in wonder that she was not spoken to, Cyril was on the stair with his mother, going up.

He was looking back anxiously, waving his hand to her from behind Lady Rivers. He had a beseeching look in his eyes, his face looked miserable across his mother's shoulders, but—he was gone. Norah looked round her stupefied. Had anything happened?—was she dreaming? And then the blood rushed to her face in a crimson flush of pride and shame.

She bore this blow alone, without even her mother to share and soften it; and the child staggered under it for the moment. She grew as pale as Helen herself after that one flash. When the carriage came to the door, two women, marble-white, stepped into it. Dr Maurice had not the heart to go with them; he would walk home, he said. And Norah looked out of the window, as she had so joyfully anticipated doing in her happiness and levity, but not to despise the people who walked. The only thought of which she was capable was—Is everybody like that? Do people behave so naturally? Is it the way of the world?

This is what they met at the Academy, where they went so lightly, not knowing. The name of the painter of the 'Dives' reached them that same night; it was not in the catalogue. His name was John Sinclair, Thirty-fifth Avenue, New York.

## CHAPTER V.

'You must be dreaming,' cried Dr Maurice with energy. 'You must be dreaming! With my—folly—and other things—you have got into a nervous state.'

'I am not dreaming,' she said very quietly. There was no appearance of excitement about her. She sat with her hands clasped tightly together, and her eyes wandering into the unknown, into the vacant air before her. And her mind had got possession of one burden, and went over and over it, repeating within herself, 'John Sinclair, Thirty-fifth Avenue, New York.'

'I will show you the same picture,' she went on. 'The very same, line for line. It was the last he ever did. And in his letter he spoke of Dives looking up—— John Sinclair, Thirty-fifth Avenue, New York!'

'Helen, Helen!' said Dr Maurice with a look

of pity. He had never called her anything but Mrs Drummond till the evening before, and now the other seemed so natural; for, in fact, she did not even notice what he called her. 'How easy is it to account for all this! Some one else must have seen the sketch, who was impressed by it as much as you were, and who knew the artist was dead, and could never claim his property. How easy to see how it may have been done, especially by a smart Yankee abroad.'

She shook her head without a word, with a faint smile; argument made no difference to her. She was sure; and what did it matter what any one said?

'Then I will tell you what I will do,' he said. 'I have some friends in New York. I will have inquiries made instantly about John Sinclair. Indeed it is quite possible some one may know him here. I shall set every kind of inquiry on foot to-morrow, to satisfy you. I warn you nothing will come of it—nothing would make me believe such a thing; but still, to prevent you taking any rash steps——'

'I will take no rash steps,' she said. 'I will do nothing. I will wait till—I hear.'

'Why this is madness,' he said. And then all at once a cold shudder passed over him, and he

said to himself, 'Good God! what if she had not refused last night!'

But the very fact that she had refused was a kind of guarantee that there was nothing in this wild idea of hers. Had there been anything in it, of course she would have accepted, and all sorts of horrors would have ensued. Such was Dr Maurice's opinion of Providence, and the opinion of many other judicious people. The fact that a sudden re-appearance would do no harm made it so much less likely that there would be any re-appearance. He tried hard to dismiss the idea altogether from his mind. It was not a comfortable idea. It is against all the traditions, all the prejudices of life, that a man should come back from the dead. A wild, despairing Dives might wish for it, or a mourner half frantic with excess of sorrow; but to the ordinary looker-on the idea is so strange as to be painful. Dr Maurice had a true affection for Robert Drummond; but he could not help feeling that it would be out of all character, out of harmony, almost an offence upon decency, that he should not be dead.

It was curious, however, what an effect this fancy of Helen's had in clearing away the cloud of embarrassment which had naturally fallen between her and him. All that produced that cloud

had evidently disappeared from her mind. She remembered it no more. It was not that she had thrust it away of set will and purpose, but that without any effort it had disappeared. This was, it is true, somewhat humiliating to Dr Maurice; but it was very convenient for all the purposes of life that it should be so. And she sat with him now and discussed the matter, abstracted in the great excitement which had taken possession of her, yet calmed by it, without a recollection that anything had ever passed between them which could confuse their intercourse. This unconsciousness, I say, was humiliating in one sense, though in another it was a relief, to the man who did not forget; but it confused him while it set Helen at her ease. It was so extraordinary to realise what was the state of affairs yesterday, and what to-day —to enter into so new and wonderful a region of possibilities, after having lived so long in quite another; for, to be sure, Helen had only known of Dr Maurice's project as regarded herself since last night; whereas, he had known it for six months, and during all that time had been accustoming himself to it, and now had to make a mental spring as far away from it as possible—a kind of gymnastic exercise which has a very bewildering effect upon an ordinary mind.

It was a relief to all the party when the Drummonds went home next morning; except, perhaps, to the old aunt, who had grown interested in the human drama thus unexpectedly produced before her, and who would have liked to see it out. The mother and daughter were glad to go home; and yet how life had changed to them in these three days! It had given to Helen the glow of a wild, incomprehensible hope, a something supernatural, mixed with terror and wonder, and a hundred conflicting emotions; while to Norah it had taken the romance out of life. To contemplate life without romance is hard upon a girl; to have a peep, as it were, behind the scenes, and see the gold of fairy-land corroding itself into slates, and the beauty into dust and ashes. Such a revolution chills one to the very soul. It is almost worse than the positive heartbreak of disappointed love, for that has a warm admixture of excitement, and is supported by the very sharpness of its own suffering; whereas in Norah's pain there was but disenchantment and angry humiliation, and that horrible sense that the new light was true and the other false, which takes all courage from the heart. She had told her mother, and Helen had been very indignant, but not so wroth as her daughter. 'Lady Rivers might have no time to wait—she

might have wanted him for something urgent—there might be something to explain,' Helen said; but as for Norah, she felt that no explanation was possible. For months past this man had been making a show of his devotion to her. He had done everything except ask her in words to be his wife. He had been as her shadow, whenever he could come to Dura, and his visits had been so frequent that it was very evident he had seized every opportunity to come: yet the moment his mother appeared on the scene, the woman whom in all the world he ought to have most wished to attach to the girl whom he loved, he had left her with shame and embarrassment—escaped from her without even the politeness of a leave-taking. Norah had wondered whether she cared for him in the old days; she had asked herself shyly, as girls do, whether the little flutter of her heart at his appearance could possibly mean that sacredest, most wonderful and fascinating of mysteries—love? Sometimes she had been disposed to believe it did: and then again she had surprised herself in the midst of a sudden longing for poor Ned with his big nose, and had blushed and asked herself angrily, was the one compatible with the other? In short, she had not known what to make of her own feelings; for she was not experienced enough

to be able to tell the difference—a difference which sometimes puzzles the wisest—between the effect produced by gratified vanity, and pleasure in the love of another, and that which springs from love itself. But she was in no doubt about the anger, the mortification, the indignant shame with which her whole nature rose up against the man who had dared to be ashamed of her. Of this there could be no explanation. She said to herself that she hoped he would not come again or attempt to make any explanation, and then she resented bitterly the fact that he did not come. She had made up her mind what she would say, how she would crush him with quiet scorn, and wonder at his apologies. 'Why should you apologise, Mr Rivers? I had no wish to be introduced to your mother,' she meant to say; but as day after day passed, and he gave her no opportunity of saying this, Norah's thoughts grew more bitter, more fiery than ever. And life was dull without this excitement in it. The weather was bright, and the season sweet, and I suppose she had her share of rational pleasure as in other seasons; but to her own consciousness Norah was bitterly ill-used, insomuch as she had not an opportunity to tell, or at least to show Cyril Rivers what she thought of him. It had been an immediate comfort to her after the

affront he had put upon her, that she would have this in her power.

The change that had come upon the lives of the two ladies in the Gatehouse was, however, scarcely apparent to their little world. Norah was a little out of temper, fitful, and ready to take offence, the Daltons at the Rectory thought; and Mrs Drummond was more silent than usual, and had an absorbed look in her eyes, a look of abstraction for which it was difficult to account. But this was all that was apparent outside. Perhaps Mr Rivers was a little longer than usual in visiting Dura; he had not been there for ten days, and Katie Dalton wondered audibly what had become of him. But nobody except Norah supposed for a moment that his connection with Dura was to be broken off in this sudden way. And everything else went on as usual. If Mrs Drummond was less frequently visible, no one remarked it much. Norah would run over and ask Katie to walk with her, on the plea that 'mamma has a headache,' and Mrs Dalton would gather her work together, and cross the road in the sunshine and 'sit with' the sufferer. But the only consequence of this visit would be that the blinds would be drawn down over the three windows in front, Mrs Dalton having an idea that light was bad for a head-

ache, and that when she returned she would tell her eldest daughter that poor dear Mrs Drummond was very poorly, and very anxious for news of a friend whom she had not heard of for years.

And the picture of Dives, which had been hung in a sacred corner, where Helen said her prayers, was brought out, and placed in the full light of day. It was even for a time brought down-stairs, while the first glow of novel hope and wonder lasted, and placed in the drawing-room, where everybody who saw it wondered at it. It was not so well painted as the great picture in the Academy. It was even different in many of its details. There was no hope in the face of this, but only a haggard passionate despair, while the look of the other was concentrated into such an agony of appealing as cannot exist where there is no hope. Dr Maurice even, when he came down, declared forcibly that it was difficult for him to trace the resemblance. Perhaps the leading idea was the same, but then it was so differently worked out. He looked at the picture in every possible light, and this was the conclusion he came to;—No; no particular resemblance,—a coincidence, that was all. And John Sinclair was a perfectly well-known painter, residing in New York, a man known to Dr Maurice's friends there. Why there

was no name to the picture in the catalogue nobody could tell. It was some absurd mistake or other; but John Sinclair, the painter, was a man who had been known in New York for years. 'Depend upon it, it is only a coincidence,' Dr Maurice said. After that visit, from what feeling I cannot say, the picture was taken back up-stairs. Not that Mrs Drummond was convinced, but that she shrank from further discussion of a matter on which she felt so deeply. She would sit before it for hours, gazing at it, careless of everything else; and if I were to reproduce all the thoughts that coursed through Helen's mind, I should do her injury with the reader, who, no doubt, believes that the feelings in a wife's mind, when such a hope entered it, could only be those of a half-delirious joy. But Helen's thoughts were not wildly joyful. She had been hardly and painfully trained to do without him, to put him out of her life. Her soul had slid into new ways, changed meanings; and in that time what change of meaning, what difference of nature, might have come to a man who had returned from death and the grave? Could it all be undone? Could it float away like a tale that is told, that tale of seven long years? Would the old assimilate with the new, and the widow become a wife again without some wrench, some convul-

sion of nature? Not long before she had denounced the name vehemently, crying out against it, declaring that she did not believe in it: but now, when perhaps it might turn out that her widowhood had been indeed a fiction and unreal—now! How she was to be a wife again; how her existence was to suffer a new change, and return into its old channel, Helen could not tell. And yet that Robert should live again, that he should receive some recompense for all his sufferings; that even she who had been in her way so cruel to him, should be able to make up for it—for that Helen would have given her life. The news about John Sinclair was a discouragement, but still it did not touch her faith. She carried her picture upstairs again, and put it reverently, not in its old corner, but where the sunshine would fall upon it and the full light of day. The fancifulness of this proceeding did not occur to her, for grief and hope, and all the deeper emotions of the heart, are always fanciful: and in this time of suspense, when she could do nothing, when she was waiting, listening for indications of what was coming, that silent idol-worship which no one knew of, did her good.

Meanwhile Dura went on blazing with lights, and sweet with music, making every day a holiday. Mrs Burton did not walk so much as she

used to do, but drove about, giving her orders, paying her visits, with beautiful horses which half the county envied, and toilettes which would have been remarked even in the park. 'That little woman is losing her head,' the Rector said, as he looked at an invitation his wife had just received for a fête which was to eclipse all the others, and which was given in celebration of Clara's birthday. It was fixed for the 6th of July, and people were coming to it from far and near. There was to be a garden party first, a sumptuous so-called breakfast, and a ball at night. The whole neighbourhood was agitated by the preparations for this solemnity. It was said that Ned, poor Ned, whose disappearance was now an old story, was to be disinherited, and that Clara was to be the heiress of all. The importance thus given to her birthday gave a certain colour to the suggestion; it was like a coming of age, people said, and replaced the festivities which ought to have taken place on the day when Ned completed his twenty-first year, a day which had passed very quietly a few weeks before, noted by none. But to Clara's birthday feast everybody was invited. The great county people, the Merewethers themselves, were coming, and in consideration of Clara's possible heiress-ship, it was whispered that the Marchioness had thoughts

of making her son a candidate for the place deserted by Cyril Rivers. Cyril, too, moreover, was among the guests; he was one of a large party which was coming from town; and the village people were asked, the Daltons and the Drummonds, beside all the lesser gentry of the neighbourhood. It was to Katie Dalton's importunate beseechings, seconded, no doubt, by her own heart, which had begun to tire of seclusion and long for a little pleasure, that Norah relinquished her first proud determination not to go; and Dr Maurice had just sent a box from town containing two dresses, one for the evening, and one for out-of-doors, which it was beyond the powers of any girl of nineteen to refuse the opportunity of wearing. When Norah had made up her own mind to this effort, she addressed herself to the task of overcoming her mother's reluctance; and, after much labour, succeeded so far that a compromise was effected. Norah went to the out-door fête, under the charge of Mrs Dalton, and Helen with a sigh took out her black silk gown once more, and prepared to go with her child in the evening. The Daltons were always there, good neighbours to support and help her; and seated by Mrs Dalton's side, who knew something of her anxiety about that friend whom she had not heard of for years,

Mrs Drummond felt herself sustained. When Norah returned with the Daltons from the garden party, Mr Rivers accompanied the girls. He came with them to the door of the Gatehouse, where Katie, secretly held fast by Norah, accompanied her friend. He lingered on the white steps, waiting to be asked in; but Norah gave no such invitation. She went back to her mother triumphant, full of angry delight.

'I have been perfectly civil to him, mamma! I have taken the greatest care—I have not avoided him, nor been stiff to him, nor anything. And he has tried so hard, so very hard, to have an explanation. Very likely! as if I would listen to any explanation.'

'How did you avoid it, Norah, if you were neither angry nor stiff?'

'Katie, mamma, always Katie! I put her between him and me wherever we went. It was fun,' cried Norah, with eyes that sparkled with revengeful satisfaction. Her spirits had risen to the highest point. She had regained her position; she had got the upper hand, which Norah loved. The prospect of the evening which was still before her, in which she should wear that prettiest ball-dress, which surely had been made by the fairies, and drag Cyril Rivers at her chariot-wheels, and

show him triumphantly how little it mattered to her, made Norah radiant. She rushed in to the Haldanes' side of the house to show herself, in the wildest spirits. Mrs Haldane and Miss Jane—wonder of wonders—were going too; everybody was to be there. The humble people were asked to behold and ratify the triumph, as well as the fine people to make it. As for Mrs Haldane, she disapproved, and was a great deal more grim than ordinary; but, for once in a way, because it would be a great thing to see, and because Mr Baldwin and his sisters were to be there too,—'as much out of their proper place as we,' she said, shaking her head,—she had allowed herself to be persuaded. Miss Jane required no persuading. She was honestly delighted to have a chance of seeing anything—the dresses and the diamonds, and Norah dancing with all the grandees. When Norah came in, all in a cloud of tulle and lace, Miss Jane fairly screamed with delight. 'I am quite happy to think I shall see the child have one good dance,' she said, walking round and round the fairy princess. 'Were you fond of dancing yourself, Miss Jane?' said Norah, not without the laugh of youth over so droll an idea. But it was not droll to Miss Jane; she put her hands, which were clothed in black with mittens, on the child's shoulders,

and gave her a kiss, and answered not a word. And Stephen looked on from that immovable silent post of his, and saw them both, and thought of the past and present, and all the shadowy uncertain days that were to come. How strange to think of the time when Miss Jane, so grave and prosaic in her old-maidish gown, had been like Norah! How wonderful to think that Norah one day might be as Miss Jane! And so they all went away to the ball together, and Stephen in his chair immovable till his nurses came back, and Susan bustling about in the kitchen, were left in the house alone.

One ball is like another; and except that the Dura ball was more splendid, more profuse in ornament, gayer in banks of flowers, richer in beautiful dresses and finery, more ambitious in music, than any ball ever known before in the country, there is little that could be said of it to distinguish it from all others, except, perhaps, the curious fact that the master of the house was not present. He had not been visible all day. He had been telegraphed for to go to town that morning, and had not returned; but then Mr Golden, who was a far more useful man in a ball-room than the master of the house, was present, and was doing all that became a man to make everything go off brilliantly. He was the slave of the young

heroine of the feast to whom everybody was paying homage; and it was remarked by a great many people, that even when going on the arm of Lord Merewether to open the ball, Clara had a suggestion to whisper to this amateur majordomo. 'He is such an old friend; he is just the same as papa,' she said to her partner with a passing blush; but then Clara was in uncommonly brilliant looks that evening, even for her. Her beautiful colour kept coming and going; there was an air of emotion, and almost agitation, about her, which gave a charm to her usually unemotional style of beauty. Lord Merewether, who was under his mother's orders to be 'very attentive,' almost fell in love with Clara, in excess of his instructions, when he noticed this unusual fluctuation of colour and tone. It supplied just what she wanted, and made the Rubens into a goddess—or so at least this young man thought.

But Helen had not been above an hour in this gay scene when a strange restlessness seized upon her. She did her best to struggle against it; she tried hard to represent to herself that nothing could have happened at home, no post could have come in since she left it, and that Norah needed her there. She saw Mr Rivers hovering about with his explanation on his lips trying to get at

her, since Norah would have nothing to say to him; and felt that it was her duty to remain by her child at such a moment. But, after a while, her nerves, or her imagination, or some incomprehensible influence was too much for her. 'You look as if you would faint,' Mrs Dalton whispered to her. 'Let Mr Dalton take you to the air—let Charlie get you something; I am sure you are ill.'

'I am not ill; but I must get home. I am wanted at home,' said Helen with her brain swimming. How it was that she did it, she never could tell afterwards; but she managed to retain command of herself, to recommend Norah to Mrs Dalton's care, and finally to steal out; no one noticing her in the commotion and movement that were always going on. When she got into the open air with her shawl wrapped about her, her senses came back. It was foolish, it was absurd—but the deed was done; and, though her restlessness calmed down when she stepped out into the calm of the summer night, it was easier then to go on than to go back; and Norah was in safe hands. It was a moonlight night, as is indispensable for any great gathering in the country To be sure it was July, and before the guests went home, the short night would be over; but still, according to habit, a moonlight night had been

selected. It was soft, and warm, and hazy,—the light very mellow, and not over bright,—the scent of the flowers and the glitter of the dew filling the air. There was so much moon, and so much light from the house, that Helen was not afraid of the dark avenue. She went on, relieved of her anxiety, feeling refreshed and eased, she could not tell how, by the blowing of the scented night-air in her face. But before she reached the shade of the avenue, some one rushed across the lawn after her. She turned half round to see who it was, thinking that perhaps Charlie or Mr Dalton had hurried after her to accompany her home. The figure, however, was not that of either. The man came hurriedly up to her, saying, in a low but earnest tone, 'Mrs Burton, don't take any rash step,' when she, as well as he, suddenly started. The voice informed her who spoke, and the sight of her upturned face in the moonlight informed him who listened. 'Mrs Drummond!' he exclaimed. They had not met face to face, nor exchanged words since the time when she denounced him in the presence of Cyril Rivers in St Mary's Road. 'Mrs Drummond,' he repeated, with an uneasy laugh; 'of all times in the world for you and me to meet!'

'I hope there is no reason why we should meet,'

said Helen impetuously. 'I am going away. There can be nothing that wants saying between you and me.'

'But, by Jove, there is though,' he said; 'there is reason enough, I can tell you—such news as will make the hair stand upright on your head. Ah! they say revenge is sweet. I shall leave you to find it out to-morrow when everybody knows.'

'What is it?' she asked breathlessly, and then stopped, and went on a few steps, horrified at the thought of thus asking information from the man she hated most. He went on along with her, saying nothing. He had no hat on, and the rose in his coat showed a little gleam of colour in the whitening of the light.

'You ought to ask me, Mrs Drummond,' he said; 'for revenge, they say, is sweet, and you would be glad to hear.'

'I want no revenge,' she said hurriedly; and they entered the gloom of the avenue side by side, the strangest pair. Her heart began to beat and flutter—she could not tell why; for she feared nothing from him; and all at once there rose up a gleam of secret triumph in her. This man believed that Robert Drummond was dead, knew no better. What did she care for his news? if indeed she were to tell him hers!

'Well,' he said, after an interval, 'I see you are resolved not to ask, so I will tell you. I have my revenge in it too, Mrs Drummond; this night, when they are all dancing, Burton is off, with the police after him. It will be known to all the world to-morrow. You ought to be grateful to me for telling you that.'

'Burton is off!—the police—after him!' She did not take in the meaning of the words.

'You don't believe me, perhaps—neither did his wife just now; or at least so she pretended; but it is true. There was a time when he left me to bear the brunt, now it is his turn; and there is a ball at his house the same night!'

She interrupted him hurriedly. 'I don't know what you mean. I cannot believe you. What has he done?' she said.

Mr Golden laughed; and in the stillness his laugh sounded strangely echoing among the trees. He turned round on his heel, waving his hand to her. 'Only what all the rest of us have done,' he said. 'Good night; I am wanted at the ball. I have a great deal to do to-night.'

She stood for a moment where he had left her, wondering, half paralysed. And then she turned and went slowly down the avenue. She felt herself shake and tremble—she could not tell why.

Was it this man's voice? Was it his laugh that sounded like something infernal? And what did it all mean? Helen, who was a brave woman by nature, felt a flutter of fear as she quickened her steps and went on. A ball at his house—the police after him. What did it mean? The silence of the long leafy road was so strange and deep after all the sound and movements; the music pursued her from behind, growing fainter and fainter as she went on; the world seemed to be all asleep, except that part of it which was making merry, dancing, and rejoicing at Dura. And now the eagerness to get home suddenly seized upon her again,—something must have happened since she left; some letter; perhaps—some one—come back.

When she got within sight of the Gatehouse, the moon was shining right down the village street as it did when it was at the full. All was quiet, silent, asleep. No, not all. Opposite her house, against the Rectory gates, two men were standing. As she went up into the shadow of the lime-trees, and rang the bell at her own door, one of them crossed the road, and came up to her touching his hat. 'Asking your pardon, ma'am,' he said, 'there is some one in your house, if you're the lady of this house, as oughtn't to be there.'

A thrill of great terror took possession of Helen. Her heart leapt to her mouth. 'I don't understand you. Who are you? And what do you want?' she asked, almost gasping for breath.

'I'm a member of the detective force. I ain't ashamed of my business,' said the man. 'We seen him go in, me and my mate. With your permission, ma'am, we'd like to go through the house.'

'Go through my house at this hour!' cried Helen. She heard the door opened behind her, but did not turn round. She was the guardian of the house, she alone, and of all who were in it, be they who they might. Her wits seemed to come to her all at once, as if she had found them groping in the dark. 'Have you any authority to go into my house? Am I obliged to let you in? Have you a warrant?'

'They've been a worriting already, ma'am, and you out,' said Susan's voice from behind. 'What business have they, I'd like to know, in a lady's house at this hour of the night?'

'Has any one come, Susan?' Helen said.

'Not a soul.'

She was standing with a candle in her hand, holding the door half open. The night air puffed the flame; and perhaps it was that too that made

the shadow of Susan's cap tremble upon the panel of the door.

'I cannot possibly admit you at this hour,' said Mrs Drummond. 'To-morrow, if you come with any authority; but not to-night.'

She went into her own house, and closed the door. How still it was and dark, with Susan's candle only flickering through the gloom! And then Susan made a sudden clutch at her mistress's arm. She held the candle down to Helen's face, and peered into it, 'I've atook him into my own room,' she said.

## CHAPTER VI.

The Gatehouse was full of long, rambling, dark passages with mysterious closets at each elbow of them, or curious little unused rooms—passages which had struck terror to Norah's soul when she was a child, and which even now she thought it expedient to run through as speedily as possible, never feeling sure that she might not be caught by some ghostly intruder behind the half-shut doors. Mrs Drummond followed Susan through one of these intricate winding ways. It led to a corner room looking out upon the garden, and close to the kitchen, which was Susan's bed-chamber. For some forgotten reason or other there was a sort of window, three or four broad panes of glass let into the partition wall high up between this room and the kitchen, the consequence of which was that Susan's room always showed a faint light to the garden. This was her

reason for taking it as the hiding-place for the strange guest.

Mrs Drummond went down the dark passage, feeling herself incapable of speech and almost of thought; a vague wonder why he should be so hotly pursued, and how it was that Susan should have known this and taken it upon herself to receive and shelter one who was a stranger to her, passed through Helen's mind. Both these things were strange and must be inquired into hereafter, but in the mean time her heart was beating too high with personal emotion to be able to think of anything else. Was it possible that thus strangely, thus suddenly, she was to meet him again from whom she had been so long parted? Their last interview rushed back upon her mind, and his appearance then. Seven years ago!—and a man changes altogether, becomes, people say, another being in seven years. This thought quivered vaguely through Helen's mind. So many thoughts went pursuing each other, swift and noiseless as ghosts. It was not above two minutes from the time she came into the hall until she stood at the threshold of Susan's room; but a whole world of questions, of reflections, had hurried through her thoughts. She trembled by intervals with a nervous shiver. Her heart beat so violently that it seemed at once

to choke and to paralyse her. To see him again—to stand face to face with him who had come back out of the grave,—to change her whole being,—to be no more herself, no more Norah's mother, but Robert's wife again! Her whole frame began to shake as with one great pulse. It was not joy, it was not fear; it was the wonder of it, the miracle, the strange, strange, incomprehensible, incredible—Could he be there?—nothing more between the two who had been parted by death and silence but that closed door?

Susan turned round upon her just before they reached it. Susan, too, hard, bony woman, little given to emotion, was trembling. She wiped her eyes with her apron and gave a sniff that was almost a groan, and thrust the candle into Helen's hand.

'Oh, don't you be hard upon him, Miss Helen as was!' cried Susan with a sob; and turned and fled into her kitchen.

Helen stopped for a moment to steady herself—to steady the light of the poor candle which, held by such agitated, unsteady hands, was flickering wildly in her grasp. And then she opened the door.

Some one started and rose up suddenly with a movement which had at once fear and watchfulness

in it. Her agitation blinded her so that she could not see. She held up the light,—if her misty eyes could have made him out,—and then all at once there came a voice which made her nerves steady in a moment, calmed down her pulses, restored to her self-command.

'Helen, is it you? I thought it must be my wife.'

The blood rushed back to Helen's heart with an ebb as sudden as the flow had been, making her faint and sick. But the revulsion of feeling was as strong, and gave her strength. The light gave a leap in her hand as she steadied herself, and threw a wild broken gleam upon him.

'Mr Burton,' she said, 'what are you doing here?'

'Then the news had not come,' he cried, with a certain relief; 'nobody knows as yet? Well, well, things are not so bad, then, as I thought.'

She put the candle on the table and looked at him. He was dressed in his morning clothes, those light-coloured summer garments which made his full person fuller, but which at this hour, and after the scene from which she had just come, looked strangely disorderly and out of place. His linen was crushed and soiled, and his coat, which

was of a colour and material which showed specks and wrinkles as much as a woman's dress, had the look of having been worn for a week night and day. The air of the vagabond which comes so rapidly to a hunted man had come to him already, and mixed with his habitual air of respectability, of wealth and self-importance, in the most curious, almost pitiful way.

'Tell me,' she said, repeating her question almost without knowing what she said, 'why are you here?'

He did not answer immediately. He made an effort to put on his usual jaunty look, to speak with his usual jocular superiority. But something —whether it was the flickering, feeble light of the candle which showed him her face, or some instinct of his own, which necessity had quickened into life—made him aware all at once that the woman by his side was in a whirl of mental indecision, that she was wavering between two resolves, and that this was no time to trifle with her. In such circumstances sometimes a man will seize upon the best argument which skill could select, but sometimes also in his haste and excitement he snatches at the one which makes most against him. He said—

'I will tell you plainly, Helen. I am as your

husband was when he went down to the river—that night.'

She gave a strange and sudden cry, and turning round made one quick step to the door. If she had not seen that Dives in the exhibition, if she had not been in the grip of wild hope and expectation, I think she would have gone straightway, driven by that sudden probing of the old wound, and given him up to his pursuers. At least that would have been her first impulse; but something turned her back. She turned to him again with a sudden fire kindled in her eyes.

'It was you who drove him there,' she said.

He made a little deprecating gesture with his hands, but he did not say anything. He saw in a moment that he had made a mistake.

'You drove him there,' she repeated, 'you and —that man; and now you come to me and think I will save you—to me, his wife. You drove him to despair, to ruin, and you think I am to save you. Why should I? What have you done that I should help you? You had no pity on him; you let him perish, you let him die. You injured me and mine beyond the reach of recovery; and now you put yourself into my hands—with your enemies outside!'

He gave a shudder, and looked at the window

as if with a thought of escape; and then he turned round upon her, standing at bay.

'Well,' he said, 'you have your revenge; I am ruined too. I don't pretend to hide it from you; but I have no river at hand to escape into to hide all my troubles in,—but only a woman to taunt me that I have tried to be kind to—and my wife and my child dancing away close by. Listen; that is what you call comfort for a ruined man, is it not?'

He pointed towards Dura as he spoke. Just then a gust of the soft night-wind brought with it the sound of the music from the great house, that house ablaze with gaiety, with splendour, and light, where Clara Burton all jewelled and crowned with flowers was dancing at this moment, while her mother led the way to the gorgeous table where princes might have sat down. No doubt the whole scene rose before his imagination as it did before Helen's. He sat down upon Susan's rush-bottomed chair with a short laugh. One candle flickering in the dim place revealing all the homely furniture of the servant's bedroom. What a contrast! what a fate! Helen felt as every generous mind feels, humbled before the presence of the immediate sufferer. He had injured her, and she, perhaps, had suffered more deeply than

Reginald Burton was capable of suffering; but it was his turn now; he had the first place. The sorrow was his before which even kings must bow.

While she stood there with pity stealing into her heart, he put down his head into his hands with a gesture of utter weariness.

'Whatever you are going to do,' he said faintly, 'let Susan give me something to eat first. I have had nothing to eat all day.'

This appeal made an end of all Helen's enmity. It had been deep, and hot, and bitter when all was well with him—but the first taste of revenge which Ned's disappearance gave her had appeased Mrs Drummond. It had been bitter, not sweet. And now this appeal overcame all her defences. If he had asked her to aid in his escape she might have resisted still. But he asked her for a meal. Tears of humiliation, of pitying shame, almost of a kind of tenderness came into her eyes. God help the man! Had it come to this?

She turned into the kitchen, where Susan sat bolt upright in a hard wooden chair before the fire, with her arms folded, the most watchful of sentinels. They had a momentary discussion what there was to set before him, and where it was to be served. Susan's opinion was very strongly in favour of the kitchen.

'Those villains 'ud see the lights to the front,' said Susan. 'And then Miss Norah, she'll be coming home, and folks with her. Them p-lice-men is up to everything. The shutters don't close up to the very top; and if they was to climb into one o' the trees! And besides, there's a fire here.'

'It is too warm for a fire, Susan.'

'Not for them as is in trouble,' said the woman; and she had her way.

Helen arranged the table with her own hands, while Susan made up with her best skill an impromptu meal—not of the richest or choicest, for the larder at the Gatehouse was poorly enough supplied; but fortunately there had been something provided for next day's dinner which was available. And when the fugitive came in to the warm kitchen—he who the day before had made all the household miserable in Dura over the failure of a salmi—he warmed his hands with a shiver of returning comfort, and sniffed the poor cutlet as it cooked, and made a wretched attempt at a joke in the sudden sense of ease and solace that had come to him.

'He was always one for his joke, was Mr Reginald,' Susan said with a sob; and as for Helen, this poor pleasantry completed her prostration. The sight of him warming himself on this July

night, eating so eagerly, like a man famished, filled her with an indescribable pity. It was not so much magnanimity on her part as utter failure on his. How could she lay sins to this man's charge, who was not great enough in himself to frighten a fly? The pity in her heart hurt her like an ache, and she was ashamed.

But what was to be done? She went softly, almost stealthily (with the strange feeling that they might hear her out of doors, of which she was not herself aware), up to her bed-room, which was over the drawing-room, and looked out into the moonlight. The men still kept their place opposite at the Rectory gate—and now a third man, one of the Dura police, with his lantern in his hand, joined them. Helen was a woman full of all the natural prejudices and susceptibilities. Her pride received such a wound by the appearance of this policeman as it would be difficult to describe. Reginald Burton was her enemy, her antagonist; and yet now she remembered her cousin. The Burtons had been of unblemished good fame in all their branches till now. The shame which had been momentarily thrown upon her husband had been connected with so much anguish that Helen's pride had not been called uppermost. But now it seized upon her. The moment the

Dura policeman appeared, it became evident to her that all the world knew, and the pang ran through her proud heart like a sudden arrow. Her kindred were disgraced, her own blood, the honest, good people in their graves; and Ned—poor, innocent Ned!—at the other end of the world. The pang was so sharp that it forced tears from her, though she was not given to weeping. A policeman! as if the man was a thief who was her own cousin, of her own blood! And then the question returned, What was to be done? I don't know what horrible vision of the culprit dragged through the street, with his ignominy visible to the whole world, rose before Helen's imagination. It did not occur to her that such a capture might be very decorously, very quietly made. She could think of nothing but the poor ragged wretch whom she had once seen handcuffed, his clothes all muddy with the falls he had got in struggling for his liberty, and a policeman on either side of him. This was the only form in which she could realise an arrest by the hands of justice. And to see the master of Dura thus dragged through the village, with all the people round, once so obsequious, staring with stupid, impudent wonder! Anything, anything rather than that! Helen ran down-stairs again, startling herself with the sound she made.

In the quiet she could hear the knife and fork which were still busy in the kitchen, and the broken talk with Susan which the fugitive kept up. She heard him laugh, and it made her heart sick. This time she turned to the other side, to the long passage opposite to that which led to the kitchen, which was the way of communication with the apartments of the Haldanes. The door there, which was generally fastened, was open to-night, and the light was still in Stephen's window, and he himself, for the first time for years, had been left to this late hour in his chair. He was seated there, very still and motionless, when Helen entered. He had dropped asleep in his loneliness. The candles on the table before him threw a strange light upon the pallor of his face, upon the closed eyes, and head thrown back. His hair had grown grey in these seven years; his face had refined and softened in the long suffering, in the patient, still, leaden days which he had lived through, making no complaint. He looked like an apostle in this awful yet gentle stillness—and he looked as if he were dead.

But even Mrs Drummond's entrance was enough to rouse him—the rustle of her dress, or perhaps even the mere sense that there was some one near him. He opened his eyes dreamily.

'Well, mother, I hope you have enjoyed it,' he said, with a smile. Then suddenly becoming aware who his companion was, 'Mrs Drummond! I beg your pardon. What has happened?'

She came and stood by him, holding out her hand, which he took and held between his. There was a mutual pity between these two—a sympathy which was almost tenderness. They were so sorry for each other—so destitute of any power to help each other! Most touching and close of bonds!

'Something has happened,' she said. 'Mr Haldane, I have come to you for your advice.'

He looked up at her anxiously.

'Not Norah—not—any one arrived——'

'Oh, no, no; something shameful, painful, terrible. You know what is going on at the great house. Mr Haldane, Reginald Burton is here in Susan's kitchen, hidden, and men watching for him outside. Men—policemen! That is what I mean. And oh! what am I to do?'

He held her hand still, and his touch kept her calm. He did not say anything for a minute, except one low exclamation under his breath.

'Sit down,' he said. 'You are worn out. Is it very late?'

'Past midnight. By-and-by your mother will

be back. Tell me first, while we are alone and can speak freely, what can I do?'

'He is hiding here,' said Stephen, 'and policemen outside? Then he is ruined, and found out. That is what you mean. Compose yourself, and tell me, if you can, what you know, and what you *wish* to do.'

'Oh, what does my wish matter?' she cried. 'I am asking you what is possible. I know little more than I tell you. He is here, worn-out, miserable, ruined, and the men watching to take him. I don't know how it has happened, why he came, or how they found it out; but so it is. They are there now in front of the house. How am I to get him out?'

'Is that the only question?' Stephen asked.

She looked at him with an impatience she could not restrain.

'What other question can there be, Mr Haldane? In a few minutes they will be back.'

'But there is another question,' he said. 'I believe this man has been our ruin—yours and mine—yours, Mrs Drummond, more fatally than mine. Golden was but one of his instruments, I believe—as guilty, but not more so. He has ruined us, and more than us——'

She wrung her hands in her impatience.

'Mr Haldane, I hear steps. We may but have a moment more.'

He put his hand upon her arm.

'Think!' he cried. 'Are we to let him go—to save him that he may ruin others? Is it just? Think what he has made us all suffer. Is there to be no punishment for him?'

'Oh, punishment!' she cried. 'Do you know what punishment means, when you make yourself the instrument of it? It means revenge; and there is nothing so bitter, nothing so terrible, as to see your own handiwork, and to think, "It was not God that did this; it was me."'

'How can *you* tell?'

'Oh, yes, I can tell. There was his son. I thought it was a just return for all the harm he had done when his poor boy—— But Ned went away, and left everything. It was not my fault; it was not Norah's fault. Yet she had done it, and I had wished she might. No; no more revenge. How can I get him away?'

'I am not so forgiving as you,' he said.

Helen could not rest. She rose up from the seat she had drawn to his side, and went to the window. There were steps that frightened her moving about outside, and then there was the sound of voices.

'Come in and go over the house! Come in at this hour of the night!' said a voice. It was Miss Jane's voice, brisk and alert as usual. Helen hurried into the hall, to the door, where she could hear what was said.

'But Jane, Jane, if any one has got in? A thief—perhaps a murderer! Oh, my poor Stephen!'

'Nonsense, mother! If you like to stay outside there, I'll go over all the house with Susan, and let you know. Why, Mrs Drummond! Here are some men who want to come in to search for some one at this time of night.'

'I have told them already they should not come in,' said Helen.

She had opened the door, and stood in front of it with a temerity which she scarcely felt justified in; for how did she know they might not rush past her, and get in before she could stop them? Such was her idea—such was the idea of all the innocent people in the house. The Dura policeman was standing by with his truncheon and his lantern.

'I've told 'em, mum, as it's a mistake,' said that functionary; 'and that this 'ere is the quietest, most respectablest 'ouse—'

'Thanks, Wilkins,' said Helen.

It was a positive comfort to her, and did her good, this simple testimony. And to think that Wilkins knew no better than that!

'Will you keep near the house?' she said, turning to him, with that feeling that he was 'on our side' which had once prepossessed Norah in favour of Mr Rivers. 'My daughter will be coming back presently, and I don't want to have her annoyed or frightened with this story. No one except the people who belong to it shall enter this house to-night.'

'As you please, ma'am; but I hope you knows the penalty,' said the detective.

Helen did not know of any penalty, nor did she care. She was wound up to so high a strain of excitement, that had she been called upon to put her arm in the place of the bolt, or do any other futile heroic piece of resistance, she would not have hesitated. She closed the door upon Mrs Haldane and her daughter, one of whom was frightened and the other excited. As they all came into the hall, Susan became visible, with her candle in her hand, defending the passage to the kitchen. Something ludicrous, something pathetic and tragic and terrible was in the aspect of the house, and its guardians—had one been wise enough to perceive what it meant.

'If Susan will come with me,' said Miss Jane briskly; 'after that idiot of a man's romance, my mother will think we are all going to be murdered in our beds. If Susan will come with me, I'll go over all the house.'

'We have examined ours,' said Helen. 'Susan, go with Miss Jane. Mrs Haldane, Mr Stephen is tired, I think.'

'Stephen must not be alarmed,' said Mrs Haldane with hesitation. 'But are you sure it is safe? Do you really think it is safe? You see, after all, when our door is open it is one house. A man might run from one room to another. Oh, Jane —Mrs Drummond—if you will believe me, I can see a shadow down that passage! Oh, my dear, you are young and rash! The men will know better; let them come in.'

'I cannot allow them to come in. There is no one, I assure you, except your son, who wants your help.'

'You are like Jane,' said the old lady; 'you are so bold and rash. Oh, I wish I had begged them to stay all night. I wouldn't mind giving a shilling or two. Think if Stephen should be frightened! Oh, yes, I am going; but don't leave me, dear. I couldn't be alone; I shall be frightened of my life.'

This was how it was that Helen was in Stephen's room again when Miss Jane came down, bustling and satisfied.

'You may make yourself perfectly easy, mother. We have gone over all the rooms—looked under the beds and in the cupboards, and there is not a ghost of anything. Poor Susan is tired sitting up for us all; I told her I'd wait up for Norah. Well, now you don't ask any news of the ball, Stephen. Norah has danced the whole evening; I have never seen her sitting down once. Her dress is beautiful; and as for herself, my dear! But everybody was looking their best. I don't admire Clara Burton in a general way; but really Clara Burton was something splendid—Yes, yes, mother; of course we must get Stephen to bed.'

'Good-night,' said Helen, going up to him. She looked in his face wistfully; but now the opportunity was over, and what could he say? He held her hand a moment, feeling the tremor in it.

'Good-night,' he said; and then very low he added hurriedly, 'The gate into the Dura woods—the garden door.'

'Thanks,' she said, with a loud throb of her heart.

The excitement, the suspense, were carrying Helen far beyond her will or intention. She had been sensible of a struggle at first whether she would not betray the fugitive. Now her thoughts had progressed so fast and far, that she would have fought for him, putting even her slight strength in the way to defend him or protect his retreat. He was a man whom she almost hated; and yet all her thoughts were with him, wondering was he safe by himself, and what could be done to make him safer still. She left the Haldanes' side of the house eagerly, and hurried down the passage to the kitchen. He was there, in Susan's arm-chair before the fire. His meal was over, and he had turned to the fire again, and fallen into a doze. While she was moving about in a fever of anxiety, he himself with his head sunk on his breast, was unconscious of his own danger. Helen, who felt incapable of either resting or sleep, stood still and looked at him in a sort of stupor.

'Poor dear, poor dear!' said Susan, holding up her hand in warning, 'he's been worrited and worn out, and he's dozed off—the best thing he could do.'

He might rest, but she could not. She went down the few steps to the garden, and stole out

into the night, cautiously opening and closing the door. The garden was walled all round. It was a productive, wealthy garden, which, even when the Gatehouse had been empty, was worth keeping up, and its doors and fastenings were all in good order. There was no chance of any one getting in by that side. Mrs Drummond stole out into the white moonlight, which suddenly surged upon her figure, and blazoned it all over with silver, and crept round, trembling at every pebble she disturbed, to the unused door which opened into the Dura woods. It had been made that there might be a rapid means of communication between the Gatehouse and the mansion, but it had never been used since the Drummonds came. She had forgotten this door until Stephen reminded her of its existence. It was partially hid behind a thicket of raspberry-bushes, which had grown high and strong in front. Fortunately, a rusted key was in the lock. With the greatest difficulty Helen turned it, feeling as if the sound, as it grated and resisted, raised whirlwinds of echoes all round her, and must betray what she was doing. Even when it was unlocked, it took all her strength to pull it open, for she could do no more. For one moment she pressed out into the dark, rustling woods. Through the foliage she could see the glance of

the lights from the house and the moving flicker of carriage-lamps going down the avenue. The music came upon her with a sudden burst like an insult. Oh, heaven! to think that all this should be going on, the dancing and laughter, and *him* dozing there by Susan's kitchen fire!

She paused a little in the garden in the stillness—not for rest, but that she might arrange her thoughts, without interruption. But there was no stillness there that night. The music came to her on the soft wind, now lower, now louder; the sound of the carriage wheels coming and going kept up a low, continuous roll; now and then there would come the sound of a voice. It was still early; only a few timid guests who feared late hours, old people and spectators like the Haldanes, were leaving the ball. It was in full career. The very sky seemed flushed over Dura House, with its numberless lights.

Helen formed her plan as she crept about the garden in the moonlight. Oh, if some kindly cloud would but rise, and veil for a little this poor earth with its mysteries! But all was clear, well seen, visible; the clear night and the blue heavens were not pitiful, like Helen. Man is often hard upon man, heaven knows, yet it is man only who can feel for the troubles of mankind.

## CHAPTER VII.

WHILE her mother was thus occupied Norah was taking her fill of pleasure. She 'danced every dance'—beatific fulfilment of every girlish wish in respect to a ball. She was so young and so fresh that this perpetual motion filled up the measure of her desires, and left her little time to think. To be sure, once or twice it had come over her that Ned, poor Ned, was not here to share in all this delight; and if Norah had been destitute of partners, or less sought than she thought her due, no doubt her heart would have been very heavy on account of Ned. But she had as many partners as any girl could desire, and she had no time to think. She was as happy as the night was long. The dancing was delightful to her for itself, the music was delightful, and the 'kindness' of everybody, which was Norah's modest, pretty synonym for the admiration she received; and she

asked no more of heaven than this, which she was receiving in such full measure. To be sure, her mother's disappearance disturbed her for the moment. But when Mrs Dalton had sworn by all her gods that Mrs Drummond was not ill, Norah resigned herself once more to her happy fate.

There was, at the same time, a special point which exhilarated Norah, satisfied her pride, and raised her spirits. During all the festivities of the afternoon she had kept Cyril Rivers at arm's length. Perhaps if he had not shown so much anxiety to approach nearer, Norah would not have felt the same satisfaction in this—but his explanation, it was evident, was hanging on his very lips, and she had triumphantly kept him from making it. The same process was repeated in the evening. She had rushed into a perfect crowd of engagements in order to escape him. Poor Charlie Dalton, whom Clara had no longer any thought of, and who for the greater part of the evening had been standing about, dolefully gazing after her, was pressed unceremoniously into Norah's service. Once, when she happened to be disengaged and saw Rivers approaching, she was so lost to all sense of shame as to seize him breathlessly by the arm. 'Dance this dance with me, Charlie,' she whispered impatiently.

'Why must I dance?' said the poor boy, who had no heart for it.

'Because I am determined not to dance with him,' said Norah, energetically leading off her captive. And thus she kept the other at a distance, though perhaps she would have been less rigid in evasion had he been more indifferent to the opportunity. It was late in the night, after supper, when he secured her at last.

'Miss Drummond, you have avoided me all night——'

'I!' cried Norah, 'but that is ridiculous. Why should I avoid you, Mr Rivers? Indeed I am sure I have spoken to you at least a dozen times this evening. It is not one's own fault when one is engaged.'

'And I have been so anxious to see you—to explain to you,' he cried, his eagerness, and the long, tantalizing delay having overcome his wisdom. 'I have been quite miserable.'

'About what, Mr. Rivers?'

'About what you must have thought very abominable behaviour—that day at the pictures; fancy, it is two months since, and you have never allowed me a moment in which I could say it till now!'

'At the pictures?' said Norah, feigning sur-

prise. 'I don't think we have seen you very often lately, and two months is a long time to remember. Oh, I recollect! you left us in a hurry.'

'My mother had come to look for me—there was some business in hand that I had to be consulted about. I cannot tell you what a wretched ass I felt myself, dragged away without a moment to explain —without even time to say, "This is my mother."'

'Mr Rivers,' said Norah, drawing her small person to its full height, and loosing her hold of his arm, 'I think it would have been good taste not to say anything about this. When we did not remark upon it, why should you? I am only a girl, I am nineteen, and I never disobeyed mamma that I know of; but still, do you think I should have let her carry me off like a baby from my friends whom I cared for, without a word? There are some things that one ought not to be asked to believe. You were not obliged to say anything at all about it. I should like to be polite, but I can't make myself a fool to please you. And, on the other hand, you know Lady Rivers is nothing to us. I did not ask to be introduced to her, and poor mamma was too ill even to know. Please don't say any more about it. It would have been much better not to have mentioned it at all.'

'But, Miss Drummond!——'

'Yes, I know. You wanted to be polite. But never mind. I am quite, quite satisfied,' said Norah with a gleam of triumph. 'Look here! Let us have Katie for our *vis-a-vis*. Don't you think Clara Burton is looking quite beautiful to-night?'

Mr Rivers did not reply. He said to himself that he had never been so completely snubbed in his life. He had never felt so small, so cowed, and that is not pleasant to a man. Her very pardon, her condonation of his offence, was humbling to him. Had she resented it, he had a hundred weapons with which to meet her resentment; but he had not one to oppose to her frank indignation, and her pardon. And yet, with curious perversity, never before had Norah seemed so sweet to him. He had felt the wildest jealousy of poor Charlie during that dance, which he went through so unwillingly; and, but for the cheerful strains of the Lancers, which commenced at this point, and set them all—so many who enjoyed it, so many who did not enjoy it—in motion, it was in his mind to commit himself as he had never yet done—to throw himself upon her mercy. This thought gave to his handsome face a look which Norah in her triumph secretly enjoyed, and

called 'sentimental.' 'But I am not one of those girls that fall down and worship a man, and think him a demigod,' Norah said to herself. 'He is no demigod! he has not so much courage as I have. He is frightened of—me! Oh, if Ned were but here!' This last little private exclamation was accompanied with the very ghost of a sigh—half of a quarter of a sigh, Norah would have said, had she described it—Ned was afraid of her too, and was not the least like a demigod. I do not defend Norah for her sauciness, nor do I blame her; for, after all, the young men of the present day are very unlike demigods; and there are some honest girls left in the world capable of loving a man as his wife ought, without worshipping him as his slave, and without even bowing herself down in delicious inferiority before him, grovelling as so many heroines do. Norah was incapable of grovelling under any circumstances; but then she had been brought up by her mother, in the traditions of womanly training such as they used to be in a world which we are told is past.

This is the very worst place in the world for a digression, I allow; it is to permit of the dancing of that figure which they were just about to commence. Clara Burton was dancing in the same set, with Mr Golden. And as her own partner

after this little episode was for some time anything but lively, Norah gave her mind to the observation of Clara. Clara and Mr Golden were great friends. She had said to Lord Merewether that he was like papa, but it may be doubted whether papas generally, even when most indulgent, are looked up to by their children as Clara looked up to her father's friend. All Dura had remarked upon it before now; all Dura had wondered, did the parents see it? What did Mrs Burton mean by permitting it? But it never once entered into Mrs Burton's cool, clever little head to fancy it possible that the attractions of such a man could move her child. Everybody in the neighbourhood, except those most concerned, had seen Clara wandering with this man, who was nearly as old as her father, through the Dura woods. Everybody had seen the flushed, eager, tender way in which she hung upon him, and looked up to him; and his constant devotion to her. 'If I were you I should speak to Mr Burton about it,' the rector's wife had said half a dozen times over; but the rector had that constitutional dislike to interfere in anything which is peculiar to Englishmen. That night Clara was beautiful, as Norah had said; she was full of agitation and excitement —even of something which looked like feeling;

her colour was splendid, her blue eyes as blue as the sea when it is stirred, her hair like masses of living gold, her complexion like the flushings of the sunset upon snow. As for her partner, a certain air of warning mingled in his assiduity. Once Norah saw him hold up his finger, as if in remonstrance. He was wary, watchful, observant of the glances round him; but Clara, who never restrained herself, put on no trammels to-night. She stood looking up at him, talking to him incessantly, forgetting the dance, and when she was compelled to remember it, hurrying through the figure that she might resume the intermitted conversation. Gradually the attention of the other dancers became concentrated on her. It was her moment of triumph, no doubt—her birthday, her coming of age as it were, though she was but eighteen—her entry, many people thought, into the glory of heiress-ship. But all this was not enough to account for the intoxication of excitement, the passion that blazed in Clara's eyes. What did it mean? When the dance was over, the majority of the dancers made their way into the coolness of the conservatory, which was lighted with soft lamps. Mr Rivers took Norah back to Mrs Dalton. His dark eyes had grown larger, his air more sentimental than ever. He withdrew a little

way apart, and folded his arms, and stood gazing at her, just, Norah reflected with impatience, as a man would do who was the hero in a novel. But very different ideas were in Norah's mind. She seized upon Charlie once more, who was sentimental too. 'Come out on the terrace with me. I want to speak to Clara,' she said. They were stopped just inside the open window by a stream of people coming in for the next dance. Norah had been pushed close to the window, half in half out, by the throng. This was how she happened to hear the whispered talk of a pair outside, who were close by her without knowing it, and whom nobody else could hear.

'At the top of the avenue, at three o'clock. Wrap a cloak round you, my darling. In the string of carriages ours will never be noticed. It is the best plan.'

'And everything is ready?' asked another voice, which was Clara's.

'Everything, my love! In an hour and a half——'

'For you! I could do it only for you!'

In a minute after the two came in, pushing past Norah and her companion, who, both pale as statues, let them pass. The others were not pale. Clara's face was dyed with vivid colour, and Mr

Golden, bending over her, looked almost young in the glow of animation and admiration with which he gazed at her. Charlie Dalton had not heard the scrap of dialogue, which meant so much; but he ground his teeth and stared at his supplanter, and crushed Norah's hand which held his arm. 'That fellow!' Charlie said between his teeth. 'Had it been some one else, I could have borne it.'

'Oh, Charlie, take me back to your mother,' cried Norah. Her thoughts went like the wind; already she had made out her plan—but what was the use of saying anything to him, poor simpleton, to make him more unhappy? Norah went back, and placed herself by Mrs Dalton's side. 'I do not mean to dance any more. I am tired,' she said; and, though the music tempted her, and her poor little feet danced in spite of her, keeping time on the floor, she did not change her resolution. Mr Rivers came, finding the opportunity he sought; but Norah paid no heed to him. The men whose names were written upon her card came too, in anxiety and dismay. But to all she had the same answer. 'I am tired. I shall dance no more to-night.'

'Let me look at you, child,' said kind Mrs Dalton; 'indeed you look tired—you look as if you had seen a ghost.'

'And so I have,' said Norah. She felt as if she must cry; Clara Burton had been her playfellow, almost her sister, as near to her as Katie, and as much beloved. What was it Clara was going to do? The child shivered in her terror. When the dancers were all in full career once more, Norah put her mouth close to Mrs Dalton's ear and whispered forth her story. 'What can we do? What shall we do?' she asked. It would be impossible to describe Mrs Dalton's consternation. She remonstrated, struggled against the idea, protested that there must be some mistake. But still Norah asked, 'What can we do? what can we do?'

'My dear Norah! see, they are not near each other—they are not looking at each other. You have made a mistake.'

'Why should they look at each other? everything is arranged and settled,' said Norah. Mrs Dalton, if you will not come with me, I will go myself. Clara must not be allowed to go. Oh, only think of it! Clara, one of us! I have made up my plan; and if you will not come, I will go myself.'

'Norah, where will you go? What can *you* do—a child? And, oh, how can I go after Clara

and leave the girls?' replied Mrs Dalton in her distress.

'You can leave them with Charlie,' said Norah. It had struck two before this explanation was made, and already a few additional guests had begun to depart. There was very little time to lose. Before Mrs Dalton was aware she found herself hurried into the cloak-room, wrapped in some wrap which was not hers, and out under the moonlight again, scarcely knowing how she got there.

'This is not my cloak, Norah,' she said piteously; 'my cloak was white.'

'Never mind, dear Mrs Dalton; white would have been seen,' said Norah, who was far too much excited to think of larceny. And then, impetuous as a little sprite, she led her friend round the farther side of the lawn, and placed her under the shadow of a clump of evergreens. 'There is a brougham standing here which never budges,' whispered Norah, 'with a white horse. I have seen him driving a white horse. Now stand very still. Oh, do stand still, please!'

'But, Norah, I see no one. It is Mrs Ashurst's old white horse; it is the fly from the inn. Norah, it is very cold. Our carriage will be coming. If it comes while we are gone—'

Norah grasped her tremulous companion by the arm. 'You would go barefoot from here to London,' she said in her ear, with a voice which was husky with excitement, 'to save any one, you know you would; and this is Clara—Clara!'

Some one came rapidly across the grass—a dark, veiled, hooded figure, keeping in the shadow. The morning was breaking in the east and mingled mysteriously with the moonlight, making a weird paleness all about among the dark trees and bushes. There was such a noise and ceaseless roll of carriages passing, of servants waiting about, of impatient horses, pawing and tossing their heads, that the very air was full of confusion. Mrs Dalton's alarm was undescribable. She held back the impetuous girl by her side, who was rushing upon that new-comer. 'Norah! it is some lady looking for her carriage. Norah!'

Norah paid no heed; she rushed forward, and laid hold upon the long grey cloak in which the new-comer was muffled. 'Clara!' she cried. 'Oh, Clara! stop, stop! and come back.'

At this moment there suddenly appeared among them another figure, in an overcoat, with a soft felt hat slouched over his face, who took Clara by the hand and whispered, 'Quick! there is not a moment to lose.'

'Is it you, Norah?' said Clara from under her cloak. 'You spy! you prying inquisitive—! Go back yourself. You have nothing to do with me.'

'Oh, Clara!' cried the other girl, clasping her hands; 'don't go away like this. It is almost morning. They will see you—in your ball dress. Clara, Clara, dear! Hate me if you like—only, for heaven's sake, come back.'

And now Mrs Dalton crept out from the shadow of the bushes. 'Mr Golden, leave her. Let her go. How dare you over-persuade a child like that? Let her go, or I will call out to stop you. Clara!'

He pushed them apart—one to one side, one to the other. 'Quick!' he cried, with a low call to a servant who stood close by. 'Quick, Clara! don't lose a moment.' He had pushed them aside roughly, and stood guarding her retreat, facing round upon them. 'What is it to you,' he said, 'if I am employed to take Miss Burton to her father? You may call any one you please—you may go and tell her mother. I am coming—now, for your life!'

The brougham dashed off with dangerous speed, charging, as it seemed, into the mass of carriages. There was a tumult and trampling of

horses, a cry as of some one hurt; but all that the two terrified women on the lawn saw was Clara's face, looking back at them from the carriage window, with an insolent, triumphant look. She had partially thrown off her cloak, and appeared from under it in her white dress, a beautiful, strange vision—and then there came the sound of the collision and conflict, and the struggle of horses, and the cry. But whoever was wounded, it was not anybody belonging to that equipage. The white horse could be traced down the avenue like a long, lessening streak of light. So far, at least, the scheme had been successful. They were gone.

Norah could not speak; she walked about upon the lawn, among the servants, wringing her hands. The morning dew, which was beginning to fall, shone wet upon her hair. 'What can we do—what can we do?' she cried.

'My dear child, we have done all we can. Oh, that foolish, foolish girl! Norah, your feet must be wet, and so I am sure are mine; and your pretty white tarlatan all spoiled. Oh, heaven help us! is this what it has all come to? I dare not send Charlie after them. Norah, run and call Mr Dalton. He might go, perhaps. Norah, oh, you must not go alone!' cried the rector's wife.

But Norah was gone. She rushed into the house, through all the departing guests, her cloak and her hair all wet with dew. She made her way into the ball-room in that plight, and rushed up to Mr Dalton, and led him alarmed out into the hall. Mrs Dalton had followed, and was slowly gathering up her dress. Her heart was full of dismay and trouble; that Clara should thus destroy herself—break her parents' hearts! and Norah must certainly have spoilt her pretty new dress. 'One would not have minded had it done any good,' she murmured within herself. When they met the rector in the hall, a hurried consultation ensued.

'Take our fly, George,' said Mrs Dalton heroically. 'We can get home somehow. Take it! They cannot be very far gone—you may overtake them yet.'

'Overtake them! Though I don't even know which way they have gone,' said the rector, fretful with this strange mission. But, all the same, he went off, and hunted out the fly, and offered the driver half a sovereign if he could overtake the brougham with a white horse. But everything retarded Mr Dalton. His horse was but a fly horse, not the most lively of his kind. The man had been drinking Miss Burton's health, and was more disposed to continue that exercise than to

gallop vaguely about the roads, even with the promise of an additional half-sovereign; Mrs Dalton, in the mean while, threw off her borrowed cloak, and went into the almost deserted ball-room in search of the mistress of the house; and Mary and Katie, wondering and shivering, standing close to Charlie, who was their protector for the moment, made a group round Norah in the hall, with the daylight every moment brightening over their faces, weariness stealing over them, and mystery oppressing them, and no appearance of either father or mother, or the fly!

Norah leant against Katie's shoulder and cried. After all her impetuous exertions the reaction was sharp. She would not give any explanation, but leant upon her friend, and cried, and shivered.

'Oh, where can mamma be? Where is the fly? Oh, Norah, have my cloak too; I don't want it. How cold you are! Charlie, run and look for the fly,' cried Katie. They stood all clinging together, while the people streamed past, getting into their carriages, going away. The daylight grew clearer, the sun began to rise, while still they stood there forlorn. And what with weariness, what with wonder and anxiety and vexation, Mary and Katie were almost crying too.

Finally Mrs Dalton appeared, when almost all

the guests were gone, with a flush on her kind face, and an energy which triumphed over her weariness. 'Come, children, we must pluck up our courage and walk,' she said. 'Take up your dresses, girls, and help Norah with hers. Poor child, perhaps the walk will be the best thing for her. It is of no use waiting for the fly.'

Here Charlie came back to report that the fly was nowhere visible, but that some one who had been knocked down by a runaway horse was being carried up to the house, much injured. 'A white horse in a brougham. They say it took fright, and dashed down the avenue; and they are afraid the man is badly hurt,' said Charlie. The ladies shuddered as the poor fellow was carried past them, his head bound round with a handkerchief stained with blood. They were the last to leave, and came down the steps just as this figure was being carried in. It was broad daylight now, and they all felt guilty and miserable in their ball dresses. This was how the last ball ended which was given by the Burtons in Dura House.

They walked down weary, feeling some weight upon them which the majority of the party did not understand, all the length of the leafy avenue, where the birds were singing, and the new morning sending arrows of gold. The fly, with Mr Dalton

in it, very tired and fretful, met them at the gate. He had not so much as come within sight of the brougham with the white horse. But yet he was ready to go up to the great house as duty demanded, to put himself at the service of its mistress. Charlie, enlightened all in a moment as to the meaning of the night's proceedings, went with him, like a ghost of misery and wrath. The girls and the mother went home alone through the sunshine. And the echoes grew still about that centre of tumult and rejoicing. The rejoicing had ended now; and, with that feast, the reign of the Burtons at Dura had come to an end.

## CHAPTER VIII.

A SUMMER night passes quickly to those who have need of darkness for their movements. When Mrs Drummond found herself at liberty to carry out the plan she had formed, the time before her was very short. She went back to the kitchen, and called Susan to her. Mr Burton woke up as she came in, and they had a hurried consultation; the consequence of which was that Susan was sent to the stables, which were not very far from the garden door of the Gatehouse, to order a carriage to be dispatched instantly to pick up Mr Burton at the north gate, two miles off, in the opposite direction from the village. He could walk thus through the grounds by paths he was familiar with, and drive to a station five miles further off on another railway. So readily do even innocence and ignorance fall into the shifty ways of guilt that this was Helen's plan. He was to wait here

till Susan returned, and the experiment of her going would be a proof if the way was quite safe for him. When Susan was gone Mrs Drummond returned alone to where her guest sat before the kitchen fire. She had her blotting-book under her arm, and an inkstand in her hand. 'Before you go,' she said in a low voice, 'I want you to do something for me.'

'I will do anything for you,' he cried—'anything! Helen, I have not deserved it. You might have treated me very differently. You have been my salvation.'

'Hush!' she said. His thanks recalled her old feelings of distrust and dislike rather than the new ones of pity. She put down her writing things on the table. 'I have my conditions as well as other people,' she said. 'I want now to know the truth.'

'What truth?'

'About Rivers's,' she said.

'Helen!'

'It is useless for you to resist or deny me,' she replied, 'you are in my power. I am willing to do everything to serve you, but I will have a full explanation. Write it how you please—but you shall not leave this place till you have given me the means, when I please, and how I please, of proving the truth.'

'What is the truth, as you call it?' he said sullenly; 'what have I to do with it? Drummond and the rest went into it with their eyes open; all the accounts of the concern were open to them.'

'I do not pretend to understand it,' said Helen. 'But you do. Here are pens and paper. I insist upon a full explanation—how it was that so flourishing a business perished in three years; where those books went to, which Robert was so falsely accused of destroying. Oh, are you not afraid to tire out my patience? Do you know that you are in my power?'

He gave an alarmed look at her. He had forgotten everything but those fables about feminine weakness which are current among such men, and had half laughed in his sleeve half an hour before at her readiness to help and serve him. But now all at once he perceived that laughter was out of place, and there was no time to lose. The reflection that ran through his mind was—All must come out in a week or two—it will do her no good; but it can do me no harm. 'If I am to give an account of the whole history it will take me hours,' he said. 'I may as well give up all thought of getting away to-night.' But he drew the blotting-book towards him. Helen did not relax nor falter. She lighted another candle; she left him to him-

self with a serious belief in his good faith which startled him. She moved about the kitchen while he wrote, filling a small flask with wine out of the solitary bottle which had been brought out for his refreshment, and which represented the entire cellar of the Gatehouse—even brushing the coat which he had thrown aside, that it might be ready for him. The man watched her with the wonder of an inferior nature. He had loved her once, and it had given him a true pleasure to humble her when the moment came. But now the ascendancy had returned into her hands. Had he been in her place how he would have triumphed! But Helen did not triumph. His misery did not please, it bowed her down to the ground. She was sad—suffering for him, ashamed, anxious. He did not understand it. Gradually, he could not have told how, her look affected him. He tore up the first statement he had commenced, a florid, apologetic narrative. He tore up the second, in which he threw the blame upon the ignorance of business of poor Drummond and his fellow-directors. Finally he was moved so strangely out of himself that he wrote the simple truth, and no more, without a word of apology or explanation. Half-a-dozen lines were enough for that. The apology would, as he said, have taken hours.

And then Susan came back. By this time he had written not only the explanation required of him, but a letter to his wife, and was ready to try his fate once more. Helen herself went with him to the garden door; the path through the woods was dark, hidden from the moonlight by the close copses and high fence, which it skirted for many a mile. And there would not be daylight to betray him for at least an hour. He stood on the verge of the dark wood, and took her hand. 'Helen, you have saved me: God bless you,' he said. And in a moment this strange episode was over, as though it had never been. She stood under the rustling trees, and listened to his footsteps. The night wind blew chill in her face, the dark boughs swayed round her as if catching at her garments. A hundred little crackling sounds, echoes, movements among the copse, all the jars and broken tones of nature that startle the fugitive, made her heart beat with terror. If she had felt a hand on her shoulder, seizing her instead of him, Helen would not have been surprised. But while she stood and listened all the sounds seemed to die away again in the stillness of the night. And the broad moonlight shone, silvering the black trees, out of which all individuality had fled, and the music from Dura came back in a gust, and the roll

of the carriages slowly moving about the avenue, waiting for the dancers. And but that Helen stood in so unusual a spot, with that garden door half open behind her, and the big key in her hand, she might have thought that all this was nothing more than a dream.

She went in, and locked the door; and then returned to Susan's kitchen. It was her turn now to feel the cold, after her excitement was over; she went in shivering, and drew close to the fire. She put her head down into her hands. The tears came to her eyes unawares; weariness had come upon her all at once, when the necessity of exertion was over. She held in her hand the paper she had made Burton write, but she had not energy enough to look at it. Would it ever be of any use to her? Would he whom it concerned ever return? Or was all this—the picture, the visit to the Exhibition, the sudden conviction which had seized upon her—were these all so many delusions in her dream? After a while Miss Jane, all unconscious, excited with her unusual pleasure, and full of everything she had seen, came and sat by her and talked. 'I told Susan to go to bed,' said Miss Jane; 'and I wish you would go too, Mrs Drummond. I will sit up for Norah. Oh, how proud I was of that child

to-night! I suppose it's very wrong, you know —so my mother says—but I can't help it. It is just as well I am a single woman, and have no children of my own; for I should have been a fool about them. The worst of all is that we shan't keep her long. She will marry, and then what shall we do? I am sure to lose her would break Stephen's heart.'

'She is very young,' said Helen, who answered for civility's sake alone, and who with all the heavy thoughts in her heart and apprehensions for the fugitive, would have given much to be left to herself.

'Yes, she is young; but not too young to do a great deal of mischief. When I saw all those men on their knees before her!' cried Miss Jane, with a laugh of triumph. She had never been an object of much admiration or homage herself; men had not gone on their knees to her, though no doubt she was more worthy than many of the foolish creatures who have been so worshipped; but the result of this was that Miss Jane enjoyed heartily the revenge which other women had it in their power to take for all the slights and scorns to which she and her homely sisters had been subjected. She liked to see 'them' punished, though 'they' were an innocent, new generation,

blameless, so far as she was concerned. She would not have injured a fly; but her face beamed all over with delight at the thought that it was Norah's mission to break hearts.

Thus the good soul sat and talked, while Helen listened to every sound, and wondered where was he now? what might be happening? She did not even hear what was being said to her until Miss Jane fell into a moralising vein. 'The Burtons are at the height of their splendour now,' she said. 'I never saw anything so grand as it was. I don't think anything could be grander. But oh, Mrs Drummond, people's sins find them out. There's Clara getting bewitched by that man; everybody could see it. A man old enough to be her father, without a scrap of character, and no money even, I suppose. Think of that! and oh, what will all their grandeur do for them, with Ned at the other end of the world, and Clara throwing herself away?'

'Oh, hush, hush!' cried Helen. 'Don't prophesy any more misfortune; there is enough without that.'

And five minutes after Norah came to the door, surrounded by the party from the Rectory, all pale and terror-stricken, with the news which they felt to be so terrible. 'Clara has gone

away!' They stood at the door and told this tale, huddled together in the fresh sunshine, the girls crying, the elder women asking each other, 'what would the Burtons do?' 'She was almost rude to me. She sent me away,' Mrs Dalton said, 'or I should have stayed with her. And Mr Burton is not there! What will she do?' They could scarcely make up their minds to separate, worn out and miserable as they all were. And, opposite, in the morning sunshine, two men still watched the Gatehouse, as they had watched it all through the night.

These miseries all ended in a misery which was comic, had any of them had heart enough left to laugh. While she helped to undress Norah, Miss Jane suddenly uttered a scream, which made Helen tremble from head to foot. She had caught in her hands the pretty flounces of that white dress, that lovely dress, Dr Maurice's present, which had turned poor little Cinderella-Norah into an enchanted princess; but now, alas, all limp, damp, ruined! even stained with the dewy grass and gravel across which it had come. Miss Jane could have cried with vexation and dismay. This was the climax of all the agonies of that wonderful night; but, fortunately, it was not so hopeless as the others. An hour

later, when the house was all silent, and even Helen lay with her eyes shut, longing to sleep, Miss Jane stole down-stairs again, carrying this melancholy garment on her arm. She went to Susan's kitchen, where the fire was still burning, and spreading it out upon the big table, took it to pieces to see what could be done. And then she made a discovery which drew from her a cry of joy. The dress was *grenadine*, not tarlatan! Dear, ignorant reader, perhaps you do not know what this means? but well did Miss Jane understand. 'Grenadine will wash!' she said to herself triumphantly. She was a clever woman, and she was not unconscious of the fact. She could wash and starch with any professional. Accordingly, she set to work with scissors and soap and starch and hot irons; but, above all, with love—love which makes the fingers cunning and the courage strong.

Mr Burton made his escape safely. He had reached the north gate before the dog-cart did, which came up for him just as the morning was breaking. With this delay it so happened that when he reached the station to which he was bound, a brougham with a white horse appeared in sight behind, and gave him a thrill of terror; it was not a likely vehicle certainly for his pur-

suers; but still it was possible that they might have found nothing more suitable had they got scent of him at Dura. He sprang out of the dog-cart accordingly, and took refuge in one of the corners of the station. It was a junction, and two early morning trains, one up and one down, passed between four and five o'clock. Both parties accordingly had some time to wait. Mr Burton skulking behind anything that would shelter him, made out, to his great amazement, that the other traveller waiting about was his friend Golden, accompanied by a cloaked and veiled woman. The fugitive grinned in ghastly satisfaction when he saw it. He had no desire just then to encounter Golden, and in such companionship he was safe. It was a lovely morning, fresh and soft, cooler than July usually is, and the pair on the platform walked about in the sun, basking in it. He watched them from behind a line of empty carriages. The woman, whoever she was, clung close to her companion, holding his arm clasped with both her hands; while Golden bent over her, with his face close to her veil. 'I wonder who she is? I wonder what they are doing here at this hour? I wonder if he has been to Dura? And, by Jove, to think of his going in for that sort of thing, as if he were five-and-

twenty!' Mr Burton said to himself. He was full of curiosity, almost of amazement, and he longed to go and sun himself on that same platform too; but he was a fugitive, and he dared not. How could he tell who might be about, or what Golden's feelings were towards him? They had been very good friends once; but Burton had stood by Golden but feebly at the time of the trial about Rivers's, and Golden had not stood by Burton warmly during the time of difficulty which had culminated in ruin. He watched them with growing curiosity, with a kind of interest which he could not understand—with—yes, he could not deny it, with a curious wistfulness and envy. He supposed the fellow was happy like that, now? And as for himself, he was not happy—he was cold, weary, anxious, afraid. He had a prison before him, perhaps a felon's sentence—anyhow, at the least, a loud, hoarse roar of English society and the newspapers. If he could but succeed in putting the Channel between him and them! and there was that other man, as guilty as himself, perhaps more guilty ('for he had not my temptations,' Mr Burton said to himself; 'he had not a position to keep up, an expensive establishment, a family'), sunning himself in the full morning light, waiting for his train in the eye of day, not

afraid of anybody—nay, probably at the height of pleasure and success, enjoying himself as a young man enjoys himself! When the pair approached a little closer to his hiding-place than they had yet done, Burton, in his haste to get out of the way, slipped his foot, and fell upon the cold iron rails. He rose with a curse in his heart, the poignancy of the contrast was too much for him. Had he but known that his appearance would have confounded his old friend, and set all his plans to nought! Could he but have imagined who it was that clung to Golden's arm!

But he did not. He saw the up-train arrive, and the two get into it. He had meant to go that way himself, feeling London, of all refuges, the most safe; but he had not courage to venture now. He waited for the other train going down into the country. He made a rapid calculation how he could shape his course to the sea, and get off, if not as directly, perhaps more securely. He had found a dark overcoat in the dog-cart, which was a boon to him; he had poor Helen's flask of wine in his pocket. And as he got into the train, and dashed away out of the station and over the silent, sunshiny country, where safety lay, Golden and Golden's companion went out of Mr Burton's mind. He had a hundred things to think of, and

yet a hundred more. Why should he trouble himself about that?

Thus the night disappeared like a mist from the face of the world; and the 7th of July, an ordinary working day like the others,—Saturday, the end of a common week,—rose up business-like and usual upon a host of toiling folk, to whom the sight of it was sweet for the sake of the resting day that came after it. Old Ann from Dura Den drove her cart with the vegetables, and the big posy for the sick gentleman, under Stephen's window, and wondered that it should still be closed, though it was ten o'clock. Susan, very heavy-eyed and pale, was cleansing and whitening her steps, upon which there had been so many footsteps last night.

'Well, Susan, you *are* late,' said old Ann.

'Our folks were all at that ball last night,' said Susan, 'keeping a body up, awaiting for 'em till morning light.'

'Well, well, young folks must have their diversions. We was fond of 'em ourselves once on a day,' said the charitable old woman.

Across the road the blinds were still down in the Rectory. The young people were all asleep; and even the elder people had been overcome with weariness and the excitement through which, more

or less, all of them had gone. Before old Ann's cart resumed its progress, however, Stephen's window had been opened, and signs of life began to appear. About eleven Mrs Drummond came downstairs. She had slept for an hour, and on waking had felt assured that she must have been dreaming, and that all her vision of the night was a delusion; but her head ached so, and her face was so pale when she looked at herself in the glass, that Helen trembled and asked herself if this was the beginning of a fever. Something must have happened—it could not all be a dream. She knelt down to say her prayers in front of the table, where her picture, her idol, was. And then she saw a paper, placed upright beneath it, as flowers might be put at a shrine. She read it then, for the first time, on her knees. It was the paper that Reginald Burton had written, which she had taken from him in her weariness without being able to read it. Half-a-dozen lines, no more. She did not understand it now; but it was enough, it was final. No one, after this, could throw reproach or scorn upon her Robert's name.

Robert! This night had been like a year, like a lifetime. It had made her forget. Now she knelt there, and everything came back to her. She did not say her prayers; the attitude some-

times is all that the heavy-laden are capable of; of itself that attitude is an appeal to God, such as a child might make who plucked at its mother's dress to attract her notice, and looked up to her, though it could find no words to say. Not a word came to Helen's lips. She knelt and recollected, and thought—her mind was in a whirl, yet it was silent, not even forming a wish. It was as if she held her breath and gazed upon something which had taken place before her, something with which she had no connection. 'I have seen the wicked great in power, like a green bay-tree; and I passed again, and lo! he was not.' Was that the story, written in ruin, written in tears? And Robert! Where was he—he who had stretched out his hands to her in the depths of despair, from hell, from across the Atlantic, from—where?

Helen rose up piteously, and that suspense which had been momentarily dispossessed by the urgency of more immediate claims upon her attention, came back again, and tore her heart in twain. Oh, they might think her foolish who did not know! but who else except Robert could have seized her very heart with those two up-stretched hands of Dives, hands that could have drawn her down, had she been there, out of the highest heaven? She could trust no longer, she thought,

to the lukewarm interest of friends—to men who did not understand. She must bestir herself to find out. She must find out if she should die.

Thus, with dry, bright eyes, and a fire new-lit in her heart which burned and scorched her, she went down-stairs into the common world. 'I will bring your breakfast directly, 'm,' said Susan, meeting her in the passage, and Helen went in to the old, ghostly drawing-room, the place which had grown so familiar to her, almost dear.

Was it the old drawing-room she had lived in yesterday? or what strange vision was it that came across her of another room, far different, a summer evening as this was a summer morning, a child who cried 'Mamma, here is a letter!' Nothing —nothing! only a mere association, one of the tricks fancy plays us. This feverish start, this sudden swimming of the head, and wild question whether she was back in St Mary's Road, or where she was, arose from the sight of a letter which lay, awaiting her, on the centre of a little round table. It lay as that letter had lain some years ago, in which he took his leave of her—as a hundred letters must have lain since. A common letter, thrown down carelessly, without any meaning. Oh, fool, fool that she was!

## CHAPTER IX.

Mrs Burton was alone in her deserted house. The house was not deserted in the common sense of the word. Up-stairs at this very moment it was buzzing with life and movement; and at least the young men in the smoking-room—men who had come from town, from their duties and their pleasures, expressly for the ball—were commenting to each other carelessly upon the absence of their host. 'Young Burton has been off for six months on a wandering fit, and old Burton is up to the eyes in business, as usual,' Cyril Rivers explained, who was not unfriendly to his entertainers; while the Marchioness, with Lady Florizel in the room of state up-stairs, who was commenting upon Clara's behaviour, and declaring her intention to leave next morning. 'Fortunately, Merewether has not committed himself,' the Marchioness was saying. In another room of the house, Mrs

Burton's two aunts, supported by their two maids, were shaking their heads together in mingled sorrow and anger. 'Depend upon it, something will come of all this,' Mrs Everest said, as she put on her nightcap; and Aunt Louisa cried, and exclaimed that when Clara entered on such an extravagant course, she always knew that some chastisement must come. 'I would shut that child up, and feed her on bread and water,' cried the stronger-minded sister; and so said the maids, who thought Miss Clary was bewitched—and with such a man!

While all this was going on, little Mrs Burton was alone in the ball-room, which was still blazing with lights. She was seated wearily in a big chair at one end. But for her diamonds, which sought the light, and made a blaze of radiance round about her, like the aureole of a saint, she would have been invisible in the great, spacious, empty room. A deserted ball-room has been so often described, that I will not repeat the unnecessary picture. This ball-room, however, had not a dismal aspect; everything was too well managed for that. The flowers, arranged in great brilliant banks of colour, were not fading, but looked as brilliant as ever; the lights shone as brightly. Except for some flowers dropped about from

the bouquets of the dancers, some shreds of lace and tulle torn from their dresses, it might have been before instead of after the ball. Mrs Burton was seated at the further end. She sat quite motionless, her hands crossed in her lap, her diamonds reflecting the light. What a night this had been for her! The other parties concerned had each had their share—her husband his ruin, her child her elopement; but this small woman with her hands clasped, with this crowded house to regulate and manage, with her part still to play in the world around her, knew all and had all to bear. She sat thus among the ruins, nothing hid from her, nothing postponed. Through her slight little frame there was a dull throbbing of pain; but her head was clear, and did not lose a jot of all that fate had done, of all it had in store. She did not complain. She had foreseen much; she had gone forward with her eyes open; she had even said that were her husband to be bankrupt in two days, she would give a ball on the intermediate night. If it was a brag, she had excelled that brag; she had given her greatest ball, and reached her apotheosis, on the very night when he was flying from justice. And no good angel had interfered to soften to her the news of these successive blows. She had herself opened the ball

with old Lord Bobadil—the man of highest rank present; and it was when she had resumed her seat after that solemn ceremonial that Golden, whom she hated, approached her, and whispered in her ear the news of her husband's ruin. She had been prepared for the news, but not then, nor at such a moment; nevertheless, she stood up and received the blow without a cry, without a moment's failure of her desperate courage. And everything had gone on. She was always pale, so that there was nothing to betray her so far as that went, and her cares as hostess never relaxed. She went from side to side, dispensing her attentions, looking after everybody's comfort as if she had been a queen, and all the time asking herself had he been taken? was he a prisoner? how much shame should she have to bear? Then, when the slow hours had gone on, and the insupportable din about her seemed as if it must soon come to an end, there arrived that other messenger of woe, poor kind Mrs Dalton, with tears in her eyes, and a voice which faltered. 'The rector has gone after them. Oh, will you let me stay with you? Can I be of any use to you?' Mrs Dalton had sobbed, attracting, as the other woman—the real sufferer—knew, the attention of those groups about, who had no right to know anything of her private

sorrows. 'It is not necessary. My father is here, and my aunts. I can have everything done that is wanted,' Mrs Burton replied: and she had turned round to show some one who came to ask her where the basket was with all the ribbons, and flowers, and pretty toys for the cotillion. Through all this she had stood her ground. She had shaken hands with the last of her guests and had seen the visitors to their rooms before she gave in; and even now she was not giving in. Had any one entered the empty room, Mrs Burton would have proved equal to the occasion; she would have risen to meet them—have talked on any subject with perfect self-command. But, fortunately, no one came.

Poor old Mr Baldwin had arrived at Dura only that night. He had heard a great many disquieting rumours, and he was very unhappy about his son-in-law's position, and about the way in which his daughter took it. Even the fact that she had her settlement scarcely consoled him; for he said to himself that the creditors would 'reflect' upon all this extravagance, and that even about the settlement itself a great deal would be said. He had hovered about her all the evening, looking wistfully at her, inviting her confidence; but Mrs Burton had not said a word to him, even of her daughter's disappearance. She had felt no im-

pulse to do anything about Clary. Whether it was that all her energy was required to bear up against those successive blows, or if her pride shrank from informing even her own friends, or finally, if she felt it useless, and knew that now no power on earth could compel the self-willed girl to return, it is certain that Mrs Burton had 'taken no steps.' Even now she did not think of taking any steps. She allowed her father and her aunts to go to bed without a word. She sat and pondered, and did nothing. Alone in that great blazing deserted room—alone in the house—alone in the world: this was what she felt. Out of doors the birds were singing and the sun shining; but the closed windows admitted only the palest gleam of the daylight. When the servants came to tell her that Mr Dalton was at the door, asking to see her, she sent him a civil message: 'Many thanks; but her father was with her, and could do all she wanted.' Then her maid came to ask if Mrs Burton did not want anything, and was sent away with a wave of her hand. Then the butler came timidly to ask should they shut up? was master to be expected? At that summons Mrs Burton rose.

'I am tired,' she said, putting on her company calm; for Simmons the butler was as im-

portant in his way as old Lord Bobadil. 'I was glad to rest a little after all the worry. Yes, certainly, shut up, and let everybody go to bed. I do not expect your master to-night.'

'If I might make so bold, madam,' said Simmons, 'Tom the groom have just been in to say as orders was took to the stables to send the dog-cart for master to the north gate, and as he took him up there and drove him to Turley station, and as he gave him this note, and said as it was all right.'

'All right!' She repeated the words, looking at him with a ghastly bewilderment which frightened the man. And then she recovered herself, and resumed her former composure. 'That will do, Simmons. Your master had a—journey—to make. I was not aware he would have started so—soon. Have everything shut up as quickly as possible, and let all the servants go to bed.'

She went up-stairs, emerging all at once into the full morning sunshine in the hall, which dazzled and appalled her. The light dazzled her eyes, but not her jewels, which woke at its touch, and blazed about her with living, many-coloured radiance. A little rainbow seemed to form round her as she went up-stairs. How her temples

throbbed! What a dull aching was in every limb, in every pulse! She went into Clara's room first. She was not a very tender mother, and never had been; yet almost every night for seventeen years she had gone into that room before retiring to her own. Clara's maid was seated, fast asleep, before a table on which a candle was burning pitifully in the full daylight. The room looked trim and still as a room does which has not been occupied in that early brightness. The maid woke with a shiver as Mrs Burton entered.

'Oh, Miss Clara, I beg your pardon!' she said.

'It is no matter. My daughter will not want you to-night. Go to bed, Jane,' said Mrs Burton. 'And you can tell Barnes to go to bed. Neither of you will be wanted. Go at once.'

When she was left alone, she cast a glance round to see if there was any letter. There was a little three-cornered note fastened on the pincushion. She took that into her hand along with her husband's note, which she held there, but did not attempt to read either. With a quick eye she noted that Clara's jewel-case and all the presents which had been showered upon her that morning — her eighteenth birthday — had gone.

A faint, mechanical smile came upon her face, and then she locked the door, and went to her own room.

There she sat down again to think, with the diamonds still upon her and all her ornaments, and the two letters in her hand. Why should she read them? She knew exactly what they would be. The one she did open after a long pause was Clary's. The other — had she any interest in it? it gave her a sensation of disgust rather: she tossed it on the table. Clary's note was very short. It ran thus:—

'DEAR MAMMA, — Feeling sure you never would consent, and as we both know we could not live without each other, I have made up my mind to leave you. I shall be Mrs Golden when you get this, for he has prepared everything. We start immediately for the Lakes, and I will write you from there. Of course it would have been nicer to have been Lady Somebody; but then I never saw any one who was half so nice as he is; and he hopes, and so do I, that you will soon make up your mind to it, and forgive us.

'Your affectionate CLARY.

'He bids me say it is to be at St James's,

Piccadilly, and that if you inquire, you will find everything quite right.'

Mrs Burton tossed this from her too on to the same table where the father's letter lay unopened. The scorn with which they filled her stopped for a moment the movements of that wonderful machine for thinking which nothing had yet arrested. It was 'human nature' *pur et simple.* Clara had taken her jewels, had made sure it was 'all right' about the wedding; and the father had sent the same message — 'all right.' All right! A smile flitted across the pale, almost stern, little face of the woman who was left to bear all this, and to bear it alone. Most other women would have made some passionate attempt to do something—to pursue the one or the other —to go to their succour. Mrs Burton had no such impulse. She was like a soldier who has fought to the last gasp; she stood still upon her span of soil, her sword broken, her banner taken from her; nothing to fight for any longer, yet still, with the instinct of battle, holding out, and standing firm. So long as there was any excuse for keeping up the conflict, she would have borne every blow like a stoic; what she could not bear

was the thought of giving in; and the hour for giving in had come.

Must it be told? Must she acknowledge before the world that all had been in vain? that her husband was a fugitive, her daughter the victim of a scoundrel, her family for ever crushed down and trampled in the dust? To everything else she could have wound up her high courage. This was the only thing that was really hard for her, and this was what she had to do. How much, she wondered, would she have to suffer? Probably Mr Burton would be taken, tried, share the fate which various men whose names she knew had already borne. Should she have to go to him? to visit him in his prison? to read her own name in the papers—'Mrs Burton spent an hour with the prisoner.' 'His wife was present!' She clasped her small, thin hands together. For a long time she had wondered whether when it came she would feel it. She could have answered her own question now. Ruin, shame, public comment, sudden descent from her high estate, humiliation, sympathy, even pity—all these were before her; and it would have been hard for her to say which was the worst.

The young men roused her with their voices as they came up-stairs. It was not worth while

going to bed, she heard one say; a bath, and then a long walk somewhere before breakfast was the only thing possible. This called her attention to the clock striking on the mantelpiece. Six o'clock! No longer night, but day! She rose, and took off her jewels and her evening dress. It troubled, and tired, and irritated her to do all this for herself; but she succeeded at last. A nightly vigil, and even all the emotion through which she had passed did not make the same difference to her colourless countenance which it would have done to a more blooming woman. When she knocked at her father's door, and went in to his bedside to speak to him, he thought her looking very much as usual. He thought he must have overslept himself, which was likely enough, considering how late he had been last night; and that she had come to call him and have a chat with him before all her fine people came down to breakfast. It was kind of Clara. It showed, what he had sometimes doubted, that she was still capable of recollecting that she was his child.

'I have come to tell you of some things that have happened,' she said, sitting down in the big chair by the bed, 'and to ask your advice and help. Some strange things have happened to-night. In the first place, papa, you were a true

prophet. Mr Burton has been obliged to go away.'

'To go away?'

'Yes, to escape, to fly—whatever you call it. He is—ruined. I suppose he must be worse than ruined,' she added quietly; 'for—I hear—the police——'

'Oh, Clara! Oh, my poor, poor child!'

'Don't be sorry for me, papa. Let us look at it calmly. I am not one to cry, you know, and get over it in that way. So far as I have heard yet, he has got off: he reached Turley station this morning, I suppose in time for the train. Most likely he has money, as he has not asked for any, and he may get safely off. Stop, papa; that is not all I have to tell you. There is something more.'

'Clara, my own poor girl! there can be nothing so bad.'

'Some people would think it worse,' she said. 'Papa, don't say any more than you can help. Clara has—eloped. She has gone off with Mr Golden, whom you all forgave, whom I hated, who was—her father's friend.'

The old man gave a great cry. Clary was his grandchild, whom he adored. He loved her with that fond, caressing, irresponsible love which is

sometimes sweeter than even a parent's love for his own child. It was for others to find fault with, to correct, her; the grandfather had nothing to do but admire, and pet, and praise. 'Clary!' it was but the other day that he told her stories as she sat on his knee!

'Yes, Clary. Here is her note, and here is—Mr Burton's. They are both gone. All this has happened since last night.'

'Clara, what o'clock is it now?'

'Half-past six,' she said, mechanically taking out her watch, 'and fortunately nobody will be stirring for some time at least. Papa, what are you going to do?'

'I am going to get up,' he said. 'Clara, there is still time. If I can get up to town by the first train, I may be in time to stop it yet.'

'To stop—what?'

'The marriage, child, the marriage! Clary's destruction! Go away, my dear, and let me get up.'

'It would be of no use,' she said. 'Papa, when Clary has made up her mind, nothing that we can say would stop her. You might do it by law, perhaps; but she will never come home again—never hear reason. I know her better. There were a great many things I wanted to ask about——'

'Leave me just now, for heaven's sake, Clara! I must try, at least, to save the child.'

She rose without another word, and went away. A smile once more stole upon her face, and stayed there, rigid and fixed. He might have been of a little help to herself; but he thought of Clary first—Clary, who was obstinate, and whom nothing could move—who was coaxing and winning to those who loved her, and would persuade the old man to anything. Well, Mrs Burton said to herself, she had hoped for his help for a moment; but now it was clear that she must do everything for herself.

She went down-stairs, and took down a cloak which hung in the hall, and wrapping it about her, stepped out into the fresh air. That, at least, might help her, though nothing else would. She walked down to the avenue, to the skirt of the woods. Like a cordial the soft air breathed about her, and gave her a certain strength. She was not a woman who cared about the meaner delights of wealth; all these she would have given up without a pang. But to exchange this large, free, lofty life which she had been leading for the restrained and limited existence of her father's house—to be no longer entire mistress of her own actions, but to be bound by her father's

antiquated notions, by what Aunt Everett and Aunt Louisa thought proper—that would be hard to bend her mind to. To give up Dura for Clapham! Even that she could do stoically, and no one would ever be the wiser. But to bear all the shame, all the comments, a husband in prison, a story of romance of real life, ruin of the father, elopement of the daughter, in the newspapers! Mrs Burton gave no outward sign of the struggle that went on within her, but she clasped her little thin white hands together, and she recognised at once, wholly and clearly, without any self-deception, what she would have to bear.

She waited there till her father came up to her on his way to the station. He stopped and told her he would come back as soon as he could.

'Most likely I will take Clary to Clapham first,' he said. 'Better than here, don't you think? She might be frightened to face you after her folly. My dear, take a little courage, if you can. The innocent child has given us all the clue that is necessary—St James's, Piccadilly. No marriage could take place before eight o'clock, and I shall reach there soon after—in time to prevent that, at least. I will take her to Clapham, and then, my dear, I will come straight back to you.'

'Very well, papa,' she said.

In her heart she wondered at his simplicity, at the folly of his hopes; but what was the use of saying anything? If it pleased him to do this, if this was what he thought best, why, let him do it. Let every one act as it seemed good in his own eyes.

'And by-the-by, Clara, one thing more,' he said—'Ned's address. Where is he now? I must telegraph at once for him.'

Then some faint semblance of the tigress guarding her young appeared in Mrs Burton.

'Ned! Why should Ned be brought home? Why should he be involved in trouble he has nothing to do with? He is out of it; he, at least, is safe. No, papa; I will not have him brought back.'

'Clara, you are mad, you are incomprehensible!' cried her father. 'Give me the boy's address.'

'I will not,' she answered, looking at him.

The woman had come to light in her at last—the woman and something of the mother. As a daughter she had neglected none of the observances of respect. She had been dutiful, though she had long been an independent agent, and had forgotten the very idea of obedience. But never had she defied her father before. She did it now

calmly, as she did everything. She had upheld her family and its importance as long as mortal strength could do it; and now when that had failed, she could at least defend her boy.

'Clara, you astonish me. I could not have believed it of you,' said her father severely.

But he had no time to remonstrate or to command. He had to hurry away for his train. And she stood and looked after him, her breath for the first time quickened with excitement, her resolution bringing a certain colour to her cheek. Ned was safe, and out of all this trouble. It was the only gleam of comfort in her clouded sky. He who should bring her boy back to undergo all this shame and suffering was her enemy, though it were done on the specious pretence of serving her. To bring her son back to support and help her would be to do her the last and cruellest wrong. She could do without the help and support. She was ready to bear anything, since it must be borne. What relief could it afford her to know that another suffered too, and that other her son? She went back to the house with quickened steps under the sway of the thought, that Ned, at least, was safe and out of it. She was not the kind of woman who would complain of bearing anything alone.

Breakfast was a very late and straggling meal that day at Dura; but Mrs Burton was the first at the table—before even the young man who had proposed a bath and a walk instead of sleep. The breakfast was as sumptuous, as well served, as usual, and there were the same number of servants about, the dogs, as usual, on the lawn, the man with the post-bags, as usual, visible, coming up the avenue. The ordinary eye would have seen no indication of any change. But Mrs Burton made a calm little speech to every new group, which had the most curiously disconcerting effect upon her guests. She said to them that family circumstances compelled her to make preparations at once for leaving Dura; that some things had happened which she need not tell them of—family events—which had changed all her arrangements. She hoped, under these circumstances, they would pardon her, if she said plainly——

'Oh, yes, certainly. Not another word,' the visitors cried, dismayed. They all gazed at each other, and whispered over their teacups when her back was turned. They heard her say the same thing to one party after another—even to the Marchioness herself, who had come down fully primed, meaning to overwhelm Mrs Burton with a theatrical leave-taking.

'Why, why, why!' she cried in her wrath, 'you mean that you want to—get rid of us, Mrs Burton!' and her hair stood on end upon her noble head.

'I am afraid, without making any mystery of it, that is what I do mean, Lady Upshire,' said the woman, who was only the wife of a rich City man—a *parvenue*, one of the *nouveaux riches*—fixing her blue eyes calmly upon her splendid guest.

'What pluck she has!' the young men said to themselves. They almost cheered her for her dauntless front. And they were all gone by two o'clock—Marchioness and maid, guardsman and public servant—every visitor, gentle and simple. They disappeared as if by magic. What questions they asked each other, what speculations they entertained among themselves, Mrs Burton neither knew nor cared. The first thing was to be free of them; and when the afternoon came, she was alone with the startled servants and her two aunts, to whom as yet she had given no explanations, and whose private opinion, stated a hundred times that morning, was, that at last beyond all controversy Clara must be mad.

## CHAPTER X.

Mr Baldwin came back to Dura in the afternoon, worn out and disappointed—foiled by the simple fact, which had never occurred to the old man as possible, that Clary—his innocent Clary—had wittingly or unwittingly given a false indication, and that St James's, Piccadilly, knew nothing of any such marriage. Mr Baldwin drove to all the hotels, to all the churches, he could think of, from St James's, Camberwell, to St James's, Kentish Town, but in vain. Just when it was too late to follow them further, he discovered an anonymous little chapel which he must have passed a dozen times in his journeys, where the ceremony had actually taken place. Charles Golden to Clara Burton. Then he had gone to the Northern Railway Station, and discovered that they had left by the eleven o'clock train. All he had done had been to verify their

movements. The poor old man aged ten years during this running to and fro. He went back to his daughter worn out and miserable. Little Clary, the pride of the family, with all her beauty, her youth, and the possibilities that lay before her! 'Now I know that we may go too far in carrying out the precepts of Christianity,' he groaned, when his sympathetic sisters came to console him. 'We thought he had repented, and we took him back to our hearts.' In this, however, poor Mr Baldwin deceived himself. Golden had been received back into their hearts, not because he had repented, but because the scandal against him had died into oblivion, and because in their souls even the honest men admired the consummate cleverness of the rogue. And in this point, at least, Mr Golden had not been mercenary; he had actually fallen in love with Clara Burton, knowing the desperate state of her father's affairs — affairs which were so desperate, when he was called on to help in regulating them, that he had been 'obliged to decline' the task. Golden had a little Sybarite 'place' of his own on the shores of the Mediterranean. So many scraps of money had adhered to his fingers in his various commercial adventures, though these adventures were always unfortunate, that he could afford himself that

crowning luxury of a beautiful wife; and then Mr Baldwin was a rich man and a doting grandfather, who after a while would be sure to forgive.

As for Mrs Burton, she had expected her father's failure, and was not surprised or disappointed. She had given her daughter up, not with any revengeful or vindictive intention, but simply as a matter of fact. 'Oh, don't curse her, Clara!' Aunt Louisa sobbed in the midst of her tears. And then indeed Mrs Burton was surprised. 'Curse her! I have no intention of cursing her,' she said. Clary had taken her own way; she had pleased herself. What she had done was quite easily to be accounted for; it was human nature. Mrs Burton was not subject to passions herself, but she recognised them as a motive-power; and though perhaps in her inmost heart there was a sense of shame that *her* child should be violently moved by those lowest, almost brutal, forces (for so she deemed them), yet her intelligence understood and allowed the possibility. Clary had acted according to her nature; that was all that was to be said. She had laid an additional burden upon her family—or rather upon her mother, the only one of the family left to bear it; but then it was not natural to Clary to take account of what other people might have

to bear. Thus Mrs Burton accepted it, making no complaint. If it gave her any additional individual pang for itself, and not merely as part of the whole, she at least said little about it, and made no individual complaint.

But there came a moment when actual feeling, emotion not to be disguised, broke forth in this self-possessed woman. She had decided to remain at Dura till further news, and until her husband's affairs could be fully examined into; and though her aunts went home, her father remained with her. Two long days passed over without news. On the third, Tuesday, Mr Baldwin went to town to make what inquiries were possible. As yet there had been but vague hints in the newspapers—rumours of changes affecting 'a well-known name in the City'—and the old man had hesitated to show himself, to ask any questions which might, as he said, 'precipitate matters.' 'While we are in ignorance, quiet is best,' he had said; but when the third day arrived, though Mrs Burton still bore the suspense like a stoic, Mr Baldwin could not bear it any longer. When he was gone, she showed no signs of impatience; she went about her business as usual, and she had a great deal to do. She had begun at once to wind up the accounts of the house, to arrange with her

servants, to whom she was a just and not ungenerous mistress, when they should go, and what would be done to find them places. But when the languid afternoon came, her energy flagged a little. She did not allow, even to herself, that she was anxious. She went into the great drawing-room, and sat down near a window from which she could see the avenue. Perhaps for the first time, the impulse came into her mind to prefer a smaller room, to take refuge somewhere else than in this waste of damask and gilding; but if such was the case, she restrained and condemned the thought. She was herself so small, almost invisible, in the great, silent place, full of those mirrors which reflected nothing, those chairs where no one sat. No marble statue with a finger on its lip was ever so complete an embodiment of silence as she, seated there all alone, motionless, looking out upon the road. It might have been hours before any one came. A summer afternoon, slow, languid, endless, one vast blank of drowsy calm and blazing sunshine, the wind too listless to blow, the leaves too heavy to wave, everything still, even the birds. But at last, at last some one came—not Mr Baldwin's slow, heavy old steps, but rapid young ones, light and impatient. She gazed at the speck as it gradually approached,

and became recognisable. Then her heart gave a great unexpected, painful throb. Ned! Her last little gleam of satisfaction, her last comfort, then, was not to be. He was not out of it, safe, as she had hoped, but here to bear all the brunt, to share all the shame. She tried to get up, to go and meet him, but sank back, faint and incapable, in her chair, trembling, sick to the heart; overwhelmed for the first time.

He came in, bringing a gust of fresh air (it seemed) with him. He was dusty, and pale, and eager.

'Mother!' he cried, as he came up to her.

She held up her hand with a gesture which was almost passionate, repelling him.

'Oh, Ned, Ned! why have you come here?'

'Don't you want me, mamma?'

He kissed her as he spoke, and put his arm round her. If she had been another kind of woman, he would have sobbed on her breast, for the lad's heart was very sore.

'No, I do not want you,' she said. 'I thought you were safe. I thought you were out of it all. I was ready to bear anything—it cannot hurt me—any more. But you, a boy, a lad, with all your life to come! Oh, Ned, Ned, why have you come here?' She had never done it before in all her

life. She did not embrace him, but clutched at his arm with her two hands, and shed passionate, hot tears. 'I do not want you! I do not want you!' she cried, and clung to him. 'I wish you were at the end of the world!'

'Oh, mother!' cried the boy.

He was fond of her, though perhaps she had never done anything to deserve it. And she—loved him. Yes. All at once she found it out, with a mother's passion. Loved him so that she would have been glad never to see him again; glad to be cut in pieces for him; glad to suffer shame, and pain, and misery, and ruin alone, that he might be out of it. This, which she had scarcely suspected, she found out at last.

But when this moment was over, and the fact that he had come was indisputable, and had to be made the best of, Mrs Burton recovered her usual calm. She was ashamed of herself for having 'broken down.' She said it was fatigue and want of sleep which had made her weak, and then she told him all the circumstances dispassionately, as was natural to her. He himself had been summoned by a telegram from Golden. He had been at Dresden when he received it, and he had travelled night and day. But why from Golden, he asked, a man whom he hated? 'Your mother

wants you here. There has been a great smash, and your presence is indispensable,' was what the telegram had said. But I will not attempt to describe how the little, pale, dispassionate mother told the tale, nor how the young son, full of youthful passion, indignation, rage, and grief, heard of his family's downfall, and the ruin of all its prospects and hopes.

When Mr Baldwin came back, he brought news still more overwhelming. The fact which had made further concealment impossible, and had driven Burton to flight, was the winding up of a trust account for which he had been responsible. The property had been invested by him, and he had paid the interest regularly; but it was found that not a penny of the original capital remained; he had appropriated all. When it was known that he had disappeared, other inquiries had been at once set on foot, but kept carefully out of the papers, lest his escape might be facilitated; and then such disclosures were made as Mr Baldwin could only repeat bit by bit, as his strength permitted. The old man cried like a child; he was utterly broken down. It had even come out about Rivers's, he said. One of the missing books, which poor Drummond had been accused of destroying, had been found in a private safe, along with other

damning accounts, which the unhappy man had not been able to destroy or conceal, so quickly did his fate overtake him. The unhappy man! Both Mr Baldwin and Mrs Burton remembered the time when Robert Drummond had been thus described—when all the newspapers had preached little sermons about him, with many a repetition of this title—articles which Burton had read, and shaken his head over, and declared were as good as sermons, warning the ignorant. This flashed upon Mrs Burton's mind, and it came more dimly to her father. Fortunately, Ned's misery was not complicated by such recollections; he had enough without that.

'But the general impression is that he has escaped,' said Mr Baldwin; and he repeated to them the vague account which had been given to him of the two futile detectives, who had watched the fugitive into a house, and kept in front of it, putting the inhabitants on their guard, while he was smuggled out by a side-door. No doubt he had escaped. And it was known that he had money; for he had drawn a large sum out of the bank the day before.

'I am glad you have come back, Ned,' the grandfather added. 'It is you who ought to manage all this, and not your mother. Of course

she has her settlement, which nobody can touch. And I think now, my dear, that you should leave Dura, and come with me to Clapham. You will have your aunts' society to make up a little, and it will be more convenient for Ned.'

Mrs Burton looked at her son almost wistfully.

'Ned, is there any sacrifice I can make that will induce you to go away?'

'None, mother,' he said, 'none. I will do anything else that you ask me. But here I must have a will of my own. I cannot go away.'

'Go away!' said Mr Baldwin. 'I don't know how he has got here; for your mother would not let me send for you, Ned; but of course this is your proper place. It will be very painful—very painful,' said the old man. 'But you have your settlement, Clara; and we must hope everything will turn out for the best.'

'My mother will give up her settlement, sir, of course,' said Ned. 'After what has happened, she could not—it would be impossible—What! you don't see it? Must not those suffer who have done the wrong?'

'Ned, you are a fool,' said Mr Baldwin, 'a hot-headed young fool. I see your sense now, Clara. That scoundrel, Golden, has sent for him

only to increase our vexation. Give up her settlement! Then pray how is she to live?'

'With me,' said Ned, rising up, and standing behind his mother's chair. He would have taken her hand to sustain him, if he could; but she did not give him her hand. He put his on the back of her chair. That, at least, was something to give him strength.

'With you!' Mr Baldwin was moved by this absurdity to something of his former vigour. 'It would be satisfactory, indeed, trusting her to you. I will have no Quixotical nonsense brought in. This is my affair. I am the proper person to look after my daughter's settlement. It is the only comfort in a bad business. Don't let me hear any more of such childish folly.'

'It is not folly,' said Ned firmly, though his voice trembled. 'I am sure my mother feels like me. We have no right to keep anything while my father has been spending other people's money; or if we have a right in law—'

Mrs Burton put up her hand to stop him. It was the first time in her life that she had allowed herself to be discussed, what she should or would do, without taking any share in it. The fact was, the question was a new one—the problem quite strange to her. She had considered it as certain

up to this moment that her settlement belonged to her absolutely, and that her husband's conduct one way or other could have no effect upon her undoubted right. The problem was altogether new. She put up her hand to interrupt the discussion.

'I have not thought of this,' she said. 'Ned, say no more. I want time to think. I shall tell you to-morrow what I will do.'

Against this decision there was not a word to say. The old man and the boy gave up their discussion as suddenly as they had begun it. Let them argue as they would, it was she who must settle the question; and just then the great bell rang—the bell which regulated the clock in the village, and warned all the countryside when the great people at the great house were going to dine. The ears which were accustomed to it scarcely noted the sound; but Ned, to whom it had become a novelty, and as great a mockery as a novelty, started violently, put up his hands to his ears, and rushed out into the hall, where Simmons stood in all the splendour of his evening dress.

'Stop that infernal noise!' cried poor Ned, in a sudden outburst of rage and humiliation. He felt tempted to knock down the solemn spy before

him, who already, he saw, had noted his dusty dress, his agitated face.

'Happy to see you home, sir,' said Simmons. 'Did you speak, sir? Is there anything as I can do for you?'

'The bell is not to be rung any more,' said Ned, walking gloomily off to his room. It was the first sign to the general world that the grandeur of Dura had come to an end.

A mournful dinner followed, carefully cooked, carefully served, an assiduous, silent servant behind each chair, and eaten as with ashes, and bitterness, and tears, a few faint remarks now and then, a feeble attempt, 'for the sake of the servants,' to look as if nothing was the matter. It was Mr Baldwin chiefly, a man who never could make up his mind that all was over, who made these attempts. Mrs Burton, for her part, was above all pretences. Her long stand against approaching ruin was over; she had laid down her arms, and she no longer cared who knew it. And as for Ned, he was too miserable, too heart-broken, to look anything but overwhelmed with sorrow and shame, as he was.

In the evening he strolled out, feeling the air of the house insupportable. His mother had gone to her room with her new problem which she had

to solve, and Mr Baldwin was tired, and fretful, and anxious to get to bed early, feeling that there was a certain virtue in that fact of going early to bed which might redeem the unusually disturbed, excited life he was leading—a life in which he had been fatally entangled with ruins, and elopements, and sitting up half the night. Ned, who had no mind for sleep, and no power of thinking which could have been of any service to him in the circumstances, went out disconsolately, saying to himself that a stroll in the woods might do him good. But when he had reached the top of the avenue, where the path diverged into the woods, some 'spirit in his feet' led him straight on. Why, he asked himself, should he go to the village? Why should he go to the Gatehouse? Yes, that was where he wanted to go—where his foolish heart had gone before him, courting slight and scorn. Why should he go? If she had sent him away then with contumely, how much more now? At that time, if she had but looked upon him kindly, he had thought he had something to offer her worthy her acceptance. Now he had nothing, and less than nothing—an empty purse and a dishonoured name. Ned slouched his hat over his eyes. He would go and look at the house, look at her win-

dow. If he might see her face again, that would be more than he hoped for. Norah could be nothing—nothing to him now.

So saying, he wandered down the leafy, shadowy way. The sun had set, the gray of the evening had come on; the moon was past the full, and rose late; it was one of those soft, tranquil, mournful summer evenings which fill the heart with wistfulness and longings. The water came unbidden into poor Ned's eyes. Oh, what ruin, what destruction had overwhelmed him and his since last he walked down that path! Then everything that life could offer to make up for the want of Norah (though that was nothing) lay within his grasp. Now, though Norah was clearly lost, everything else was lost with her. He saw no hope before him; his very heart was crushed; a beggar, and more than a beggar; a man who did not know how to dig or how to work; the son of a father who was disgraced. These were miserable thoughts to pour through the mind of a young man of twenty-one. There have been others who have had as much to bear; but they, perhaps, had no Norah to complicate and increase the burden. As he drew near the Gatehouse, his heart began to beat louder. Possibly she would not care to speak to him at all, he thought; how quickly she

had dismissed him last time, when he had no stains upon him, as he had now!

He drew his hat still more over his brows. He walked quickly past the Gatehouse. The windows were all open, and Stephen Haldane sat within, in an interior faintly lighted up by the candles which Miss Jane had just set down upon the table.

'Don't shut my window yet,' he heard the invalid say. 'My poor window! My chief pleasure!'

It was strange to Ned to hear those words, which seemed to let him into the very secret of the sick man's life.

'And a capital window it has been too,' said Miss Jane briskly, thinking of the book, and the money it had brought in.

Ned slackened his steps when he had passed. There had been something at one of the windows on the other side—something, a shadow, a passing gleam, as of a pale face pillowed upon two arms. The poor boy turned, and went back this time more slowly. Yes, surely there was a face at the window. The arms were withdrawn now; there was no light inside to reveal who it was; only a something—a pale little face looking out.

Back again—just once more, once more—to have a last look. He would never see her again,

most likely. As far away as if she were a star in heaven would she be henceforward. He would pass a little more slowly this time; there was no one about to see him. The road was quieter than usual; no one in sight; and with his hat so over his eyes, who could recognise him? He went very softly, lingering over every step. She was still there, looking out, and in the dark with no one near her! Oh, Norah! If she could but know how his heart was pulling at him, forcing him towards that door!

He thought he heard some sound in the silence as of an exclamation, and the face disappeared from the window. A moment after the door opened suddenly, and a little figure rushed out.

'Ned!' it said, 'Ned! Is it possible? Can it be you? And, oh, what do you mean walking about outside like that, as if you knew nobody here?'

'Oh, Norah! I did not know if I might come,' said abject Ned.

'Of course you may come. Why shouldn't you come? Oh, Ned, I was so lonely! I am so glad to see you! I did not know what to do with myself. Susan would not bring in the lamp, and I am so afraid of this room when it is dark!'

'How you once frightened me about it!' he said, as he went in with her.

His heart felt so much lighter, he could not tell how. Insensibly his spirits rose, and with a sense of infinite refreshment, and even of having escaped from something, he went back to the recollections of his youth. Such an innocent, simple recollection, belonging to the time when all was pleasure, when there was no pain.

'Did I? But never mind. Oh, Ned! poor Ned! have they brought you here because of all this trouble? I have so much to say to you. My heart is breaking for you. Oh, you poor, poor, dear boy!'

This was not how he had expected to be spoken to. He could scarcely see her face, it was so dark, what with the curtains at the windows and the shadows of the lime leaves; but she had put her hand into his to comfort him. He did not know what to say; his heart was torn in twain, between misery and joy. It was so hard to let any gleam of light into that desperate darkness; and yet it was so hard to keep his heart from dancing at the sound of her soft, tender voice.

'Norah,' he said, 'oh, Norah! it will not be so very bad if you are sorry for me. You would not speak to me last time. I thought I might, perhaps, never see you again.'

'Oh, Ned! I was only a child. How foolish

I was! I hoped you would look back; but you never looked back; and we who have been brought up together, who have always been—fond of each other!'

'Do you? do you? Oh, Norah! not just because you are sorry? Do you care—a little for me? Speak the truth.'

'Ned, Ned!—I care for you more than anybody—except mamma.'

There was a little silence after this. They were like two children in the simplicity of their youth; their hearts beat together, their burdens—and both the young shoulders were weighed down by premature burdens—were somehow lightened, they could not tell how.

After a while, Norah, nestling like a little bird in the dark, said softly, 'Do you mind sitting without the lamp?' and Ned answered, 'No.' They sat down together, holding each other's hands; they were not afraid of the dark. They poured out their hearts to each other. All his sorrows, all his difficulties, Ned poured into Norah's sympathetic bosom; and she cried, and he consoled her; and she patted his hand or his sleeve, and said, 'Poor boy! Poor, dear Ned!' It was not much. She had no advice to give him, not many words of wisdom; but what she did say was

as healing as the leaves of that tree in Paradise. Her touch stanched all his wounds.

'I have something to tell you too,' she said, trembling a little, when all his tale had been told. 'Ned, you have heard of poor papa, my father, who died before we came here? Oh, Ned! listen. Stoop down, and let me whisper. Ned, he did not die—'

'Norah!'

'Hush. Yes; it is quite true. Oh, don't be frightened. I can't help being frightened staying here alone. Mamma went to him yesterday. Oh, Ned! after seven years! Was there ever anything so strange?'

'Poor Mrs Drummond!' said Ned. Oh, Norah, thank God; my father has not done so much harm as I thought. Are you all alone, my own darling? I suppose she was happy to go.'

He said this with a strange accent of blame in his voice. 'For her own selfish happiness she could leave Norah—my Norah—all alone!' This was what the young man, in his haste, thought.

'I think she was frightened too,' said Norah, under her breath. 'She did not understand it. It is as if he had been really dead, and come alive again. Mamma did not say anything; but I know she was frightened too.'

'Norah, most likely he hates us. If he should try to keep you from me—'

'Oh, Ned, do you mean that this means anything? Do you think it is right? We are all in such trouble, not knowing what may happen. Do you mean,' said Norah, faltering and trembling, 'do you mean that this means— Is it—being engaged?'

'Doesn't it, dear? Oh, Norah, what could it mean else? You would never have the heart to cast me off now?'

'Cast you off! Oh, no, Ned! Oh, never, Ned! But then that is different. We are so dreadfully young. We have no money. We are in such trouble. Oh! do you think it is right?'

'It can't be wrong to be fond of each other, Norah; and you said you were—a little.'

'Yes; oh, yes! Oh, Ned! do be satisfied. Isn't it enough for us to care for each other—to be the very best, dearest friends?'

'It is not enough for me,' he said, turning his head aside, and speaking sternly in the dark.

'Isn't it, Ned?' said Norah timidly. 'Ned, I wish I could see your face. You are not angry? You poor, dear boy! Oh! you don't think I could have the heart to cross you? and you in such trouble. Ned, what must we do?'

'You must promise me, Norah, on your true and faithful word, that you will marry me as soon as we can, whatever anybody may say.'

Norah in her alarm seized at the saving clause which staved off all immediate terrors.

'When we *can*, Ned.'

'Yes, my own darling. You promise? I shall not mind what happens if I have your promise—your faithful promise, Norah.'

'I promise you faithfully, Ned—faithfully, dear Ned!—when we can—if it should not be for years.'

'But it shall be!' he cried; and then they kissed each other, poor children! and Norah was sitting by herself crying when Susan brought in the lamp.

## CHAPTER XI.

Mrs Burton took her new problem away with her into the quiet of her room. It was a question which had never occurred to her before. Some few first principles even an inquiring mind like hers must take for granted, and this had been one of them. She had no love for money, and no contempt for it—it was a mere commonplace necessity, not a thing to be discussed; and though she had a high natural sense of honour and honesty, in her own person, it had not occurred to her to consider that in such a matter she had anything to do but to accept the arrangement which was according to law and common custom, an arrangement which, of course, had been made (theoretically) in view of a calamity such as had just happened. It was the intention of her settlement, and of all settlements, she said to herself, to secure a woman against the chances of her husband's ruin. She, in most cases,

was entirely irresponsible for that ruin. She had nothing to do with it, and was unable to prevent it. She had married with the belief that she herself and her children would be provided for, and the first duty of her friends was to make sure that it should be so. Up to this point there was no flaw in the argument. Mrs Burton knew that she had brought her husband a good fortune; and her future had been secured as an equivalent. It was like buying a commission—it was like making an investment. She had put in so much, she had a right to secure to herself absolutely the power of taking it out again, or recovering what had been hers. Mr Burton had not incurred his liabilities with her knowledge or consent; he had never consulted her on the matter. He had never said or even hinted to her that her expenditure was too great, that he could not afford it. True it was possible that fastidious persons might blame her for proceeding so long on her splendid course, after hints and rumours had reached her about her husband's position; but these were nothing more than rumours. She had no sort of official information, nothing really to justify her in making a sudden change in her household, which probably would have affected Mr Burton's credit more than her extravagance. She was in no way responsible.

She had even protested against the re-introduction of Golden into his affairs. She could not blame herself for anything she had done; she had always been ready to hear, always willing to give him her advice, to second him in any scheme he propounded to her. She put herself at the bar, and produced all the evidence she knew of, on both sides of the question, and acquitted herself. The money she could have saved by economy was not worth considering in the magnitude of Mr Burton's affairs. She had done nothing which she could feel had made her his accomplice in his wrong-doing.

And she had no right to balk her father in his care for her—to establish a bad precedent in regard to the security of marriage settlements—to put it in the power of any set of creditors to upbraid some other woman whose view of her duty might be different. She had no right to do it. She had to think not of herself only, but of all the married women who slept serenely in the assurance that, whatever happened, their children's bread was secure. She reflected that such a step would put an end to all security—that no woman would venture to marry, that no father would venture to give his child to a man in business, if this safeguard were broken down. It would be impossible. It would be a blow aimed at the constitution of the

country—at the best bulwark of families; it would be an injustice. Of all a commercial man's creditors, surely his wife was the one claimant who had most right to come first. Others might be partially involved; she had put everything in his hands. Without this safeguard she would not have married him, she would not have been permitted to marry him. Going over the question carefully, Mrs Burton felt, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that she had right on her side.

She had right on her side—but she had not Ned. This was a very different matter—an argument such as she had scarcely ever taken into consideration before. Mrs Burton did not disdain the personal argument. She knew that in the confused state of human affairs, in the intricate range of human thoughts, it was often impossible to go upon pure reason, and that personal pleas had to be admitted. But she had never consciously done this before. She was almost scornful of her own weakness now. But she could not help herself. She had to suffer the entrance of this great personal argument, if with a mental pang yet without resistance. She loved her son. All that reason could do for her, all the approbation of her own judgment, the sense of right, the feeling that her position was logically unassail-

able, would not be enough to console her for the illogical, unreasoning disapproval of her boy. For the first time in her life, with a great surprise, this certainty seized upon her. Up to this time she had gone her own way, she had satisfied herself that she was right according to her own standard, and she had not cared what any one said or thought. But now all at once, with wonder, almost with shame, she found that she had descended from this high eminence. A whole host of foolish, childish, unreasonable principles of action, inconsequences, and stupidities were suddenly imported into her mental world by this apparition of Ned. Not the most certain sense of right that reasoning creature ever had, would neutralise, she felt, that pained and wondering look in her son's eyes. If he disapproved it would be a cold comfort to her that reason was on her side. If this indignant, impatient, foolish young soul protested against her that what she did would not bear comparing with some fantastic visionary standard which he called honour, what would it avail her that by her own just standard of weight and measure she was not found wanting? Thus all Mrs Burton's principles and habits, her ways of thinking, the long-exercised solitary irresponsible power of her intelligence, which had guided

her through life for forty years, were all at once brought to a sudden stand-still by the touch, by the breath of that thing called Love, which, she knew not how, had suddenly come in upon her like a giant. This new influence paralysed the fine, delicate, exquisite machinery, by which hitherto all her problems had been worked out. She tried to struggle against it, but the struggle was ineffectual. It was the first time she had felt herself, acknowledged herself, to be acting like a fool! What then? She could not help it. Even in the clear, cold daylight of her mind the entrance of this new force, all shadowy, mysterious, wonderful, could not be contested. She threw down her arms once more. She had been beaten terribly, miserably in the battle of her life—she was beaten sweetly, wonderfully now, in a way which melted her hardness and made the disused heart beat and tremble strangely within her, in the other world where reason hitherto had reigned supreme.

But nothing more was said on the subject for some time. Next morning brought letters, which roused the little party once more into excitement. There was one from Mr Burton, informing his wife that he had got safely to France by a way little used, and was now in the small seaport of

St Servan, awaiting letters from his family, and their advice as to what was best. He had not meant to go there, but a chance encounter with Golden at the station had driven him to take the down-train instead of the up-train. He would remain there if he could, he added, until he heard from home; but if any alarm came would hasten across the country to Brest, from whence he could get off to America. Mr Burton did not say a word of apology or explanation, but he begged to have news 'of all,' to be told 'how people were taking it,' and to have the newspapers sent him. He added in a P.S. the following question: 'By the way, what could Golden be doing at Turley Station, seven miles from Dura, at four o'clock in the morning? And who could the lady be who was with him? If you hear anything on this subject, let me know.'

Clara's letter was from Windermere. It was full of effusiveness and enthusiasm, hoping that dearest mamma would forgive them. Papa, Charles had told her, was not likely to be in a position to forgive any one, but would want it himself, which was very dreadful; but was it not beautiful of Charles, and showed how generous and true he was, that papa's ruin made no difference to his feelings? This reflection, Clara said,

made her so happy, that she felt as if she could even forgive papa—for if he had not been so rash and so wicked she never would have known how much her dear Charles loved her. They were coming back to London in a fortnight from this heavenly lake, and would start then on a round-about journey to Charles's delightful 'place' on the Mediterranean. And, oh! Clara hoped with effusion, dearest mamma would see them, and forgive them, and believe that she never had been so happy in her life as when she signed herself dear mamma's ever affectionate Clara Golden. These were the letters that came to the little party at Dura on the morning after Ned's arrival. They were received with very different feelings by the three. Mr Baldwin, on the whole, was pleased. He was pleased with the 'love to grand-papa,' with which Clara wound up her letter; and he was glad the child was happy at least. 'What is done cannot be undone,' he said; 'and that is quite true about there being nothing mercenary in it, you know.' Mrs Burton gave a faint smile as she laid the letters down one after another. They were just such letters as she expected. Had she been alone, perhaps, she would have tossed them from her in scorn, as she had done with the previous notes; but that had been in a moment of

strong excitement, when she was not full mistress of herself; and what was the good, Mrs Burton thought, of quarrelling with your own whom you cannot alter; or of expecting sense and good taste where such qualities did not exist? From these two, her husband and her daughter, she did not expect any more.

But poor Ned was utterly cast down by these epistles. He asked himself, as Norah had done when Mr Rivers left her at the door of the Academy's Exhibition, was this natural? was this the way of the world? and, like Norah, felt his own distress doubled by the horrible thought that to think of your own comfort first and above all, and to be utterly unmoved by the reflection that you have caused untold misery to others, is the natural impulse of humanity. He was so sad, and looked so humbled, that his mother's heart was penetrated in her new enlightenment by a strange perception of how he was feeling. She was not so feeling herself. The sight of selfishness, even on so grand a scale, did not surprise nor shock her; but she felt what he was feeling, which was as strange to her as a new revelation. The family at Dura during these days were like a beleaguered city—they lived encircled in a close round, if not of enemies, yet of observant, watchful spectators,

who might become enemies at any moment, who might note even the postmark on their letters, and use that against them. Whenever a step was heard approaching the door, a little thrill went through them. It might be some one coming to announce deeper misfortune still. It might be some one who dared to be insolent, some one who had a right to curse and denounce. The tension of their nerves was terrible, the strain of watchfulness, and the pain of standing secretly and always on their defence.

'Let us go, let us go, Clara, I cannot stay here any longer; now that we know where to write to them, let us go,' cried Mr Baldwin after the letters had been read and discussed; and then the old man went out to take a melancholy walk, and ponder what it would be best to do. Should they go back to Clapham? or should he take his poor child away somewhere for 'change of air'? If ever any one wanted change of air surely Clara must.

'Ned, come here,' said Mrs Burton, when they were left alone. He went and sat down by her, listless, with his hands in his pockets. Notwithstanding the joy of last night, the letters, the shame and ruin and misery, had overwhelmed Ned.

'I have been thinking over what you said yesterday about my settlement,' said his mother. 'Ned, in one way your grandfather was right. It is the equivalent to my fortune. It was the foundation of our family life—without that I should not have been permitted to marry; I should not probably have chosen to marry. To give up that is to make an end of all the securities of life —I speak as arguing the question.'

'How can *we* argue the question?' cried Ned. 'What have the securities of life mattered to the others, who had no connection with—with my father? He was nothing to them but a man of business. They trusted him, and they have nothing left.'

'Yes, Ned; but if one of them had been a secured creditor, as it is called, you would not have expected him to give up his security, in order to place himself on an equal level with the others. The most visionary standard of honour would never demand that.'

'We are not secured creditors. We are part of him, sharing his responsibility,' cried Ned bitterly, 'sharing his shame.'

'But we are the first of all his creditors, all the same, in justice; and our debt is secured. Ned, I do not say this is what I am going to do;

but I think, according to my judgment, your grandfather is right.'

'Then, mother——' He had risen up, his face had grown very pale, his nostrils dilated, his eyes shining. She who had never been afraid for anything in her life was afraid of her son—of his indignation, of his wrath. She put out her hand, half appealing, half commanding, to stop him. She caught at him, as it were, before he could say another word.

'Ned, hear me out first! I approve of it as a matter of justice. I think we have no right to set up a new standard to make a rule for other women in my position. There will always be such, I suppose. The settlement itself was simply a precaution against this possible thing—which has happened. But I do not say I mean to act according to my opinion. That is different. I have—thought it over, Ned.'

'Mother,' he said, melting almost into tears, and taking her hand into his, 'mother! you who are so much wiser than I am—you are going to let yourself be guided by me?'

'Yes,' she said. 'I don't quite make myself out, Ned. I have always taken my own way. Mine is the right way, the just way; but perhaps yours is the best.'

'Mother, mother dear! I am awfully miserable; but I feel as if I could tell you how happy I am, now.'

And, without another word of preface, without a pause to hear her out, without even observing the bewildered look as of one stopped in mid-career with which she regarded him, Ned dashed into the story of his own love, of his despair and his joy. She listened to him with her blue eyes dilating, looking out of her pale face like stars out of a winter sky—suddenly stiffened back into a little silent stone-woman. She was bewildered at first and thrown off her balance. And then gradually, slowly, the new impatience and faith that had been born of love died in her, and the old, cold, patient toleration, the faint smile, came back. It was natural. His own affairs, of course, were the closest to him. He thought of his private story first, not of hers. She had never subjected herself to such a shock before, and did not know how hard it was to bear. Well! but what of that? That was her own folly, not any one else's. She had put aside her armour, thrown open her breast, for the first time; and if an arrow, barbed and sharp, was the first thing that came to it, that was but natural—it was her own fault. She sat, therefore, and listened with the faint smile even now

stealing about her lips—a smile that was half at herself, half at human nature, thus once more, once again, proving itself. And Ned, who had felt so bitterly the absorption of his father and sister in their own affairs, their indifference to the feelings of others—Ned did the same. He slurred over the sacrifice which his mother, at no small cost, was bending her own will to make, and rewarded her by the story of his own boyish happiness—how Norah had cast him off once, how she loved him now. This was the best, the only return he could make to her. From her own serious, weighty purpose, which involved (she felt) so much, he led her aside to his love-tale, of which, for the moment at least, it was madness to expect that anything could come.

'But you don't say anything?' he said at last, half offended, when he had done—or rather when her failure of response had stopped the fulness of his speech.

'I don't know what I can say,' she answered, with a coldness which he felt at once. 'This seems scarcely the time—scarcely the moment—'

'Of course,' he said hurriedly, 'I do not expect nor hope that it can be very soon.'

'No one, I should think, would be so mad as to expect that,' said his mother; 'and these

long, aimless engagements, without any visible end——'

'I do not see how my engagement can be thought aimless,' he said, growing hot.

'Not in your own mind, I suppose; but, so far as anything like marriage is concerned, considering the state of affairs generally, I do not see much meaning in it,' said Mrs Burton coldly. 'Your prospects are not brilliant. It was only last night, for instance, that you proposed to burden yourself with me.'

'Mother!'

'It is quite true. In answer to your grandfather's sensible question how I was to live, you answered: with you. Did you mean, upon some hypothetical engagement, whatever you may happen to get, to support a wife—and me?'

He made no answer. A hot flush of mingled anger and pain came over him; he was wrong somehow; he did not quite see how. He had missed the right way of making his announcement, but still it was not his fault. He could not see how he was to blame.

'You must not be surprised in these circumstances if I cannot make any very warm congratulations,' she added. 'Make your mind easy,

however, Ned. I never intended to be a burden on you; but even without that——'

'What have I done, mother, that you should speak to me so?' he cried. 'You were so different just now. It is not for Norah's sake? No one could dislike Norah. What have I done?'

'Nothing,' she said; and then, with that faintest smile, 'you have acted according to your nature, Ned—like the rest. I have no reason to complain.'

Then there was a pause. He was a generous, tender-hearted boy, full of love and sympathy; but he had never so much as imagined, could not imagine, the state of feeling his mother had been in—and, accordingly, could not understand where he was wrong. Wrong somehow, unknowingly, unintentionally—puzzled, affronted, sore at heart—he went away from her. Was it mere caprice on her part? What was it? So it happened that the boy put his foot upon his mother's very heart; and then strained all his faculties, anxiously, affectionately, to find out what had made her countenance change, and could not, with all his efforts, discover what it was.

The smile remained on Mrs Burton's face when she was left alone. He had declined to hear her

decision about the settlement. Was it not natural that she should reconsider it, now that she found how little interest he took in the matter? But it is easier to let that intruder Love, who disorders reason, into a woman's heart than to turn him out again. She did again another novel thing; she made a compromise. She sent for her father at once, and entered into the matter with him. 'I allow that all you say is perfectly just,' she said; 'but this is, partly, a matter of feeling, papa.' She smiled at herself as she said it, but yet did say it, without flinching. 'I will keep a portion of my settlement—say half. It is, as you said, the only thing I have to depend on.'

'My dear,' said poor Mr Baldwin, 'of course you have always me to depend on. You are my only child. What I have must come to you, Clara.'

'But I don't want it to come to me, papa.'

'No, that I am sure you don't; but what is the use of my money to me, but to make my child and her children comfortable—that is excepting, Clara—always excepting what I feel bound to do—what I have always done—in the cause of—God. But, all the same, I cannot approve of any sacrifice of your rights.'

'I would rather not say any more about it,' she said.

And thus for the moment the discussion terminated. Ned went down to the village again, and was made happy, almost quite happy, by a talk with Norah; and they went over together to the Rectory, and told Mrs Dalton, as a substitute for the absent mother, and were very wretched and very happy together over their miserable prospects and their rapture of early love. Norah, however, was sorry that he had told his mother so prematurely. 'She will think it heartless of us, Ned, to think of being happy when she must be so miserable. Oh, I would have broken it to her very gently. I would have told her how it happened—by accident—that we did not mean anything. Oh, Ned, boys are always so awkward. You have gone and made her think!'

'If you were to come and talk to her, Norah—'

'No, indeed. What am I to her? A little upstart thing, thrusting myself in, taking away her son. Oh, Ned, how could you? Go and give her a kiss, and say we never meant it. Say I would never, never think of such a thing while everybody is in such trouble. Say we are so sorry—Oh, Ned! how can you, you who are only a boy, be half sorry enough?'

With which salutary bringing down Ned went home, and was very humble to his mother and

very anxious to win back her confidence—an attempt in which he partly succeeded; for, having once begun to open her heart, she could not altogether close it; and a new necessity, a new want, had developed in her. But he never made his way back entirely into that place which had been his for a moment, and which he had forfeited by his own folly. He never quite brought back the state of mind in which she had considered that matter of the settlement first. Next day Mrs Burton left Dura with her father, 'on a visit,' it was said; and Ned went to town, 'to see after' his father's affairs. Poor boy! there was not much that he could see after. He worked hard and laboriously, under his grandfather's directions and under the orders of the people who had the winding-up of Mr Burton's concerns in hand; but he had not experience enough to do much out of his own head; and it was in this melancholy way that his knowledge of business began.

And poor little Norah, alone in the Gatehouse, went and poured out her heart to Mr Stephen, who listened to her with a heart which throbbed to every woe of hers. A great woe was hanging over the Haldanes, a trouble which as yet they but dimly foresaw. Burton had ruined them in his prosperity, and now, in his downfall, was

about to drag them still lower. Already the estate of Dura was in the market, with its mansion, and grounds, and woods, and farms—and the Gatehouse. They had got to feel that the Gatehouse was their home, and all Stephen's happiness was connected with that window, with the tailor and shoemaker who took their evening walks on the other side of the way, with the rector and his morning discussions, even with old Ann in her market cart. And how was he now to go away and seek another refuge? Heavy were the hearts in the Gatehouse. Norah, when Ned had gone, was overwhelmed by terrors. Fears lest her mother should not approve, wondering questions about her unknown father, doubts of Mrs Burton, fears of Ned and for Ned, came upon her like a host, and made her miserable. And then Mr Rivers came down, who had already made several attempts to see her, and this time made her wretched by succeeding and telling her another love tale, to which she could make no reply. But for that incident at the Exhibition, and the pain it had brought about, things might have ended otherwise. Had Cyril Rivers made up his mind in May instead of delaying till July, the chances were that Norah, flattered, pleased, and not unwilling to suppose that she might perhaps love

him in time, would have given a very different answer. And then she asked herself in dismay, what would have happened when poor Ned came? So that, on the whole, it was for the best, as people say. The pain and shock of that discovery which she had made when Lady Rivers drew her son away—and he went—had been for the best; though it would be hard to believe that Cyril thought so, as he went back mortified to town, feeling that it had cost him a great deal to make this sacrifice, and that his sacrifice had been in vain.

Thus Dura changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. The great house was empty and desolate; the great bell pealed no more through all the echoes; the noisy comings and goings of the Burtons, the sound of them as they moved about, the dash of Mr Burton's phaeton and his wife's fine horses, had all died out into the silence. Miss Jane plodded wearily about the village, trying to find some cheap cottage where Stephen could find refuge when the property was sold. And Norah, anxious and pale, and full of many terrors, lived alone in her end of the house, and watched for the postman every morning, and wondered, wondered, till her heart grew sick, why no letters came.

Where was Helen? She had disappeared from them into the unknown, as her husband had done. Was it into Hades, into the everlasting darkness, that she had followed her lost, as Orpheus followed Eurydice? A week passed, and the silent days crept on, and no one could tell.

## CHAPTER XII.

Helen Drummond had a tedious voyage from Southampton to St Malo. She was not a good sailor, nor indeed a good traveller in any way. She was not rich enough to procure for herself those ameliorations of the weariness of journeys which are within the reach of everybody who has money. She had to consult cheapness more than comfort, and when she arrived at last in the bay, with all its rocky islets rising out of the blue, beautiful sea, and the little fortress city reigning over it, and all the white-sailed boats skimming about like so many sea-birds, she would have been unable to observe the beauty of the scene from sheer weariness, if anxiety had not already banished from her every thought but one.

Where was he? How should she find him? Was it real? Was it possible? Could it be true?

The boat was late of arriving; it had been

delayed, and was not expected at the moment when the passengers were ready to land. Helen looked, with a beating heart, upon all the loungers on shore, wondering could he be among them; but it was not till almost all her fellow-passengers had left the vessel that a tattered, grinning *Commissionaire* came up to her, and asked if she were Madame Drummond. When she answered, a voluble explanation followed, which Helen, in her agitation, and with ears unaccustomed to the voluble Breton-French mixed with scraps of still less comprehensible English, understood with great difficulty. Monsieur had been on the pier half the night; he had been assured by all the officials that the boat could not arrive till noon. Monsieur had charged himself, François, to be on the watch, and bring him news as soon as the steamer was in sight; in place of which he, the delighted François, would have the gratification of leading Madame to Monsieur. Half dead with excitement and fatigue, Helen followed her guide. He led her along the rocky shore to where a little steam ferry-boat puffed and snorted. Then she had to embark again for a five minutes' passage across the bay. She landed on the other side, so stupified with suspense, and with the accumulated excitement which was now coming to a climax, that

she felt incapable of uttering a word. Her body was all one pulse, throbbing wildly; a crimson flush alternated with dead pallor in her face; her heart choked her, palpitating in her throat. Whom was she going to meet? What manner of man was it who said he was her Robert, who wrote as Robert wrote, who had called her to him, with the force of absolute right? For was not Robert dead, dead, buried under the cold river, seven years ago? She was not happy, she was frightened, as Norah said. Her position was incomprehensible to her. She, Robert's spotless wife, his faithful widow—to whom was she going? She did not know what the words meant that were being poured into her ears. The figures she met whirled past her like monsters in a dream. Her own weary feet obeyed her mechanically; she moved and breathed, and kept command of herself, she knew not how.

There is a little cottage on the very edge of the cliff, in that village of Dinard on the Breton coast, which looks across the bay into which the Rance rushes impetuously meeting the great sea-tides—and from which St Servan opposite, St Malo with its walls and towers, all the lip of the bay lined with houses, with fortifications, with bristling masts and sails, show fair in the sunshine. Com-

ing into it from the dusty road, so small is it, so light, so close to the water, the traveller feels that he must have come suddenly into the light poop cabin of some big ship, lifting its breast high from the sea.

Here it was that Helen came in, her frame all one tremble, breathless, stupified, carried along in the wild whirl of some dream. She saw some one get up with a great cry—and then—she saw nothing more. The excitement, the weariness, the strangeness and terror that possessed her, were more than she could bear. She fell down at Robert's feet, as she had done at the foot of the picture in the exhibition. It was perhaps the easiest, gentlest way of getting over the great shock and convulsion of the new life that had now to begin.

Helen was conscious after a while of a voice, of two voices talking vaguely over her, one which she did not know, one—— At the sound of that her brain tried to rally; she tried to recollect. Where was she?—in St Mary's Road, in the old days before the studio was built? that was what it felt like. She could not see anything; a whirling, revolving cloud of darkness went round and round, swallowing her up. She tried to raise her hand to grasp at something. Now she was sinking,

sinking into that sea which had gleamed upon her for a moment, through the window—a sea full of ships, yet with no saviour for her. If she could only move her hand, raise her head, see something beside this blinding blackness. And then again that voice! She had fallen, fallen somewhere, and something buzzed loud in her ears, something coming that was about to crush her—on the steps at St Mary's Road.

'Helen! don't you know me? Look at me, if you can, my own love!'

She gave a long, sobbing cry. She opened her eyes heavily. 'Yes, Robert,' she said. The wonder and the terror had gone away in her faint, with the seven years that created them. When the soul loses the common thread of time and place it comes back to its primal elements, to the things in it that are everlasting. She answered out of her unconsciousness as (God send it!) we shall answer our friends in heaven out of the death-trance, not wondering—restored to the unity of love which is for ever and ever, not for a time.

She was lying on a little sofa, that window on one side of her, with its glorious sea and sky and sunshine. On the other, a man, with hair as white as snow, with Norah's eyes, looking at her in an agony of tenderness, with a face worn and lined

by suffering and toil. The sight of him startled her so that she came to herself in a moment. It startled her into the consciousness that she was his wife, and in a manner responsible for him, for his well-being and comfort. She started up, wondering how she could think of herself, indignant at herself for taking up the foreground for a moment. 'Oh, my dear, my dear!' she cried. 'What have they done to you, Robert?' and drew him to her, taking him into her arms.

Not frightened now, not wondering, not strange at all. The strangeness was that he had been kept away from her so long, cruelly kept away, to make him like this, whitened, worn, old. All at once strength and calm and self-command came back to Helen. Except for his looks, the harm some one had done to him, this interval crumpled away like a burnt paper, and disappeared, and was as if it had never been. She put her arms round him, drew him to her with an indignant love and tenderness. 'My poor Robert! my poor Robert! how you have wanted me,' she said, with the tears in her eyes.

'Ah! wanted you!' he cried; and he too gave in to this impulse of nature. He was not an impassioned man claiming his own, but a weary one come back to his natural rest. He put his white

head down upon hers, and in the relief and sudden ease and consolation, wept like a child. It was more than joy; terrible fears had come to him at the last, terrors that his appeal might be unwelcome—that his recollection might have died out of her heart. He knew that she was in the sight of the world faithful to him; but whether her heart was true, whether the surprise would be a joy, he did not know.

Let us leave them to tell their mutual story. The reader knows one side of it. The other had come about thus. It took a long time to tell it so as to satisfy Helen; but it may be put here into fewer words.

On the night when Robert, as he said, died, he had been picked up by a tug steam-boat, which was on its way down stream to take a vessel going to America down to the sea. He had been all but dead, and with the addition of the care, distress, and anxiety through which he had passed before, partial drowning was no joke to him. How it was that he managed to get transferred from the little steamer into the ship, he had never very clearly discovered. Whether he had passionately entreated to be taken on board, or whether he had dashed himself once more into the river and been rescued this time by the sea-going vessel, he could

not tell. But, anyhow, he had been taken on board the American; and there, amid all the discomforts of a merchant ship, where there was no room for passengers, and where his presence was most unwelcome, he had an illness, which made his slow passage across the Atlantic look like a feverish dream to him. He knew nothing about it, except as a horror and misery which had been. When the ship arrived, he had been transferred to an hospital, where he lingered until all hope of life had gone out of him, if indeed any ever existed. And then, all at once, and unaccountably, he had got well again, as people do over whom no anxious nurses watch, who are of importance to no one. When he came to life again he was one of the poorest of the poor, unknown, penniless, an object of charity. In that position he could never go home, never make himself known to those whom (he felt) he had ruined, whom he had already made up his mind to leave free at the cost of his life. Forlorn, hopeless, and miserable, poor Robert had still the necessity upon him of maintaining the worthless life which Providence had, as it were, thrust back upon his hands. He went to the studio of a painter in New York—that same John Sinclair whose name had been attached to the 'Dives.' He had told his story fully and

truly. When a man asserts in a painter's studio that he is himself a painter, the means are at hand for the verification of his assertion; and when Robert took the palette in his hand, Mr Sinclair believed his story. He had begun humbly, under this kind stranger's help; he had become a portrait-painter, a branch of art which, in his youth, he had followed for the sake of bread and butter, as so many do. But Robert, friendless and hopeless, driven out of everything but art, had, by a mere instinct of self-preservation, to keep himself alive, taken to his work in a way which made it a very different thing from the paint which is done for bread and butter. A very little bread and butter sufficed him. But man does not live by bread alone; and all the better aliment, the food of his soul, he had to get somehow out of his portraits. The consequence of this was, that gradually these portraits became things to talk of, things that people went far to see, and competed to have. He cared so little for it—was that why the stream of fortune came to him? But when his languid soul awoke after a while to a sense of the work he was doing, Robert ceased to care little for it. He began to care much; and as his portraits kept their popularity his gains increased. He became hungry for gain; he grew a miser, and over-

worked himself, thinking of his wife, thinking of the child to whom he was dead. He managed to get some news of them incidentally through his friend and former patron Sinclair; he heard where they were, and that they were well. At length, when he had scraped so much money together that he thought he might venture upon some communication, his heart went back to the agony of his parting, and the subject of his last sketch returned to him. Ah! was he not Dives now, stretching out vain hands, not daring to cry! He could not summon courage enough to write, but he could paint—he could put all his despairing soul, which yet had a faint hope in it, into that imploring face, those beseeching hands. He worked at it night and day, throwing his whole heart and soul into the canvas. And, with a heart trembling at his own temerity, after he sent his picture to England he himself had come back, but not to England—he had not courage for that; he was not even sufficiently instructed to know whether it would be safe for him to go back—whether he might bring the law upon him with fresh bugbears and troubles in its train—but he went to France. He had come to Brest, and he had wandered to this the nearest point from which communication with England was easy. He had arrived at St

Malo in May, at the very time when Helen saw the picture in the Exhibition, and received its message into her very heart. But he had not ventured to send his letter till months after—not till now.

'Helen!' he said, trembling; 'will you stay with me here? will you go with me, back to New York? What shall we do?'

'Robert, let us go home.'

'Can I go home? I do not think so. I have a little money, for the child and you. I made it hardly—after I died. I should not like to give it once again to satisfy people who suffered no more than we did.'

'Oh, Robert,' she said. 'I have my story to tell you too.' And her story took as long in telling as his did; for it was difficult to her to remember that he knew nothing—that he did not know what he had been accused of; as difficult as it was for him to understand the allusions she made to the lost books and the censure which had been passed upon his name. He would stop her and say, 'What does that mean?' a dozen times in a single sentence. And then, as the story advanced to its climax, impatience seized him, and a growing excitement. He got up from his seat beside

her, and paced about the little room. Then she saw, for the first time, that he was lame. How he had suffered! The seven years had not made much difference to her; her peaceful life had smoothed out the lines which sorrow had made in her face. There was not a white thread in her brown hair; she had almost grown younger instead of older, having upon her wherever she went a reflection of Norah's youth, which somehow she shared. But Robert was lame, and walked with difficulty, a consequence of his almost suicide; he was old, thin, white-haired, with furrows of anxiety and longing and heart-hunger in his face. All this had been done by the man who had beguiled him into the doomed bank, who had looked on calmly at his ruin, who had willingly countenanced the destruction of his good name. Mrs Drummond had lived through it all, had got over her hot fits of rage and indignation, and at this moment had her heart softened towards Reginald Burton, whom she had saved. She was not prepared for the excitement, the suppressed fury, the passionate indignation of her husband, to whom all this was new. She told him of the paper she had extorted from her cousin that last night, 'which clears you entirely—' she said.

'Clears me!' he cried, gnashing his teeth. 'My God! *clears* me! I who have done nothing but suffer by him. Clears *me!*'

'I do not quite mean that, Robert. You were cleared before. No one believed it. But we thought Golden only was to blame. Now this paper is formal, and explains everything. It makes it all easy for you.'

He did not stop, as if this was anything consolatory; he kept moving up and down, painfully, with his lameness. 'And that scoundrel has got off,' he cried between his teeth—'got off! and has the audacity to clear me.'

Poor Helen was disconcerted. She had forgotten her own fury of indignation when she first saw the accusation against him. She had long, long grown used to all that, and used to the reflection that nobody believed it whose opinion was worth anything. She had insisted upon Burton's confession and explanation, she scarcely knew why—more as a punishment to him than as a vindication of Robert. She was confused about it altogether, not quite knowing what she meant. And now, in the light of his indignation, she felt almost as if she had done her husband an injury—insulted him. She faltered, and looked at him wistfully, and did not know what to say. She had not lost the habit

of love, but she had lost the habit of companionship; she had told her story wrongly; she did not know how to bring him to her state of feeling, or to transport herself into his. And this too was the fault of the man who had driven Robert to despair—the man whom she had saved.

'He has got off,' she said humbly, 'by my means. Robert, I tried revenge once, but I will never try it again. I could not give him up, however bad he had been, when he was in my power.'

The sound of trembling in her voice went to his heart. 'My poor Helen! my sweet Helen!' he cried, coming to her. 'Do you think I blame you? You could not have done otherwise. For you there was but one course—but if I had the chance now——'

Just then there was a commotion at the door, and sounds of many voices. A great many exclamations in French, with one or two broken questions in English, came to their ears. 'You has you papiers. Domm you papiers. You say you is Jean—Jean Smiff, et pas——'

'Je me fie à monsieur ici. Monsieur est-il chez lui? C'est un Anglais. Il nous expliquera tout ça,' said another voice. It was the voice of the maire, whom Robert had made friends with in

his hunger for human companionship. The parley at the door went on for a few minutes longer, and then there entered a band of excited Frenchmen. One, a gendarme from St Malo, carried an open telegram in his hand; another, in a blouse, kept his hand upon the shoulder of a burly Englishman in a light coat. The maire brought up the rear. They seemed such a crowd of people as they entered the little, light room, that it was some moments before the three English people thus brought face to face recognised each other. Helen with difficulty suppressed a cry. Robert stood confronting the party with the flush of his indignation not yet subsided, with a wonder beyond words in his eyes. As for the other, he showed no sign of surprise. He was driven back to his last stronghold, forced to use all his strength to keep himself up and maintain his courage. His eye dilated and gave a flutter of wonder at the sight of Helen. It was evident that he did not recog nise her companion. He kept his arms folded, as if for self-preservation, to keep within him all the warmth all the courage possible, physically to keep up and support himself.

The three men rushed into explanation all at once. A telegram had been received at St Malo,

describing an Englishman who was supposed to have gone there, and whose description, which the gendarme held out, in the telegram, corresponded exactly with that of the prisoner. The prisoner, however, called himself Smith. Smiff—or Smitt, as his pursuers pronounced it—and produced papers which were *en règle;* but he could not explain what he was doing here; he showed no inclination to be taken to the English consul. On the contrary, he had crossed to Dinard as soon as he heard that inquiries had been made about him at his hotel. While all this was being told the stranger stood immovable, with his arms folded; he did not understand half of it. His French was as deficient as the French of untravelled Englishmen usually is, and the tumult around him, at the same time, confused his mind and quickened his outward senses. He could not make out what his chances of liberation were; but his eyes were open to any possibility of escape. They were blood-shot and strained those eyes; now and then that flutter of wonder, of excitement, of watchfulness, came into them, but he showed no other sign of emotion. At such a terrible crisis all secondary sensations perish; he had no time to wonder what Helen, whom he had left behind him in England, should

be doing here. Rather it was natural that everybody connected with his fate should be here, gathering round him silently to see the end.

Thus this encounter had but little effect upon Burton; but it would be impossible te describe the effect it had upon the man who stood opposite to him, whom he had not recognised. Robert Drummond had suffered as few men ever suffered. He had died—he had come alive again—he had lived two separate lives. For some years up to this day his existence had been that of a man deprived of all the hopes and consolations of life—a man miserably alone, dead to every one belonging to him. Even the return to life which he had tried to realise this morning was no more than an experiment. He might never be able to conquer, to forget those seven ghosts which stood between him and his wife and child. He could not take up his life again where he left it—that was impossible. And all this had been done by the influence of the man before him, who was in his power, whom he might if he would give over to prison and trial and punishment. A gleam of fierce joy shot through Drummond's heart, and then——

They stood facing each other, with the Frenchmen grouped about them. But Burton had not,

beyond the first glance, looked at his judge. His face confronted him, but his eyes did not; he had escaped as yet the knowledge who it was.

A thousand and a thousand thoughts whirled through Drummond's mind; he had only a moment to decide in; he had the past to satisfy, and the burning, fiery indignation of the present moment, in which for the first time he had identified and comprehended the past. Give him up! punish him! Should such a scoundrel get off, when innocent men had so bitterly suffered? Let him fall, and bring down in his train all who were concerned—all who made a prey of the ignorant and the poor! This wave of thought possessed him with a whirl and sweep like the rushing tide—and then there came the interval of silence, the moment when the waters fell back and all was still.

Revenge! 'I tried revenge once, but I will never try it again!' Who was it that had said this close to him, so that the very air repeated and repeated it, whispering it in his ear? He had himself been dead, and he had come alive again. His new life, which had commenced this morning, was spotless as yet. He had to decide, decide, decide in a moment how it should be inaugurated, by mercy or by judgment—by the sin (was it not

a sin?) of helping the escape of a criminal, or by the righteous deed (where was it said that this might be a sin too?) of handing him over to punishment. How his soul was tossed upon these waves! He stood as in the midst of a great battle, which raged round him. Fierce arrows tore his heart, coming from one side and another, he could not tell how. Give up the accursed thing—punish the unworthy soul—be just! be just! But then that other, 'Neither have I condemned thee; go, and sin no more.' And all had to be done in a minute, while those voluble explanations interlaced each other, and each man expounded his case. Drummond glanced at his wife for help, but she dared not look at him. She sat on the sofa against the light, with her hands tightly clasped in her lap. Was she praying? For so long, out of the depths of his hell, Dives, poor Dives, had not dared to pray.

He did not know what he said when at length he spoke; it was some commonplace, some nothing. But it attracted at once the attention of the prisoner. Burton turned round, and gazed at the man whom he thought dead. He did not recognise the voice, except that it was a voice he knew; he did not even recognise the face, which had grown prematurely old, framed in its white hair,

at the first glance; but there crept over him a shudder of enlightenment, a gleam of perception. His senses were quickened by his own position. He shook where he stood as if with cold or palsy. He looked at Helen, he looked at the man by her side. Then an inarticulate cry came from him; terror of he knew not what deprived him, fortunately, of all power of speech. He fell back in his fear, and his attendants thought he meant to escape. They threw themselves between him and the door. It was then that Drummond spoke in his haste, scarcely knowing what he said.

'I know him,' he said in French. 'It is a long time since we have met, and he has just recognised me, you perceive. We are not friends, so you may trust me. His papers are quite right, and it is a mistake about the telegram. Look here; this is not his description. "Nez ordinaire;" why, he has a long nose. "Teint brun;" he is quite fresh-coloured, and his hair is grey. This is a great mistake. Monsieur le Maire, I know the man, and I will be responsible for him. You must let him go.'

'I thought so,' said the maire, pleased with his own discrimination. 'Je l'ai dit. Monsieur nous expliquera tout ça. Voilà que j'ai dit.'

'Mais, monsieur——' began the gendarme.

Helen sat against the light, seeing nothing, and closed her eyes, and clasped her hands in her lap. Burton, bewildered and terror-stricken, looked on without showing any emotion. Perhaps the passiveness of his face was his best safeguard. Five minutes of expostulation and explanation followed, and then gradually the Frenchmen edged themselves out of the room. Fortunately Monsieur le Maire had taken this view from the beginning; he had been sure it was a mistake. When they were got rid of at last, the three who were left behind looked at each other in a silence which was more significant than words. Burton dropped into a chair; he was not able to stand nor to speak, but kept gazing at Drummond with a pitiful wonder and terror. At last—

'Are you Robert Drummond?' he asked hoarsely. 'Have you come back from your grave——'

'I am Robert Drummond,' said the other; 'and you are—John Smith, who must be got out of here as soon as possible. Have you money?'

'Yes.'

'Then I advise you to go away at once. Go up to Dinan by the river-side, or walk to St Brieuc to get the train. In the one case you are on your way to Brest, where there are ships always sailing;

by the other you can get to Paris or wherever you please. You may wait here till the evening, if you choose; but then go.'

'I will go to Brest,' he said humbly.

'I would rather not know where you went; but go you must. My wife and I met to-day for the first time for seven years; we do not wish for company, you may suppose.'

Drummond's voice was very stern. He had no compassion for the man who stood thus humbled and miserable before him; not for him had he done this. And Burton was too much stupefied, too much bewildered, to make any direct reply. He looked at Helen with dull wonder, and asked under his breath—

'Did you know?'

'No,' she said. 'It came upon me almost as suddenly as upon you.'

Then he pulled some papers out of his pocket.

'These are English papers. I don't know if it is long since you have left. But you might like to see them.' When he had done this, he made a few steps towards the door, where the old French bonne was waiting to show him where to go. Then he paused, and turned round again, facing them. 'What a man says in my position is very little to anybody,' he said; 'but—I want to say to you,

Forgive me. I have helped to do you dreadful harm; but I—I did not mean it. I never meant it. I meant to get gain myself; but I never wished to harm you.'

And then he disappeared, saved again, saved at his uttermost need—surely this time finally saved—and by those whom he had injured the most. When he reached the clean little room where he was to stay all day, it appeared to Reginald Burton that he must be in a dream. The same feeling had been in his mind ever since he escaped from England. All was strange to him; and strangest of all was the fact that he could no longer command or regulate matters by his own will, but was the sport of circumstances, driven about he knew not how. His bewilderment was so great that he was not able to think. Saved first by a helpless woman, whose powers he would have laughed at a month ago; saved now by a ghost out of the grave!

That night he left Dinard under cover of the darkness, and walked to St Brieuc, where he got the train for Brest. He arrived there in time to get on board of a vessel about to sail for America. And thus Reginald Burton escaped from the immediate penal consequences of his sins. From the other consequences no man ever escapes. The

prison, the trial, the weary round of punishment he had eluded; but his life was over and ended, and everything that was worth having in the world had abandoned him. Love was not his to carry away with him; reputation, honour, wealth, even comfort were gone. He had to make a miserable new beginning, to shrink into poverty, obscurity, and dependence. It would be hard to say whether these were more or less easy to bear than the prison work, prison life, prison garb from which he had escaped.

## CHAPTER XIII.

This was the end of Mr Burton of Dura—Mr Burton, of the great City firm, he who had been known as one of the greatest of commercial magnitudes, he who had ruined as many people as if he had been an emperor. For some time there was a very great deal about it in the newspapers, and his concerns were exposed to the light of day. He involved many others with him in his downfall, and some in his shame. If he had been taken, he would have joined in prison those men whom in our own day we have seen degraded from a high position in society down to the picking of oakum in gaol—men whom we all pour our loathing upon at the moment of their discovery, but of whom we say 'poor souls!' a few months after, when some clever newspaper correspondent has a peep at them, disguised in the prison garb, and

known as numbers 300 and 301. Burton missed the prison and the pity; but he did not miss the punishment. In spite of various attempts that were made to stop it, the investigation of his affairs was very full and clear. It became apparent from his own private books, and that one of Rivers's which had been found in his safe, that the bank had been in reality all but ruined when it was made into a joint-stock company. Burton and his colleague had guaranteed the debts, and put the best face possible upon things generally; and Mr Golden's management, and an unexpected run of good luck, had all but carried the labouring concern into clear water. It was at this period that Burton, thanking his stars or his gods, withdrew from the share in the management which he had held nominally, and left it to Golden to complete the triumph of daring and good fortune. How this failed is already known to the reader. The mystery of the lost books was never cleared up; for Golden was out of the way, enjoying his honeymoon, when the private affairs of the other conspirator were thus thrown open to the light of day. But there was enough in the one book found among Mr Burton's to show how very inconvenient to him the finding of the others would have been. Thus daylight blazed upon all those tortu-

ous, gloomy paths, and showed how the desire of self-interest guided the man through them, with an absolute indifference to the interests of others. He had not meant any harm, as he said; he had meant his own gain in the first place, his own recovery when his position was threatened, his own safety when danger came. He had not set out with a deliberate intention of ruining others; but this is a thing which nobody ever does; and he had not cared afterwards how many were ruined, so that he could hold on his way. Such cases happen now and then, and human justice cannot touch them; but most generally Nemesis comes sooner or later. Even at the worst, however, his material punishment was never so hard as that of some of his victims. The loss of the trust-money, which had been the immediate cause of his ruin, took the very bread out of the mouths of a family of orphans; but Mr Burton, at the lowest depths of his humiliation, had always bread enough, and to spare. He was never even thrown into such mental anxiety, such stress of painful calculation, as that into which the inhabitants of the Gatehouse were cast by his downfall. Miss Jane went painfully all over Dura, looking at the cottages, to see if by any means something could be found or contrived to suit Stephen; and her heart sank within her as she inspected the damp, low-roofed places, which

were so very different from the warm old wainscoted rooms, the comfort of the Gatehouse. When the property was sold, however, it was found that the Gatehouse had been made into a separate lot, and had been bought, not by the rich descendant of the old Harcourts who had got Dura, but by some one whose name was unknown.

'Somebody who is going to live in the house himself, no doubt,' Miss Jane said, with a very long face; 'and I am sure I wish him well in it, whoever he may be,' she added with a struggle. 'But oh, Norah! what a thing it will be for us to go away!'

'If I knew him, I would go to him, and beg for your rooms for you. He never would have the heart to turn you out, if he was a good man,' cried Norah. 'For us it does not matter; but oh, Miss Jane, for you!'

'It cannot be helped, my dear,' said Miss Jane, drying her eyes. 'We have no right to it, you know. It does seem hard that we should be ruined by his prosperity, and then, as it were ruined again by his downfall. It seems hard; but it is not anybody's fault. Of course when we accepted it we knew the penalty. He might have turned us out at any time. No, Norah; we have no reason to complain.'

'That makes it worse,' cried impulsive Norah.

'It is always a comfort when one can think it is somebody's fault. And so it is—Mr Burton's fault. Oh, how much harm he has done! Oh, what a destroyer he has been! He has done as much harm as a war or a pestilence,' cried Norah. 'Think of poor—papa!'

She had always to make a pause before that name, not believing in it somehow, feeling it hurt her. By this time she had heard all about the meeting between her father and mother, and the day had been fixed when she was to join them; but still she had a sore, wounding, jealous sense that the new father was her rival—that he might be almost her enemy. Fathers on the whole seemed but an equivocal advantage to Norah. There was Mr Burton, who had ruined and shamed every one connected with him; and there was poor—papa, who might, for anything she knew, take all the gladness out of her own life.

'Oh, hush, my dear!' said Miss Jane. 'Mr Burton has been a bitter acquaintance to us; but he is Ned's father, and we must not complain.'

Just then there was a knock at the door, and Ned himself came in. He came from town, as he did often, to spend the evening with his betrothed. Their days were running very short now, and their prospects were not encouraging. He had

not even time to look for any employment for himself, so much was he occupied with his father's affairs; and Norah was going away, and when should they meet again? These evenings which they spent together were very sweet; but they were growing daily sadder as they approached more closely to the shadow of the farewell. But this time Ned came in with a flush of pleasure in his face. His eyes were so brightened by it, and his colour so much improved, that he looked 'quite handsome,' Miss Jane thought; and he walked in with something of the impulsive satisfaction of old days.

'My grandfather is a brick,' he said, 'after all. He has given me my fortune. He has helped me to do something I had set my heart on. Miss Jane, don't think any more of leaving the Gatehouse. So long as I live nobody can turn you out.'

'What do you mean, Ned?'

'I mean that dear old grandpapa has been awfully good to me,' said Ned, 'and the Gatehouse is mine. I love it, Miss Jane. Don't you say anything. You may think it will be bitter for me to come here after all that has passed; but I love it. Since ever I was a boy, I have thought this room the dearest place in the world—ever

since Norah sat and talked rubbish, and frightened me out of my life. How well I remember that! She has forgotten years ago! but I shall never forget. What are you crying about, Miss Jane? Now this is very hard upon a fellow, I must say. I thought it was good news.'

'And so it is—blessed news, you dear, dear, kind boy!' cried Miss Jane. 'Oh, children! what can I say to you? God bless you! And God will bless you for thinking of the afflicted first, before yourselves.'

'I had nothing to do with it—I knew nothing about it,' cried Norah proudly; and all at once, without any warning, she threw herself upon Ned, and gave him a sudden kiss on his brown cheek. For five minutes after none of the three were very coherent; for to do a good action when you are young makes you feel very foolish, and ready to cry with any one who cares to cry. Ned told them all about it between laughing and sobbing—how his grandfather had given him his portion, and how it was the best possible investment to buy the Gatehouse. 'For you see,' said Ned, 'when Norah makes up her mind to marry, we shall have a house all ready. As for everybody here knowing what has happened, everybody all over the country knows,' he added, with a hot

flush on his cheek; 'and at Dura people like me —a little, and would not be unkind, as in other places. And how could I let the place Norah had been brought up in—the place I love—go to other people? So, Miss Jane, be happy, and set your brother's mind at rest. Nobody shall disturb you here as long as I live; and if I should die, it would go to Norah.'

'Oh, Ned, hush!' cried Norah, putting up her hand to his lip.

And then they went out into the garden, and wandered about and talked. Nothing but this innocent and close association, with no one to think it might be improper or to call them to account, could have made exactly such a bond as that which existed between these two innocent young souls. They were lovers, and yet they were half brother and sister. They talked of their plans with the wistful certainty and uncertainty of those who feel that another will may come in to shatter all their purposes, though in themselves they are so unalterable and sure. There was this always hanging over them, like the sword in the fable, of which they were conscious, though they would not say a word about it. To-night their spirits were raised. The fact that this familiar place was *theirs*, that Ned was actually its master, that here they might spend

their days together as man and wife, exhilarated them into childish delight.

'I always think of you as in that room,' he said to her, 'when I picture my Norah to myself; and there is never half an hour all day long that I don't do that. I always see the old curtains and the funny old furniture. And to think it is ours, Norah, and that we shall grow old here, too!'

'I never mean to grow old,' said Norah. 'Fancy, Ned, mamma is not old, and she is nineteen years older than me. Nineteen years—twenty years! It is as good as a century; it will never come to an end!'

'Or if it does come to an end,' said wise Ned, in the additional discretion of two years' additional age, 'at least we shall have had our day.'

With this chastened yet delightful consciousness of the life before them they parted that evening. But next time they met Ned was not equally bright. He had been very sorely tried by the newspapers, by the shame he had to bear, by the looks askance which were bestowed on 'Burton's son.'

'I never shall be able to stay there,' he said, pouring out his troubled heart to Norah. 'I cannot bear it. Fancy having to hear one's father insulted, and not being able to say a word. I

cannot do it; oh, Norah, I cannot! We must give up the thought of living here. I must go abroad.'

'Where, Ned?'

'Oh, I don't know. America, Australia—anywhere. I cannot stay here. Anywhere that I can earn my bread.'

'Ned,' said Norah, her happy voice all tuned to tones of weeping, 'remember I am mamma's only child. She has got—some one else now; but, after all, I am her only child.'

'Do you think I forget that?' he said. 'It is because I am afraid, because I feel, they will never, never trust you to me—so useless as I am—my father's son. Oh, Norah, when I think it all over, my heart is like to break!'

'But, Ned, you were in such good spirits last night.'

'Ah, but last night was different. My own Norah! if they said no, dear, if they were angry—Oh, Norah! don't hate me for saying it—what would you do?'

'What could I do?' she said, with her brown eyes blazing, half in indignation, half in resolution. 'And what do you think they are made of, Ned, to dare to say such a thing to me? Was mamma ever cruel? I would do just what I will do now;

I would say, 'Ned, please don't! dear Ned, don't!' But if you would, notwithstanding all I said to you, of course I must go too.'

'My own Norah! But now they are going to take you away from me, and when, when shall I see you again?'

'People go to St Malo by the boat,' said Norah demurely. 'It sails from Southampton, and it gets there in I don't remember how many hours. There is nothing against people going to St Malo that want to go.'

And thus once more the evening had a more cheerful termination. But none of the party were cheerful when Norah picked up all her little belongings, and went up to town to Dr Maurice who was to be her escort. Probably, of all the party, she herself was the most cheerful; for she was the one who was going away to novelties which could not but be more or less agreeable to her imagination, while the others, in the blank of their daily unchanging existence, were left behind. Miss Jane cried over her, Mrs Haldane bade God bless her, and as for Stephen, he drew her close to him, and could not speak.

'I don't know what life will be worth, Norah, without your mother and you,' he said, looking

up to her at last with the patient smile he had worn since ever Norah could remember—the one thing in the world which was more pathetic than sorrow itself; for he loved Helen, and missed her to the bottom of his heart—loved her as a disabled, shipwrecked man may love a woman altogether out of his reach, most purely, most truly, without hope or thought of any return—but as no man may justly love a woman who has her husband by her side. This visionary difference, which is yet so real, Stephen felt, and it made him very sad; and the loss of the child gave him full warrant to look as sad as he felt.

'But, oh, Stephen! let us not complain,' said Mrs Haldane; 'for has it not been shown to us beyond all question that everything is for the best.'

All for the best! All that had happened—Mr Burton's ruin, the tragical overthrow of his family, the destruction of poor Ned's hopes and prospects, the shame and humiliation and misery—had all been so 'overruled,' as Mrs Haldane would have said, that their house was more firmly secured to them than ever, and was theirs, most likely, as long as Stephen lived! It was a small matter to be procured at such a cost; but yet it was a

satisfaction to her to feel that so many laws had been overthrown on her account, and that all was for the best.

As for Ned's parting with Norah, it is a thing which must not be spoken of. It took place in the cab in which her young lover conveyed her from the station to Dr Maurice's door. Ah, what rending of the young hearts there was as they tore themselves asunder! What big, hollow eyes, with the tears forced back from them, what gulps of choking sorrow swallowed down, as Ned, looking neither to the right hand nor the left, stalked away from Dr Maurice's door!

To tell the truth, Dr Maurice himself was not very comfortable either. He had got a great fright, and he had not recovered it. His brain was still confused; he felt as if he had been beaten about the head; a dull, hot colour dwelt upon his cheeks. He tried to explain to himself that he was feverish; but he was not feverish—or at least it was only his mind, not his body, which was so. It was partly wonder, but chiefly it was fright, on account of his own marvellous and hairbreadth escape. At the time when he had made that proposal to Helen, he believed, as she did, and everybody else, that her husband had died years ago. And, good heavens! what if she had not refused?

Dr Maurice grew hot and cold all over, he actually shuddered, at the supposition. And yet such a thing might have happened. He went reluctantly, yet with curiosity, to see his old friend. He wondered with a confused and troubled mind whether Helen would have said anything about it —whether Drummond would take any notice of it. The doctor was impatient with Drummond, and dissatisfied altogether as to his conduct. A man, he reflected, cannot do that sort of thing with impunity. To be for seven years as though he had never been, and then to come to life again and interfere with everybody's affairs! It was hard. Drummond had got his full share of sympathy; he had turned his whole world upside down. Seven years ago he had been mourned for as few men are mourned; and now it was a mistake, it was almost an impertinence, that he should come to life again, as if nothing had happened. But nevertheless Dr Maurice volunteered to take Norah to St Malo. He was glad to do it —to rub out the recollection of that false step of his—to show that he bore no malice, and that no thoughts were in his mind which were inconsistent with his old friendship for Robert and respect for Robert's wife.

Robert's wife! She had called herself so when

she was but Robert's widow. But nobody understood, nobody thought, what a change it was to Helen to fish up her old existence again, and resume its habits as if there had been no break in it. Love had conquered the strangeness at first; but there were so many strangenesses to be conquered. She had fallen into so different a channel from that into which his thoughts had been diverted. They were both unchanged in their affections; but how different in everything else! They were each other's nearest, closest, dearest; and yet they had to make acquaintance with each other over again. Nothing can be more strange than such a close union, accompanied by such a total ignorance. It was not even as if Helen had remained as he had known her—had received no new influences into her life. Both had an existence unknown to the other. Robert in the joy of his recovered identity, in the happiness of finding that there was still love and companionship for him in the world, took the reunion more simply than Helen did, and ignored its difficulties, or did not feel them. He had always taken things more simply than she. His absolute faith in her, his simple delight in finding her, his fond admiration of her, revived in Helen some of her old feelings of suppressed wonder and half doubt. But that

doubt was humbler now than it had been once. In the old life a ghost of impatience had been in her; she had doubted his powers, and chafed at his failures. Now she began to doubt whether she had ever understood him—whether she had done him justice. For once, at least, Robert had risen to that height of power which passion sometimes forces almost beyond the reach of genius. He had made alive and put upon a dead piece of canvas, for all the world to see, one face which was a revelation out of the worlds unknown. Helen's heart had never wanted any additional bond to the husband whom she had chosen and clung to through good and evil; but her mind had wanted something more than his easy talent, his exquisite skill, the gentle, modest pitch of imagination which was all that common life moved him to. But on that point she was satisfied now. The only drawback was, she was no longer sure that it was Robert. He was himself, and yet another. He was her own by a hundred tender signs and sureties; and yet he was strange to her —strange!

And it was thus, with a suppressed excitement, which neither told, that the re-united pair awaited their child's coming. She breathless with curiosity and anxiety to know what Norah would

think of her unknown father; he eager to make acquaintance with the new creature whom he knew only as a child. 'The child' he called her, till Helen smiled at his pertinacity, and ceased to remind him that Norah was no longer a child. Their excitement rose very high when the steamboat came in. Helen's feelings were, as usual, by far the most complicated. Norah was her own creation, if we may say so, framed by her, cultivated by her—not only flesh of her flesh, but heart of her heart, and mind of her mind; yet the influence of Norah's opinions, Norah's ways of thinking, was strong upon her mother, almost more strong than Helen's were on Norah; for the latter had all the confidence of youth, the former all the hesitation of middle age. What if Norah should not 'take to' the new father—the stranger who yet was so truly her own Robert of old? Neither the one nor the other even so much as recollected Dr Maurice—the poor man who was bracing up his courage to meet them, wondering what they might think. And they thought of him simply not at all.

And Norah approached that rocky shore with an unconcealable, almost avowed, jealousy of her father. A shade of that emotion, half shame, half pain, with which a young woman regards her

mother's second marriage was in her mind. It was a partial desecration of her idea of her mother, and she was jealous of the new companion who naturally must be more to Helen than even she herself could be. She was jealous, though she had long given her mother a rival more dangerous still in Ned; but in such feelings no one is reasonable. Dr Maurice had stolen into her confidence, she knew not how, and, partly out of pure perversity, was very strenuous in Ned's favour, and had promised to plead his cause. The wretched man was almost glad that there should be this new complication coming along with Norah, to perplex from the very beginning her father's relations with her. Had things been as he once hoped—had he been able to make Norah his own child, as he had tried to do—then he would have resisted Ned to his last gasp; but as she was not his, he was wickedly glad that she should not be altogether Robert's, but that from the first his should be but a divided proprietorship.

'I will do what I can to make things easy for you, Norah,' he said, as they drew near St Malo, half out of love, half out of spite. 'I will give you what I meant to leave you, and that should get over part of the difficulty.'

'Oh, Dr Maurice, you have always been so good to me!' cried heedless Norah. 'If it had been you instead of papa——'

She was angry with herself when she had made that foolish, hasty speech; but, oh! how sweet it was to her companion! What balm it shed upon those awkward sorenesses of his! He drew her hand through his arm, and bent over her with the tenderest looks.

'It would be strange if I did not do my best for my little Norah,' he said, with something like a tear in his eye. Hypocrite! If she had been his little Norah, then heaven have mercy upon poor Ned!

They landed, and there was all the flutter and agitation of meeting, which was more confusing, more agitating, than meetings generally are, though these are always hard enough to manage. They went together across the bay to the little cottage on the cliff. They took a long time to settle down. Robert hung about his child as if she had been a new toy, unable to keep from gazing at her, touching her, recalling what she used to be, glorying and rejoicing over the possession of her; while Helen, on her side, watched too with a painful closeness, reading the thoughts in Norah's eyes before they had come. She wanted

to jump into certainty at once. But they had to eat, and drink, and rest; they had to talk of all that had happened—of all that might yet happen. And so the first days passed, and the family unconsciously re-united itself, and the extraordinary sank, no one knowing how, into the blessed calm of every day.

And then there occurred an event which took all the company by surprise: Norah fell in love with her father. She 'took to' him as a girl might be expected to take to a man whose image she was. She was more like him a great deal than she was like her mother. Her hasty, impulsive ways, her fresh simplicity of soul, were all his. She had been thought to resemble her mother before; but when she was by her father's side, it was apparent in a moment whom she most resembled. She discovered it herself with a glow of delight. 'Why, mamma, he is like me!' she cried, with a delightful youthful reversal of the fact. And poor Helen did not quite like it. It is terrible, but it is true—for the first moment it gave her a pang. The child had been all hers; she had almost ceased to remember that there could be any sharing of her. She had been anxious about Norah's reception of her father; but she was not quite prepared for this. Dr

Maurice, for his part, was simply furious, and went as near to hating Robert Drummond as it was possible to do; but then, of course, that feeling on Maurice's part was simply ludicrous, and deserved nothing but to be laughed at. This curious event made the most tragi-comic convulsion in the cottage on the cliff.

## CHAPTER XIV.

And now all the threads are shortening in the shuttle, and the web is nearly woven out. If any one has ever supposed for a moment that Robert Drummond and his wife would make a last appearance as cruel parents, interfering with their daughter's happiness, it does not say much for the historian's success in elucidating their characters. If Norah had wanted to marry a bad man, they would no doubt have made a terrible stand, and made themselves very unhappy; but when it was only their own prejudices, and poverty, and other external disadvantages that had to be taken into account, nothing but the forecasting imagination of two timid lovers could have feared for the result. When two people have themselves married upon nothing, it is so much more easy for them to see how that can be managed over again; and, heaven save you, good people! so many of us used to marry upon nothing in the old days.

But a great deal had to happen before this could come to pass. The Drummonds went home to England late in the autumn, and Robert was received back by the world with such acclamations as perhaps have not greeted a man of his profession in England for ages. Of itself the picture of 'Dives' had made a great impression upon the general mind; but when his strange story became public, and it was known that the picture of the year had been painted by a man risen, as it were, out of the grave, warmer still became the interest in it. The largest sum which had been given for a picture for years was offered for this to the resuscitated painter. Helen, always visionary, revolted from the very thought of selling this picture, which had been the link between herself and her husband, and which had so many associations to them both; but Robert had too much practical good sense to yield to this romantic difficulty. 'I am no longer Dives,' he said, as he drew his wife's arm through his own, and took her out with him to conclude the bargain. It increased the income which Robert's American gains brought him, and made them a great deal more comfortable. But Helen would never visit at the great house where 'Dives' was, and she would have given half

her living to have possessed the greatest work her husband ever produced—the only one by which, all the critics said, he would be known to posterity. This was one of the disappointments of her new life, and it was without doubt an unreasonable disappointment, as so many are that sting us most deeply. The Drummonds were so fortunate, after some waiting and bargaining, as to secure their old house in St Mary's Road, with the studio in which such happy and such terrible hours had been passed. It was beyond their means; but yet they made an effort to purchase this pleasure for themselves. And here for two years the family lived together unbroken. Now and then they went to the Gatehouse, and made the hearts of the Haldanes glad. And painters would throng about the studio, and the old life came back as if it had never had a break. By times Helen would sit in the familiar room, and ask herself was it *now*—the present—or was it the past which had come back? The difference was, there was no child curled against the window, with brown hair about her shoulders, and a book in her arms, but only that slim, fair, brown-eyed maiden, who wore a ring of betrothal upon her finger, and had thoughts which travelled far by times after her distant lover; and that the master of the house,

when he came into the room, was not the light-footed, youthful-browed Robert of old, but a white-haired man, growing old before his time. These were the changes; but everything else was unchanged.

Robert Drummond, however, never painted another picture like that 'Dives;' it was the one passion flower, the single great blossom, of his life. He painted other pictures as he used to do, which were good Drummonds, specimens of that master which the picture-dealers were very willing to have and collectors to add to their treasures, but which belonged to a world altogether distinct from the other. This Helen felt too with a gentle pang, but not as she had felt it of old. Once he had risen above that pleasant, charming level of beautiful mediocrity; once he had painted, not in common pigments, but in colours mixed with tears and life-blood. At such a cost even she was glad that no more great works should be produced. She was satisfied; her craving for genius and fame had once been fed, almost at the cost of their lives; and now she was content to descend to the gentler, lower work—the work by which men earn their daily bread.

Ah! but even then, even now, had it been—not Raphael, perhaps, who was one of the Shak-

sperian men, without passion, who do the work of gods as if they were the humanest, commonest of labourers—but such a fiery soul as that of Michelangelo whom this woman had mated! But it was not so. She could have understood the imperfection which is full of genius; what she was slow to understand was the perfection in which no genius was. But she was calmed and changed by all she had gone through, and had learned how dearly such excellence may be bought, and that life is too feeble to bear so vast a strain. Accordingly, fortified and consoled by the one gleam of glory which had crowned his brows, Helen smiled upon her painter, and took pleasure in his work, even when it ceased to be glorious. That was over; but the dear common life—the quiet, blessed routine of every day—that ordinary existence, with love to lighten it, and work to burden it, and care and pleasure intermingled, which, apart from the great bursts of passion and sorrow and delight that come in from time to time, is the best blessing God gives to man—that had come back, and was here in all its fulness, in perfect fellowship and content.

Norah lived at home with her parents for two years—the reason of which was, not that they objected to poor Ned, but that Ned was so sick at

heart with all that he had suffered, that he was not capable of settling down to such work as could be procured for him in England. He was 'Burton's son;' and though even the people who looked cold at him on account of his parentage would soon have forgotten it, Ned himself could not forget. There was even a moment of despair in which he had declared that he would not share his disgrace with the girl he loved, but would carry it with him to his grave as soon as might be, and trouble no one any more. This state of mind alarmed Norah dreadfully, but it did not alarm the more experienced persons, who were aware that the mind at one-and-twenty has a great many vagaries, and is not always to be taken at its word. The despair came to a sudden end when Ned found himself suddenly appointed to a vice-consulship in an Italian seaport, where his chief made him do all the work, and where he received very little of the pay. When this serious moment came, and life had to be fairly looked in the face, Ned came to himself—he became a reasonable creature. Of course, after his despair, his first idea was to be married instantly; but finally he consented to wait until something better—something they could live on—could be procured for him. He bore his banishment valiantly, and

so did Norah. And it did him good; he began to forget that he was 'Burton's son;' the whole terrible story began to steal out of his mind with that blessed facility which belongs to youth. His sky brightened from those early clouds; his mind, which was a very good, clear, capable intelligence, developed and strengthened; and finally, the exertions of his mother and grandfather, and those of Drummond, who had some influence too among great people who were lovers of art, procured him an appointment at home. Ned would have nothing to do with business; he shuddered at the very name of it, and rejected the plans his kind grandfather had formed for him with a repugnance which was almost horror. Mr Baldwin did not understand how the boy could be so foolish; but his mother understood, and subdued all opposition. Instead of taking his chance, therefore, of commerce, with the hope of becoming in his turn a millionnaire, Ned made himself very happy in the public service on a few hundreds a year. If he lived long enough, and nobody was promoted over him, and nothing happened to him or the office, the chances were that after thirty years or so he might find himself in enjoyment of a thousand a year. And all the family said to each other, 'That is very good, you know, for a young man

without much interest,' and congratulated Ned as if he had the thousand a year already which was thirty years off, and subject to all the chances of good and evil fortune, of economical ministers, and those public crises which demand the sacrifice of junior clerks. But notwithstanding all these drawbacks, Ned was very happy in his new appointment, and his marriage day drew nigh.

Mrs Burton had lived for some time with her father and her aunts at Clapham—as long, indeed, as she could bear it; then she took a little house in town. She had given up half of her settlement to her husband's creditors; and whether she measured her sacrifice by her own knowledge of human nature, or did it simply in the revulsion of her heart, after Ned's careless reception of the larger offering which she was willing to have made for him—certain it is that she got much more honour from her public renunciation of the half than she would have done had she let the whole go as she once intended. Her magnanimity was in all the papers, and everybody commended the modest, unexaggerated sacrifice. And she had still a very good income of her own, derived from the half she retained. Her life in London, she thought, was happier than at Clapham. Yet, perhaps, a doubt may be entertained on this sub-

ject; for a life so limited was hard to her, however luxurious it might be. She did not care for luxuries; but she did care to watch the secret movements of life, to penetrate the secrets of human machinery, to note how men met the different emergencies of their existence. She gathered a little society round her who were as fond of this pursuit as herself; but unless they could have provided themselves with cases on which to operate, this association could not do them much good, and it was dry fare to be driven to scrutinising each other. She thought she was happier in her tiny house in Mayfair, where she kept three maids and a man, and was extremely comfortable; but I believe that in reality her time of highest enjoyment was also her time of greatest suffering, when she was ruling her own little world at Dura, and seeing her house tumble to pieces, and holding out against fate. She had had a chance for a moment of a better life when her son came back, and touched with a careless, passing hand those chords of her heart which had never vibrated before. But the touch was careless, momentary. Before that vibration had done more than thrill through her, the thoughtless hand was lifted, and the opportunity over, and Mrs Burton, with her soft cynic smile, her perfect

toleration for the wants and weaknesses of humanity, her self-contained and self-sufficing character, had returned to herself. She was proud, very proud, in her way, and she was never betrayed into such weakness again. Which was to blame, the mother or the son, it would be hard to say; and yet Ned could hardly be blamed for failing to perceive an opportunity which he never guessed at nor dreamed of. Some exceptionally sympathetic natures might perhaps by instinct have felt the power that had been put into their hands; but it is impossible to say that he was to blame for not feeling it. Of all human creatures in this chilly universe, Ned remained the one who most deeply interested his mother. She made no opposition to his marriage; she even made a distinct effort to like and to attract Norah, who on her side did her best to be affectionate and filial to the woman whose cold gentleness and softness of manner were so unlike her own. It was an experiment which mutually could not be said to have failed. They were always, as people say, on the best of terms; but so far as any real *rapprochement* went, it cannot be said that it succeeded. Ned's life, however, such as it was, was the one point in her family to which Mrs Burton could turn without

that emotion of calmly-observant contempt—if the sentiment could be described as anything so decided or warm as contempt—with which she regarded human nature in general. Her husband, when he reached America, at once wrote home to claim a share in the income secured by her settlement, which she accorded him without hesitation, moved by a certain gentle, unexpressed disdain. He received his allowance, as she termed it, or his share, as he called it, with unfailing regularity, and made a hundred ventures with it in the new field of speculation he had entered on with varying success. He gained money and he lost it as he moved about from one town to another; and sometimes in his letters he would tell her of his successes—successes which made her smile. It was his nature, just as it was Mr Baldwin's nature to take the chair at meetings, to devote himself to the interests of the denomination. The one tendency was no more elevated than the other, when you came to look into them, the student of human nature thought. Perhaps, on the whole, the commercial gambling on a small scale which now occupied the ruined merchant was more honest than the other; for Burton thought of nothing but his own profit or gain, whereas Mr Baldwin

thought he was doing God a service. But this was not a comparison for a daughter, for a wife, to make.

And then Clara came back from her southern villa, a young mother, with a husband who was no longer her lover, and of whom she had become aware that he was growing old. The villa was situated on the shores of the loveliest sea, in the most beautiful climate in the world; but Clara tired of it, and found it dull, and with her dulness bored her husband so that his life became a burden to him. He brought her home at her urgent desire, with her baby, and they lived about in London for a short time, now in an hotel, now in a lodging, till it occurred to Clara that it was her duty to go and live near 'dear grandpapa,' and delight his old age with the fourth generation of his descendants. It suited her very well for a time. 'Dear grandpapa' was abject to her; her aunts became slaves to herself and her baby; she became the centre of all their thoughts and plans. Clary, who loved all pleasant things, and to whom luxury and ease were life, made herself at home at Clapham; and Mr Golden relieved her of his presence, paid visits here and there, lived at his club—which, strangely enough, had not ex-

pelled him—and returned to all the delights of his old bachelor life. What was to be the final end of it was hard to prophesy; but already Clary had begun to be bored at Clapham, and to make scenes with her husband when he paid her his unfrequent visits. And this was the love-match so romantically made! Clary, amid all her jealousies and all her dulness, kept so firm a hold upon the rich old people who could not live for ever, and who could restore her at their death, if they so pleased, to much of her old splendour, that her mother derived a certain painful amusement from this new manifestation of her life. Amusement, I cannot deny,—and painful, I hope; seeing that the creature who thus showed forth to her once again the poor motives and self-seeking of humanity was her only daughter. But with such evidences before her eyes of what human nature could be, was it wonderful that Mrs Burton should stand more and more by herself, and harden day by day into a colder toleration, a more disdainful acquiescence in the evils she could not fight against. What was the good of fighting against them? What could she do but render herself extremely unhappy, and spoil the comfort of others without doing them any good? It was not their fault;

they were acting according to their nature. Thus Mrs Burton's philosophy grew, and thus she spent her diminished life.

It was in the midst of all these varied circumstances that the joy-bells rang for Norah's wedding. Mrs Burton did not go; for even her philosophy was not equal to the sight of Dura, where, according to the wish of both bride and bridegroom, the bridal was; but Clara, eager in the dulness of Clapham for any change, was present in a toilet which filled her aunts with compunction, yet admiration, and which one of them had been wheedled into giving her. Clara took great state upon her as the matron, the only one of the party who had attained that glory, though she was the youngest, as she reminded them all. 'But if I don't do better than Clary has done, I hope I shall never marry at all,' Katie Dalton cried with natural indignation. The pretty procession went out of the Gatehouse on foot to the church behind the trees, where Norah, as she said, had been 'brought up,' and where Mr Dalton blessed the young pair, while his kind wife stood holding Helen's hand and crying softly, as it were, under her breath. Helen herself did not cry; and Norah's tears came amid such an April shining of happiness, that no

one could object to them. The whole village came out to watch the pair whom the whole village knew. A certain tenderness of respect, such as the crowd seldom shows, was in the salutations Dura gave to the son of the ruined man who had so long reigned among them. No one could remember, not the most tenacious rural memory, an unkind act of Ned's; and the people were so sorry for him, that their pleasure in his joy was half pathetic. 'Poor lad!' they said; 'poor fellow! And it was none of his fault.' And the friendliness that brought him back to hold his high festival and morning joy of youth among them touched the kindly folks, and went to their hearts. Stephen Haldane sat at his window, and watched the bride come and go. Tears came into his eyes, and a pathetic mixture of gladness and sorrow to his heart. He watched the procession go out, and in his loneliness folded his hands and prayed for them while they were in church. It was summer once more, and the blossomed limes were full of bees, and all the air sweet with scent and sound. While all the goodly company walked together to the kirk, Stephen, who could not go with them, sat there in the sunshine with his folded hands. What thoughts were in his mind! What broken

lights of God's meaning and ways gleamed about him! What strange clouds passed over him through the sunshine—recollections of his own life, hopes for theirs! And when the bride went away from the door, away into the world with her husband—in that all-effectual separation from her father's house which may be but for a few days, but which is more or less for ever, Stephen once more looked out upon them from his window. And by his side stood Helen, escaped there to command herself and to console him. The father leaned out of the window, waving his hand; but the mother stood behind, with her hand upon the arm of the invalid's chair. When Robert turned round, it was with wonder that he perceived in Stephen's eyes a deeper feeling, a more penetrating emotion, than he himself felt, or had any thought of. He held out his hand to his friend, and he put his arm round his wife.

'Well, Helen,' he said, with his cheery voice, 'she is gone as you went from your mother; and there are two of us still, whatever life may have in store.'

'If there had not been two of us,' the mother cried, with momentary passion, 'I think I should have died!'

Stephen Haldane took her hand in his, in sign of his sympathy. He held it tightly, swaying for a moment in his chair. And he said nothing, for there was no one whose ear was his, to whom his words were precious. But in his heart he murmured, God hearing him, 'There is but one of me; and I never die.'

THE END.

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