

FOR LOVE AND LIFE.

BY

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“OMBRA,” “MAY,”

&c., &c.

“The device on his shield was a young oak tree pulled up by the roots,
with the Spanish word *Desdichado*, signifying Disinherited”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER I.

MISS LOCKWOOD'S STORY.

I AM obliged to go back a few days, that the reader may be made aware of the causes which detained Edgar, and of the business which had occupied his mind, mingled with all the frivolities of the Entertainment, during his absence. Annoyance, just alloyed with a forlorn kind of amusement, was his strongest sentiment, when he found himself appointed by his patron to be a kind of father-confessor to Miss Lockwood, to ascertain her story, and take upon himself her defence, if defence was possible. Why should he be selected for such a deli-

cate office? he asked; and when he found himself seated opposite to the young lady from the cloak and shawl department in Mr. Tottenham's room, his sense of the incongruity of his position became more and more embarrassing. Miss Lockwood's face was not of a common kind. The features were all fine, even refined, had the mind been conformable; but as the mind was not of a high order, the fine face took an air of impertinence, of self-opinion, and utter indifference to the ideas or feelings of others, which no coarse features could have expressed so well; the elevation of her head was a toss, the curl of her short upper lip a sneer. She placed herself on a chair in front of Mr. Tottenham's writing-table, at which Edgar sat, and turned her profile towards him, and tucked up her feet on a foot-stool. She had a book in her hand, which she used sometimes as a fan, sometimes to shield her face from the fire, or Edgar's eyes, when she found them embarrassing. But it was he who was embarrassed, not Miss Lockwood.

It cost him a good deal of trouble to begin his interrogatory.

“You must remember,” he said, “that I have not thrust myself into this business, but that it is by your own desire—though I am entirely at a loss to know why.”

“Of course you are,” said Miss Lockwood. “It is one of the things that no man can be expected to understand—till he knows. It’s because we’ve got an object in common, sir, you and me——”

“An object in common?”

“Yes; perhaps you’re a better Christian than I am, or perhaps you pretend to be; but knowing what you’ve been, and how you’ve fallen to what you are, I don’t think it’s in human nature that you shouldn’t feel the same as me.”

“What I’ve been, and how I’ve fallen to what I am!” said Edgar, smiling at the expression with whimsical amazement and vexation. “What is the object in life which you suppose me to share?”

“To spite the *Ardens!*” cried the young

lady from the mantle department, with sudden vigour and animation. Her eyes flashed, she clasped her hands together, and laughed and coughed—the laughter hard and mirthless, the cough harder still, and painful to hear. “Don’t you remember what I said to you? All my trouble, all that has ever gone against me in the world, and the base stories they’re telling you now—all came along of the Ardens; and now Providence has thrown you in my way, that has as much reason to hate them. I can’t set myself right without setting them wrong—and revenge is sweet. Arthur Arden shall rue the day he ever set eyes on you or me !”

“Wait a little,” said Edgar, bewildered. “In the first place, I don’t hate the Ardens, and I don’t want to injure them, and I hope, when we talk it over, you may change your mind. What has Arthur Arden done to you?”

“That’s my story,” said Miss Lockwood, and then she made a short pause. “Do you know the things that are said about

me?" she asked. "They say in the house that I have had a baby. That's quite true. I would not deny it when I was asked; I didn't choose to tell a lie. They believed me fast enough when what I said was to my own disadvantage; but when I told the truth in another way, because it was to my advantage, they say—Prove it. I can't prove it without ruining other folks, or I'd have done it before now; but I was happy enough as I was, and I didn't care to ruin others. Now, however, they've forced me to it, and thrown you in my way."

"For heaven's sake," cried Edgar, "don't mix me up with your scheme of vengeance! What have I to do with it?" He was alarmed by the calm white vehemence with which she spoke.

"Oh! not much with my part of the business," she said lightly. "This is how it is: I'm married—excuse enough any day for what I'm charged with; but they won't take my word, and I have to prove it. When I tell them I'm only a widow in a kind of a

way, they say to me, 'Produce your husband,' and this is what I've got to do. Nearly ten years ago, Mr. Earnshaw, if that is your name—are you listening to me?—I married Arthur Arden; or, rather, Arthur Arden married me."

"Good God!" cried Edgar; he did not at first seem to take in the meaning of the words, but only felt vaguely that he had received a blow. "You are mad!" he said, after a pause, looking at her—"you are mad!"

"Not a bit; I am saner than you are, for I never would have given up a fortune to him. I am the first Mrs. Arthur Arden, whoever the second may be. He married me twice over, to make it more sure."

"Good God!" cried Edgar again; his countenance had grown whiter than hers; all power of movement seemed to be taken out of him. "Prove this horrible thing that you say—prove it! He never could be such a villain!"

"Oh, couldn't he?—much you know

about him! He could do worse things than that, if worse is possible. You shall prove it yourself without me stirring a foot. Listen, and I will tell you just how it was. When he saw he couldn't have me in any other way, he offered marriage; I was young then, and so was he, and I was excusable—I have always felt I was excusable; for a handsomer man, or one with more taking ways—You know him, that's enough. Well, not to make any more fuss than was necessary, I proposed the registrar; but, if you please, he was a deal too religious for that. 'Let's have some sort of parson,' he said, 'though he mayn't be much to look at.' We were married in the Methodist chapel up on the way to Highgate. I'll tell you all about it—I'll give you the name of the street and the date. It's up Camden Town way, not far from the Highgate Road. Father and mother used to attend chapel there."

"You were married—to Arthur Arden!" said Edgar; all the details were lost upon

him, for he had not yet grasped the fact—
“married to Arthur Arden! Is this what
you mean to say?”

“Yes, yes, yes!” cried Miss Lockwood,
in high impatience, waving the book which
she used as a fan—“that is what I meant to
say; and there’s a deal more. You seem to be
a slow sort of gentleman. I’ll stop, shall I,
till you’ve got it well into your head?” she
said, with a laugh.

The laugh, the mocking look, the devilish
calm of the woman who was expounding so
calmly something which must bring ruin
and despair upon a family, and take name
and fame from another woman, struck Ed-
gar with hot, mad anger.

“For God’s sake, hold your tongue!” he
cried, not knowing what he said—“you
will drive me mad!”

“I’m sure I don’t see why,” said Miss
Lockwood—“why should it?—it ain’t any-
thing to you. And to hold my tongue is
the last thing I mean to do. You know
what I said; I’ll go over it again to make
quite sure.”

Then, with a light laugh, she repeated word for word what she had already said, throwing in descriptive touches about the Methodist chapel and its pews.

“Father and mother had the third from the pulpit on the right-hand side. I don't call myself a Methodist now; it stands in your way sometimes, and the Church is always respectable; but I ought to like the Methodists, for it was there it happened. You had better take down the address and the day. I can tell you all the particulars.”

Edgar did not know much about the law, but he had heard, at least, of one ordinary formula.

“Have you got your marriage certificate?” he said.

“Oh! they don't have such things among the Methodists,” said Miss Lockwood. “Now I'll tell you about the second time—for it was done twice over, to make sure. You remember all that was in the papers about that couple who were first married in Ireland, and then in Scotland, and turned out

not to be married at all? We went off to Scotland, him and me, for our wedding tour, and I thought I'd just make certain sure, in case there should be anything irregular, you know. So when we were at the hotel, I got the landlady in, and one of the men, and I said he was my husband before them, and made them put their names to it. He was dreadfully angry—so angry that I knew I had been right, and had seen through him all the while, and that he meant to deceive me if he could; but he couldn't deny it all of a sudden, in a moment, with the certainty that he would be turned out of the house then and there if he did. I've got that, if you like to call that a marriage certificate. They tell me it's hard and fast in Scotch law."

"But we are in England," said Edgar, feebly. "I don't think Scotch law tells here."

"Oh! it does, about a thing like this," said Miss Lockwood. "If I'm married in Scotland, I can't be single in England, and

marry again, can I? Now that's my story. If his new wife hadn't have been so proud——”

“She is not proud,” said Edgar, with a groan; “it is—her manner—she does not mean it. And then she has been so petted and flattered all her life. Poor girl! she has done nothing to you that you should feel so unfriendly towards her.”

“Oh! hasn't she?” said Miss Lockwood. “Only taken my place, that's all. Lived in my house, and driven in my carriage, and had everything I ought to have had—no more than that!”

Edgar was like a man stupefied. He stood holding his head with his hands, feeling that everything swam around him. Miss Lockwood's defender?—ah! no, but the defender of another, whose more than life was assailed. This desperation at last made things clearer before him, and taught him to counterfeit calm.

“It could not be she who drove you from him,” he said, with all the composure

he could collect. "Tell me how it came about that you are called Miss Lockwood, and have been here so long, if all you have told me is true?"

"I won't say that it was not partly my fault," she replied, with a complacent nod of her head. "After awhile we didn't get on—I was suspicious of him from the first, as I've told you; I know he never meant honest and right; and he didn't like being found out. Nobody as I know of does. We got to be sick of each other after awhile. He was as poor as Job; and he has the devil's own temper. If you think I was a patient Grizel to stand that, you're very much mistaken. Ill-usage and slavery, and nothing to live upon! I soon showed him as that wouldn't do for me. The baby died," she added indifferently—"poor little thing, it was a blessing that the Almighty took it! I fretted at first, but I felt it was a deal better off than it could ever have been with me; and then I took another situation. I had been in Grant and Robinson's before I married, so as I didn't

want to make a show of myself with them that knew me, I took back my single name again. They are rather low folks there, and I didn't stay long; and I found I liked my liberty a deal better than studying his temper, and being left to starve, as I was with him; so I kept on, now here, now there, till I came to Tottenham's. And here I've never had nothing to complain of," said Miss Lockwood, "till some of these prying women found out about the baby. I made up my mind to say nothing about who I was, seeing circumstances ain't favourable. But I shan't deny it; why should I deny it? it ain't for my profit to deny it. Other folks may take harm, but I can't; and when I saw you, then I felt that the right moment had come, and that I must speak."

"Why did not you speak before he was married?—had you no feeling that, if you were safe, another woman was about to be ruined?" said Edgar, bitterly. "Why did you not speak then?"

"Am I bound to take care of other

women?" said Miss Lockwood. "I had nobody to take care of me ; and I took care of myself—why couldn't she do the same? She was a lady, and had plenty of friends—I had nobody to take care of me."

"But it would have been to your own advantage," said Edgar. "How do you suppose anyone can believe that you neglected to declare yourself Arthur Arden's wife at the time when it would have been such a great thing for you, and when he was coming into a good estate, and could make his wife a lady of importance? You are not indifferent to your own comfort—why did you not speak then?"

"I pleased myself, I suppose," she said, tossing her head ; then added, with matter-of-fact composure, "Besides, I was sick of him. He was never the least amusing, and the most fault-finding, ill-tempered—One's spelling, and one's looks, and one's manners, and one's dress—he was never satisfied. Then," she went on, sinking her voice—"I don't deny the truth—I knew

he'd never take me home and let people know I was his real wife. All I could have got out of him would have been an allowance, to live in some hole and corner. I preferred my freedom to that, and the power of getting a little amusement. I don't mind work, bless you—not work of this kind—it amuses me; and if I had been left in peace here when I was comfortable, I shouldn't have interfered—I should have let things take their chance.”

“In all this,” said Edgar, feeling his throat dry and his utterance difficult, “you consider only yourself, no one else.”

“Who else should I consider?” said Miss Lockwood. “I should like to know who else considered me? Not a soul. I had to take care of myself, and I did. Why should not his other wife have her wits about her as well as me?”

Then there was a pause. Edgar was too much broken down by this disclosure, too miserable to speak; and she sat holding up the book between her face and the fire,

with a flush upon her pale cheeks, sometimes fanning herself, her nose in the air, her finely-cut profile inspired by impertinence and worldly selfishness, till it looked ugly to the disquieted gazer. Few women could have been so handsome, and yet looked so unhandsome. As he looked at her, sickening with the sight, Edgar felt bitterly that this woman was indeed Arthur Arden's true mate—they matched each other well. But Clare, his sister—Clare, whom there had been no one to guard—who, rich in friends as she was, had no brother, no guardian to watch over her interests—poor Clare! The only thing he seemed able to do for her now was to prove her shame, and extricate her, if he could extricate her, from the terrible falseness of her position. His heart ached so that it gave him a physical pain. He had kept up no correspondence with her whom he had looked upon during all the earlier part of his life as his sister, and whom he felt in his very heart to be doubly his sister the moment that evil came in her

way. The thing for him to consider now was what he could do for her, to save her, if possible—though how she could be saved, he knew not, as the story was so circumstantial, and apparently true. But, at all events, it could not but be well for Clare that her enemy's cause was in her brother's hands. Good for Clare!—would it be good for the other woman, to whom he had promised to do justice? Edgar almost felt his heart stand still as he asked himself this question. Justice—justice must be done, in any case, there could be no doubt of that. If Clare's position was untenable, she must not be allowed to go on in ignorance, for misery even is better than dishonour. This was some comfort to him in his profound and sudden wretchedness. Clare's cause, and that of this other, were so far the same.

“I will undertake your commission,” he said gravely; “but understand me first. Instead of hating the Ardens, I would give my life to preserve my sister, Mrs. Arden, from the shame and grief you are trying to

bring upon her. Of course, one way or another, I shall feel it my duty now to verify what you say; but it is right to tell you that her interest is the first thing I shall consider, not yours."

"*Her* interest!" cried Miss Lockwood, starting up in her chair. "Oh! you poor, mean-spirited creature! Call yourself a man, and let yourself be treated like a dog—that's your nature, is it? I suppose they've made you a pension, or something, to keep you crawling and toadying. I shouldn't wonder," she said, stopping suddenly, "if you were to offer me a good round sum to compromise the business, or an allowance for life—?"

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Edgar, quietly. She stared at him for a moment, panting—and then, in the effort to speak, was seized upon by a violent fit of coughing, which shook her fragile figure, and convulsed her suddenly-crimsoned face. "Can I get you anything?" he asked, rising with an impulse of pity. She shook her

head, and waved to him with her hand to sit down again. Does the reader remember how Christian in the story had vile thoughts whispered into his ear, thrown into his mind, which were none of his? Profoundest and truest of parables! Into Edgar's mind, thrown there by some devil, came a wish and a hope; he did not originate them, but he had to undergo them, writhing within himself with shame and horror. He wished that she might die, that Clare might thus be saved from exposure, at least from outward ruin, from the stigma upon herself and upon her children, which nothing else could avert. The wish ran through him while he sat helpless, trying with all the struggling powers of his mind to reject it. Few of us, I suspect, have escaped a similar experience. It was not his doing, but he had to bear the consciousness of this inhuman thought.

When Miss Lockwood had struggled back to the power of articulation, she turned to him again, with an echo of her jaunty laugh.

“They say I'm in a consumption,” she

said; "don't you believe it. I'll see you all out, mind if I don't. We're a long-lived family. None of us ever were known to have anything the matter with our chests."

"Have you spoken to a doctor?" said Edgar, with so deep a remorseful compunction that it made his tone almost tender in kindness.

"Oh! the doctor—he speaks to me!" she said. "I tell the young ladies he's fallen in love with me. Oh! that ain't so unlikely neither! Men as good have done it before now; but I wouldn't have anything to say to him," she continued, with her usual laugh. "I don't make any brag of it, but I never forget as I'm a married woman. I don't mind a little flirtation, just for amusement; but no man has ever had it in his power to brag that he's gone further with me."

Then there was a pause, for disquiet began to resume its place in Edgar's mind, and the poor creature before him had need of rest to regain her breath. She opened

the book she held in her hand, and pushed to him across the table some written memoranda.

“There’s where my chapel is as I was married in,” she said, “and there’s—it’s nothing but a copy, so, if you destroy it, it won’t do me any harm—the Scotch certificate. They were young folks that signed it, no older than myself, so be sure you’ll find them, if you want to. There, I’ve given you all that’s needed to prove what I say, and if you don’t clear me, I’ll tell the Master, that’s all, and he’ll do it, fast enough! Your fine Mrs. Arden, forsooth, that has no more right to be Mrs. Arden than you had to be Squire, won’t get off, don’t you think it, for now my blood’s up. I know what Arthur will do,” she cried, getting excited again. “He’s a man of sense, and a man of the world, he is. He’ll come to me on his knees, and offer a good big lump of money, or a nice allowance. Oh! I know him! He ain’t a poor, mean-spirited cur, to lick the hand

that cuffs him, or to go against his own interest, like you."

Here another fit of coughing came on, worse than the first. Edgar, compassionate, took up the paper, and left the room.

"I am afraid Miss Lockwood is ill. Will you send some one to her?" he said, to the first young lady he met.

"Hasn't she a dreadful cough? And she won't do anything for it, or take any care of herself. I'll send one of the young ladies from her own department," said this fine personage, rustling along in her black silk robes. Mr. Watson was hovering near, to claim Edgar's attention, about some of the arrangements for the approaching festivity.

"Mr. Tottenham bade me say, sir, if you'd kindly step this way, into the hall," said the walking gentleman.

Poor Edgar! if he breathed a passing anathema upon enlightened schemes and disciples of social progress, I do not think that anyone need be surprised.

CHAPTER II.

A PLUNGE INTO THE MAZE.

“**H**ER plea is simply that she is married—that seems all there is to say.”

“I am aware she says that,” said Mr. Tottenham. “I hope to heaven she can prove it, Earnshaw, and end this tempest in a tea-cup! I am sick of the whole affair! Has her husband deserted her, or is he dead, or what has become of him? I hope she gave you some proofs.”

“I must make inquiries before I can answer,” said Edgar. “By some miserable chance friends of my own are involved. I

must get at the bottom of it. Her husband—if he is her husband—has married again; in his own rank—a lady in whom I am deeply interested——”

“My dear fellow!” said Mr. Tottenham, “what a business for you! Did the woman know, confound her? There, I don’t often speak rashly, but some of these women, upon my honour, would try the patience of a saint! I daresay it’s all a lie. That sort of person cares no more for a lie! I’ll pack her off out of the establishment, and we’ll think of it no more.”

“Pardon me, I must think of it, and follow it out,” said Edgar; “it is too serious to be neglected. Altogether independent of this woman, a lady’s—my friend’s happiness, her reputation, perhaps her life—for how could she outlive name and fame, and love and confidence?” he said, suddenly feeling himself overcome by the horrible suggestion. “It looks like preferring my own business to yours, but I must see to this first.”

“Go, go, my dear Earnshaw—never mind my business—have some money and go!” cried Mr. Tottenham. “I can’t tell you how grieved I am to have brought you into this. Poor lady! poor lady!—I won’t ask who it is. But recollect they lie like the devil!—they don’t mind what they say, like you or me, who understand the consequences; they think of nothing beyond the spite of the moment. I am in for three quarrels, and a resignation, all because I want to please them!” cried the poor master of the great shop, dolorously. He accompanied Edgar out to the private door, continuing his plaint. “A nothing will do it,” he said; “and they don’t care for what happens, so long as they indulge the temper of the moment. To lose their employment, or their friends, or the esteem of those who would try to help them in everything—all this is nought. I declare I could almost cry like a baby when I think of it! Don’t be cast down, Earnshaw. More likely than not it’s all a lie!”

“If I cannot get back this evening in time for you—” Edgar began.

“Never mind, never mind. Go to the Square. I’ll tell them to have a room ready for you. And take some money—nothing is to be done without money. And, Earnshaw,” he added, calling after him some minutes later, when Edgar was at the door, “on second thoughts, you won’t say anything to Mary about my little troubles? After all, the best of us have got our tempers; perhaps I am injudicious, and expect too much. She has always had her doubts about my mode of treatment. Don’t, there’s a good fellow, betray to them at home that I lost my temper too!”

This little preliminary to the Entertainment was locked in Edgar’s bosom, and never betrayed to anyone. To tell the truth, his mind was much too full of more important matters to think upon any such inconsiderable circumstance; for he was not the Apostle of the Shop, and had no scheme to justify and uphold in the eyes of

all men and women. Edgar, I fear, was not of the stuff of which social reformers are made. The concerns of the individual were more important to him at all times than those of the mass; and one human shadow crossing his way, interested his heart and mind far beyond a mere crowd, though the crowd, no doubt, as being multitudinous, must have been more important. Edgar turned his back upon the establishment with, I fear, very little Christian feeling towards Tottenham's, and all concerned with it—hating the Entertainment, weary of Mr. Tottenham himself, and disgusted with the strange impersonation of cruelty and selfishness which had just been revealed to him in the form of a woman. He could not shut out from his eyes that thin white face, so full of self, so destitute of any generous feeling.

Such stories have been told before in almost every tone of sympathy and reprobation; women betrayed have been wept in every language under heaven, and their

betrayed, denounced, but what was there to lament about, to denounce here? A woman sharp and clever to make the best of her bargain; a man trying legal cheats upon her; two people drawn together by some semblance of what is called passion, yet each watching and scheming, how best, on either side, to outwit the other. Never was tale of misery and despair so pitiful; for this was all baseness, meanness, calculation on both hands. They were fitly matched, and it was little worth any man's while to interfere between them—but, O heaven! to think of the other fate involved in theirs. This roused Edgar to an excitement which was almost maddening. To think that these two base beings had wound into their miserable tangle the feet of Clare—that her innocent life must pay the penalty for their evil lives, that she must bear the dishonour while spotless from the guilt!

Edgar posted along the great London thoroughfare, through the continually varying crowd of passers-by, absorbed in an

agitation and disquiet which drove all his own affairs out of his head. His own affairs might involve much trouble and distress; but neither shame nor guilt was in them. Heaven above! to think that guilt or shame could have anything to do with Clare!

Now Clare had not been, at least at the last, a very good sister to Edgar—she was not his sister at all, so far as blood went; and when this had been discovered, and the homeliness of his real origin identified, Clare had shrunk from him, notwithstanding that for all her life, in childish fondness and womanly sympathy, she had loved him as her only brother. Edgar had mournfully consented to a complete severance between them. She had married his enemy; and he himself had sunk so much out of sight that he had felt no further intercourse to be possible, though his affectionate heart had felt it deeply. But as soon as he heard of her danger, all his old love for his sister had sprung up in Edgar's heart. He took back her name, as it were, into the number

of those sounds most familiar to him. "Clare," he said to himself, feeling a thrill of renewed warmth go through him, mingled with poignant pain—"Clare, my sister, my only sister, the sole creature in the world that belongs to me!" Alas! she did not belong to Edgar any more than any inaccessible princess; but in his heart this was what he felt. He pushed his way through the full streets, with the air and the sentiment of a man bound upon the most urgent business, seeing little on his way, thinking of nothing but his object—the object in common which Miss Lockwood had supposed him to have with herself. But Edgar did not even remember that—he thought of nothing but Clare's comfort and well-being which were concerned, and how it would be possible to confound her adversaries, and save her from ignoble persecution. If he could keep it from her knowledge altogether! But, alas! how could that be done? He went faster and faster, driven by his thoughts.

The address Miss Lockwood had given him was in a small street off the Hampstead Road. That strange long line of street, with here and there a handful of older houses, a broader pavement, a bit of dusty garden, to show the suburban air it once had possessed; its heterogeneous shops, furniture, birdcages, perambulators, all kinds of out-of-the-way wares fled past the wayfarer, taking wings to themselves, he thought. It is not an interesting quarter, and Edgar had no time to give to any picturesque or historical reminiscences. When he reached the little street in which the chapel he sought was situated, he walked up on one side and down on the other, expecting every moment to see the building of which he was in search. A chapel is not a thing apt to disappear, even in the changeful district of Camden Town. Rubbing his eyes, he went up and down again, inspecting the close lines of mean houses. The only break in the street was where two or three small houses, of a more bilious brick than usual,

whose outlines had not yet been toned down by London soot and smoke, diversified the prospect. He went to a little shop opposite this yellow patch upon the old grimy garment to make inquiries.

“Chapel! there ain’t no chapel hereabouts,” said the baker, who was filling his basket with loaves.

“Hold your tongue, John,” said his wife, from the inner shop. “I’ll set you all right in a moment. There’s where the chapel was, sir, right opposite. There was a bit of a yard where they’ve built them houses. The chapel is behind; but it ain’t a chapel now. It’s been took for an infant school by our new Rector. Don’t you see a little bit of an entry at that open door? That’s where you go in. But since it’s been shut up there’s been a difference in the neighbourhood. Most of us is church folks now.”

“And does nothing remain of the chapel—nobody belonging to it, no books nor records?” cried Edgar, suddenly brought to

a standstill. The woman looked at him surprised.

“I never heard as they had any books—more than the hymn-books, which they took with them, I suppose. It’s our new Rector as has bought it—a real good man, as gives none of us no peace——”

“And sets you all on with your tongues,” said her husband, throwing his basket over his shoulder.

Edgar did not wait to hear the retort of the wife, and felt no interest in the doings of the new Rector. He did not know what to do in this unforeseen difficulty. He went across the road, and up the little entry, and looked at the grimy building beyond, which was no great satisfaction to his feelings. It was a dreary little chapel, of the most ordinary type, cleared of its pews, and filled with the low benches and staring pictures of an infant school, and looked as if it had been thrust up into a corner by the little line of houses built across the scrap of open space which had formerly existed in front of

its doors. As he gazed round him helplessly, another woman came up, who asked with bated breath what he wanted.

“We’re all church folks now hereabouts,” she said; “but I don’t mind telling you, sir, as a stranger, I was always fond of the old chapel. What preaching there used to be, to be sure!—dreadful rousing and comforting! And it’s more relief, like, to the mind, to say, ‘Lord, ha’ mercy upon us!’ or, ‘Glory, glory!’ or the like o’ that, just when you pleases, than at set times out o’ a book. There’s nothing most but prayers here now. If you want any of the chapel folks, maybe I could tell you. I’ve been in the street twenty years and more.”

“I want to find out about a marriage that took place here ten years ago,” said Edgar.

“Marriage!” said the woman, shaking her head. “I don’t recollect no marriage. Preachings are one thing, and weddings is another. I don’t hold with weddings out of church. If there’s any good in church—”

Edgar had to stop this exposition by asking after the "chapel-folks" to whom she could direct him, and in answer was told of three tradesmen in the neighbourhood who "held by the Methodys," one of whom had been a deacon in the disused chapel. This was a carpenter, who could not be seen till his dinner-hour, and on whom Edgar had to dance attendance with very indifferent satisfaction; for the deacon's report was that the chapel had never been, so far as he could remember, licensed for marriages, and that none had taken place within it. This statement, however, was flatly contradicted by the pork-butcher, whose name was the next on his list, and who recollected to have heard that some one had been married there just about the time indicated by Miss Lockwood. Finally, Edgar lighted on an official who had been a local preacher in the days of the chapel, and who was now a Scripture-reader, under the sway of the new Rector, who had evidently turned the church and parish upside-down. This per-

sonage had known something of the Lockwoods, and was not disinclined—having ascertained that Edgar was a stranger, and unlikely to betray any of his hankerings after the chapel—to gossip about the little defunct community. Its books and records had, he said, been removed, when it was closed, to some central office of the denomination, where they would, no doubt, be shown on application. This man was very anxious to give a great deal of information quite apart from the matter in hand. He gave Edgar a sketch of the decay of the chapel, in which, I fear, the young man took no interest, though it was curious enough; and he told him about the Lockwoods, and about the eldest daughter, who, he was afraid, had come to no good.

“She said as she was married, but nobody believed her. She was always a flighty one,” said the Scripture-reader.

This was all that Edgar picked up out of a flood of unimportant communications. He could not even find any clue to the place

where these denominational records were kept, and by this time the day was too far advanced to do more. Drearily he left the grimy little street, with its damp pavements, its poor little badly-lighted shops and faint lamps, not without encountering the new Rector in person, an omniscient personage, who had already heard of his inquiries, and regarded him suspiciously, as perhaps a "Methody" in disguise, planning the restoration of dissent in a locality just purged from its taint. Edgar was too tired, too depressed and down-hearted to be amused by the watchful look of the muscular Christian, who saw in him a wolf prowling about the fold. He made his way into the main road, and jumped into a hansom, and drove down the long line of shabby, crowded thoroughfare, so mean and small, yet so great and full of life. Those miles and miles of mean, monotonous street, without a feature to mark one from another, full of crowds of human creatures, never heard of, except as counting so many hundreds, more

or less, in the year's calendar of mortality—how strangely impressive they become at last by mere repetition, mass upon mass, crowd upon crowd, poor, nameless, mean, unlovely! Perhaps it was the general weariness and depression of Edgar's whole being that brought this feeling into his mind as he drove noisily, silently along between those lines of faintly-lighted houses towards what is impertinently, yet justly, called the habitable part of London. For one fair, bright path in the social, as in the physical world, how many mean, and darkling, and obscure!—how small the spot which lies known and visible to the general eye!—how great the confused darkness all round! Such reflections are the mere growth of weariness and despondency, but they heighten the depression of which they are an evidence.

The whole of noisy, crowded London was as a wilderness to Edgar. He drove to his club, where he had not been since the day when he met Mr. Tottenham. So short

a time ago, and yet how his life had altered in the interval! He was no longer drifting vaguely upon the current, as he had been doing. His old existence had caught at him with anxious hands. Notwithstanding all the alterations of time, circumstances, and being, he was at this moment not Edgar Earnshaw at all, but the Edgar Arden of three years ago, caught back into the old sphere, surrounded by the old thoughts. Such curious vindications of the unchangeableness of character, the identity of being, which suddenly seize upon a man, and whirl him back in a moment, defying all external changes, into his old, his unalterable self, are among the strangest things in humanity. Dizzy with the shock he had received, harassed by anxiety, worn out by unsuccessful effort, Edgar felt the world swim round with him, and scarcely could answer to himself who he was. Had all the Lockwood business been a dream? Was it a dream that he had been as a stranger for three long years to Clare, his sister—to Gussy, his al-

most bride? And yet his mind at this moment was as full of their images as if no interval had been.

After he had dined and refreshed himself, he set to work with, I think,—notwithstanding his anxiety, the first shock of which was now over,—a thrill of conscious energy, and almost pleasure in something to do, which was so much more important than those vague lessons to Phil, or vaguer studies in experimental philosophy, to which his mind had been lately turned. To be here on the spot, ready to work for Clare when she was assailed, was something to be glad of, deeply as the idea of such an assault upon her had excited and pained him. And at the same time as his weariness wore off, and the first excitement cooled down, he began to feel himself more able to realize the matter in all its particulars, and see the safer possibilities. It began to appear to him likely enough that all that could be proved was Arthur Arden's villainy, a subject which did not much concern him, which had no

novelty in it, and which, though Clare was Arthur Arden's wife, could not affect her more now than it had done ever since she married him. Indeed, if it was but this, there need be no necessity for communicating it to Clare at all. It was more probable, when he came to think of it, that an educated and clever man should be able to outwit a dressmaker girl, however deeply instructed in the laws of marriage by novels and *causes célèbres*, than that she should outwit him; and in this case there was nothing that need ever be made known to Clare.

Edgar was glad, and yet I don't know that a certain disappointment, quite involuntary and unawares, did not steal into his mind with this thought; for he had begun to cherish an idea of seeing his sister, of perhaps resuming something of his old intercourse with her, and at least being known to have worked for and defended her. These thoughts, however, were but the secondary current in his mind, while the working part of it was

planning a further enterprise for the morrow. He got the directory, and, after considerable trouble, found out from it the names and addresses of certain officials of the Wesleyan body, to whom he could go in search of the missing registers of the Hart Street Chapel—if registers there were—or who could give him definite and reliable information, in face of the conflicting testimony he had already received, as to whether marriages had ever been celebrated in it.

Edgar knew, I suppose, as much as other men generally do about the ordinary machinery of society, but he did not know where to lay his hand on any conclusive official information about the Hart Street Chapel, whether it had ever been licenced, or had any legal existence as a place of worship, any more than—you or I would, dear reader, were we in a similar difficulty. Who knows anything about such matters? He had lost a day already in the merest A B C of preliminary inquiry, and no doubt would lose several more.

Then he took out the most important of Miss Lockwood's papers, which he had only glanced at as yet. It was dated from a small village in the Western Highlands, within reach, as he knew, of Loch Arroch, and was a certificate, signed by Helen Campbell and John Mactaggart, that Arthur Arden and Emma Lockwood had that day, in their presence, declared themselves to be man and wife. Edgar's knowledge of such matters had, I fear, been derived entirely from novels and newspaper reports, and he read over the document, which was alarmingly explicit and straightforward, with a certain panic. He said to himself that there were no doubt ways in law by which to lessen the weight of such an attestation, or means of shaking its importance ; but it frightened him just as he was escaping from his first fright, and brought back all his excitement and alarm.

He did not go to Berkeley Square, as Mr. Tottenham had recommended, but to his old lodgings, where he found a bed with

difficulty, and where once more his two lives seemed to meet in sharp encounter. But his head by this time was too full of schemes for to-morrow to permit of any personal speculation; he was far, as yet, from seeing any end to his undertaking, and it was impossible to tell what journeys, what researches might be still before him.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE DEPTHS.

NEXT morning he went first to his old lawyer, in whom he had confidence, and having copied the certificate, carefully changing the names, submitted it to him. Mr. Parchemin declared that he knew nothing of Scotch law, but shook his head, and hoped there was nothing very unpleasant in the circumstances, declaring vehemently that it was a shame and disgrace that such snares should be spread for the unwary on the other side of the border. Was it a disgrace that Arthur Arden should

not have been protected in Scotland, as in England, from the quick-wittedness of the girl whom he had already cheated and meant to betray? Edgar felt that there might be something to be said on both sides of the question, as he left his copy in Mr. Parchemin's hands, who undertook to consult a Scotch legal authority on the question; then he went upon his other business. I need not follow him through his manifold and perplexing inquiries, or inform the reader how he was sent from office to office, and from secretary to secretary, or with what loss of time and patience his quest was accompanied. After several days' work, however, he ascertained that the chapel in Hart Street had indeed been licensed, but only used once or twice for marriages, and that no record of any such marriage as that which he was in search of could be found anywhere. A stray record of a class-meeting, in which Emma Lockwood had been admonished for levity of demeanour, was the sole mention of her to be found; and

though the officials admitted a certain carelessness in the preservation of books belonging to an extinct chapel, they declared it to be impossible that such a fact could have been absolutely ignored. There was, indeed, a rumour in the denomination that a local preacher had been found to have taken upon himself to perform a marriage, for which he had been severely reprimanded; but as he had been possessed of no authority to make such a proceeding legal, no register had been made of the fact, and only the reprimand was inscribed on the books of the community. This was the only opening for even a conjecture as to the truth of Miss Lockwood's first story. If the second could only have been dissipated as easily!

Edgar's inquiries among the Wesleyan authorities lasted, as I have said, several days, and caused him more fatigue of limb and of mind than it is easy to express. He went to Tottenham's—where, indeed, he showed himself every day, getting more and

more irritated with the Entertainment, and all its preparations—as soon as he had ascertained beyond doubt that the marriage at Hart Street Chapel was fictitious. Miss Lockwood, he was informed, was an invalid, but would see him in the young ladies' dining-room, where, accordingly, he found her, looking sharper, and whiter, and more worn than ever. He told her his news quietly, with a natural pity for the woman deceived; a gleam of sudden light shone in her eyes.

“I told you so,” she said, triumphantly; “now didn't I tell you so? He wanted to take me in—I felt it from the very first; but he hadn't got to do with a fool, as he thought. I was even with him for that.”

“I have written to find out if your Scotch witnesses are alive,” said Edgar.

“Alive!—why shouldn't they be alive, like I am, and like he is?” she cried, with feverish irritability. “Folks of our ages don't die!—what are you thinking of? And if they were dead, what would it matter?—

there's their names as good as themselves. Ah! I didn't botch my business any more than he botched his. You'll find it's all right."

"I hope you are better," Edgar said, with a compassion that was all the more profound because the object of it neither deserved, nor would have accepted it.

"Better—oh! thank you, I am quite well," she said lightly—"only a bit of a cold. Perhaps on the whole it's as well I'm not going to sing to-night; a cold is so bad for one's voice. Good-bye, Mr. Earnshaw. We'll meet at the old gentleman's turn-out to-night."

And she waved her hand, dismissing poor Edgar, who left her with a warmer sense of disgust and dislike than had ever moved his friendly bosom before. And yet it was in this creature's interests he was working, and against Clare! Mr. Tottenham caught him on his way out, to hand him a number of letters which had arrived for him, and to call for his advice in the final preparations.

The public had been shut out of the hall in which the Entertainment was to be, on pretence of alterations.

“Three more resignations,” Mr. Tottenham said, who was feverish and harassed, and looked like a man at the end of his patience. “Heaven be praised, it will be over to-night! Come early, Earnshaw, if you can spare the time, and stand by me. If any of the performers get cross, and refuse to perform, what shall I do?”

“Let them!” cried Edgar; “ungrateful fools, after all your kindness.”

Edgar was too much harassed and annoyed himself to be perfectly rational in his judgments.

“Don’t let us be uncharitable,” said Mr. Tottenham; “have they perhaps, after all, much reason for gratitude? Is it not my own crotchet I am carrying out, in spite of all obstacles? But it will be a lesson—I think it will be a lesson,” he added. “And, Earnshaw, don’t fail me to-night.”

Edgar went straight from the shop to Mr.

Parchemin's, to receive the opinion of the eminent Scotch law authority in respect to the marriage certificate. He had written to Robert Campbell, at Loch Arroch Head, suggesting that inquiries might be made about the persons who signed it, and had heard from him that morning that the landlady of the inn was certainly to be found, and that she perfectly remembered having put her name to the paper. The waiter was no longer there, but could be easily laid hands upon. There was accordingly no hope except in the Scotch lawyer, who might still make waste paper of the certificate. Edgar found Mr. Parchemin hot and red, after a controversy with this functionary.

“He laughs at my indignation,” said the old lawyer. “Well, I suppose if one did not heat one's self in argument, what he says might have some justice in it. He says innocent men that let women alone, and innocent women that behave as they ought

to do, will never get any harm from the Scotch marriage law ; and that it's always a safeguard for a poor girl that may have been led astray without meaning it. He says—well, I see you're impatient—though how such an anomaly can ever be suffered so near to civilization ! Well, he says it's as good a marriage as if it had been done in Westminster Abbey by the Archbishop of Canterbury. That's all the comfort I've got to give you. I hope it hasn't got anything directly to say to you."

"Thanks," said Edgar, faintly ; "it has to do with some—very dear friends of mine. I could scarcely feel it more deeply if it concerned myself."

"It is a disgrace to civilization !" cried the lawyer—"it is a subversion of every honest principle. You young men ought to take warning——"

"—To do a villainy of this kind, when we mean to do it, out of Scotland ?" said Edgar, "or we may find ourselves the victims instead of the victors ? Heaven forbid that I

should do anything to save a scoundrel from his just deserts!"

"But I thought you were interested—deeply interested——"

"Not for him, the cowardly blackguard!" cried Edgar, excited beyond self-control.

He turned away from the place, holding the lawyer's opinion, for which he had spent a large part of his little remaining stock of money, clutched in his hand. A feverish, momentary sense, almost of gratification, that Arden should have been thus punished, possessed him—only for a moment. He hastened to the club, where he could sit quiet and think it over. He had not been able even to consider his own business, but had thrust his letters into his pocket without looking at them.

When he found himself alone, or almost alone, in a corner of the library, he covered his face with his hands, and yielded to the crushing influence of this last certainty. Clare was no longer an honoured matron, the possessor of a well-recognized position,

the mother of children of whom she was proud, the wife of a man whom at least she had once loved, and who, presumably, had done nothing to make her hate and scorn him. God help her! What was she now? What was her position to be? She had no relations to fall back upon, or to stand by her in her trouble, except himself, who was no relation—only poor Edgar, her loving brother, bound to her by everything but blood; but, alas! he knew that in such emergencies blood is everything, and other ties count for so little. The thought made his heart sick; and he could not be silent, could not hide it from her, dared not shut up this secret in his own mind, as he might have done almost anything else that affected her painfully. There was but one way, but one step before him now.

His letters tumbled out of his pocket as he drew out Miss Lockwood's original paper, and he tried to look at them, by way of giving his overworn mind a pause, and that he might be the better able to choose the

best way of carrying out the duty now before him. These letters were—some of them, at least—answers to those which he had written in the excitement and happy tumult of his mind, after Lady Mary's unintentional revelation. He read them as through a mist; their very meaning came dimly upon him, and he could with difficulty realize the state of his feelings when, all glowing with the prospect of personal happiness, and the profound and tender exultation with which he found himself to be still beloved, he had written these confident appeals to the kindness of his friends. Most likely, had he read the replies with a disengaged mind, they would have disappointed him bitterly, with a dreariness of downfall proportioned to his warmth of hope. But in his present state of mind every sound around him was muffled, every blow softened. One nail strikes out another, say the astute Italians. The mind is not capable of two profound and passionate pre-occupations at once. He read them with subdued con-

sciousness, with a veil before his eyes. They were all friendly, and some were warmly cordial. "What can we do for you?" they all said. "If you could take a mastership, I have interest at more than one public school; but, alas! I suppose you did not even take your degree in England," one wrote to him. "If you knew anything about land, or had been trained to the law," said another, "I might have got you a land agency in Ireland, a capital thing for a man of energy and courage; but then I fear you are no lawyer, and not much of an agriculturist." "What can you do, my dear fellow?" said a third, more cautiously. "Think what you are most fit for—you must know best yourself—and let me know, and I will try all I can do."

Edgar laughed as he bundled them all back into his pocket. What was he most fit for? To be an amateur detective, and find out secrets that broke his heart. A dull ache for his own disappointment (though his mind was not lively enough to feel dis-

appointed) seemed to add to the general despondency, the lowered life and oppressed heart of which he had been conscious without this. But then what had he to do with personal comfort or happiness? In the first place there lay this tremendous passage before him—this revelation to be made to Clare.

It was late in the afternoon before he could nerve himself to write the indispensable letter, from which he felt it was cowardly to shrink. It was not a model of composition, though it gave him a great deal of trouble. This is what he said:—

“SIR,

“It is deeply against my will that I address you, so long after all communication has ended between us; and it is possible that you may not remember even the new name with which I sign this. By a singular and unhappy chance, facts in your past life, affecting the honour and credit of the family, have been brought to my know-

ledge, of all people in the world. If I could have avoided the confidence, I should have done so ; but it was out of my power. When I say that these facts concern a person called Lockwood (or so called, at least, before her pretended marriage), you will, I have no doubt, understand what I mean. Will you meet me, at any place you may choose to appoint, for the purpose of discussing this most momentous and fatal business? I have examined it minutely, with the help of the best legal authority, from whom the real names of the parties have been concealed, and I cannot hold out to you any hope that it will be easily arranged. In order, however, to save it from being thrown at once into professional hands, and exposed to the public, will you communicate with me, or appoint a time and place to meet me? I entreat you to do this, for the sake of your children and family. I cannot trust myself to appeal to any other sacred claim upon you. For God's sake, let

me see you, and tell me if you have any plea to raise !

“EDGAR EARNSHAW.”

He felt that the outburst at the end was injudicious, but could not restrain the ebullition of feeling. If he could but be allowed to manage it quietly, to have her misery broken to Clare without any interposition of the world's scorn or pity. She was the one utterly guiltless, but it was she who would be most exposed to animadversion ; he felt this, with his heart bleeding for his sister. If he had but had the privilege of a brother— if he could have gone to her, and drawn her gently away, and provided home and sympathy for her, before the blow had fallen ! But neither he nor anyone could do this, for Clare was not the kind of being to make close friends. She reserved her love for the few who belonged to her, and had little or none to expend on strangers. Did she still think of him as one belonging to

her, or was his recollection altogether eclipsed, blotted out from her mind? He began half a dozen letters to Clare herself, asking if she still thought of him, if she would allow him to remember that he was once her brother, with a humility which he could not have shown had she been as happy and prosperous as all the world believed her to be. But after he had written these letters, one after another, retouching a phrase here, and an epithet there, which was too weak or too strong for his excited fancy, and lingering over her name with tears in his eyes, he destroyed them all. Until he heard from her husband, he did not feel that he could venture to write to his sister. His sister!—his poor, forlorn, ruined, solitary sister, rich as she was, and surrounded by all things advantageous! a wife, and yet no wife; the mother of children whose birth would be their shame! Edgar rose up from where he was writing in the intolerable pang of this thought—he

could not keep still while it flashed through his mind. Clara, the proudest, the purest, the most fastidious of women—how could she bear it? He said to himself that it was impossible—impossible—that she must die of it! There was no way of escape for her. It would kill her, and his was the hand which had to give the blow.

In this condition, with such thoughts running over in his vexed brain, to go back to the shop, and find poor Mr. Tottenham wrestling among the difficulties which, poor man, were overwhelming him, with dark lines of care under his eyes, and his face haggard with anxiety—imagine, dear reader, what it was! He could have laughed at the petty trouble; yet no one could laugh at the pained face, the kind heart wounded, the manifest and quite overwhelming trouble of the philanthropist.

“I don’t even know yet whether they will keep to their engagements; and we are all at sixes and sevens, and the company

will begin to arrive in an hour or two!" cried poor Mr. Tottenham. Edgar's anxieties were so much more engrossing and terrible that to have a share in these small ones did him good; and he was so indifferent that he calmed everybody, brought the unruly performers back to their senses, and thrust all the arrangements on by the sheer carelessness he felt as to whether they were ready or not. "Who cares about your play?" he said to Watson, who came to pour out his grievances. "Do you think the Duchess of Middlemarch is so anxious to hear you? They will enjoy themselves a great deal better chatting to each other."

This brought Mr. Watson and his troupe to their senses, as all Mr. Tottenham's agitated remonstrances had not brought them. Edgar did not care to be in the way of the fine people when they arrived. He got a kind word from Lady Mary, who whispered to him, "How ill you are looking! You must tell us what it is, and let us help

you ;” for this kind woman found it hard to realise that there were things in which the support of herself and her husband would be but little efficacious ; and he had approached Lady Augusta, as has been recorded, with some wistful, hopeless intention of recommending Clare to her, in case of anything that might happen. But Lady Augusta had grown so pale at the sight of him, and had thrown so many uneasy glances round her, that Edgar withdrew, with his heart somewhat heavy, feeling his burden rather more than he could conveniently bear. He had gone and hid himself in the library, trying to read, and hearing far off the din of applause—the distant sound of voices. The noise of the visitors’ feet approaching had driven him from that refuge, when Mr. Tottenham, in high triumph, led his guests through his huge establishment. Edgar, dislodged, and not caring to put himself in the way of further discouragement, chose this moment to give his message

to Phil, and strayed away from sound and light into the retired passages, when that happened to him in his time of extremity which it is now my business to record.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW EVENT.

“**H**AVE you—forgotten me—then?”
“Forgotten you!” cried Edgar.

Heaven help him!—he did not advance nor take her hands, which she held out, kept back by his honour and promise—till he saw that her eyes were full of tears, that her lips were quivering, unable to articulate anything more, and that her figure swayed slightly, as if tottering. Then all that was superficial went to the winds. He took her back through the half-lighted passage, supporting her tenderly, to Mr. Tottenham’s room. The door closed behind them, and

Gussy turned to him with swimming eyes—eyes running over with tears and wistful happiness. She could not speak. She let him hold her, and looked up at him, all her heart in her face. Poor Edgar was seized upon at the same moment, all unprepared as he was, by that sudden gush of long-restrained feeling which carries all before it. “Is this how it is to be?” he said, no louder than a whisper, holding her fast and close, grasping her slender arm, as if she might still flee from him, or revolt from his touch. But Gussy had no mind to escape. Either she had nothing to say, or she was still too much shaken to attempt to say it. She let her head drop like a flower overcharged, and leaned on him and fell a-sobbing—fell on his neck, as the Bible says, though Gussy’s little figure fell short of that, and she only leaned as high as she could reach, resting there like a child. If ever a man came at a step out of purgatory, or worse, into Paradise, it was this man. Utterly alone half an hour ago, now

accompanied so as all the world could not add to him. He did not try to stop her sobbing, but bent his head down upon hers, and I think for one moment let his own heart expand into something which was like a sob too—an inarticulate utterance of all this sudden rapture, unexpected, unlooked for, impossible as it was.

I do not know which was the first to come to themselves. It must have been Gussy, whose sobs had relieved her soul. She stirred within his arm, and lifted her head, and tried to withdraw from him.

“Not yet, not yet,” said Edgar. “Think how long I have wanted you, how long I have yearned for you; and that I have no right to you even now.”

“Right!” said Gussy, softly—“you have the only right—no one can have any right but you.”

“Is it so?—is it so? Say it again,” said Edgar. “Say that I am not a selfish hound, beguiling you; but that you will have it so. Say you will have it so! What I will is not

the question—it is your will that is my law.”

“Do you know what you are saying—or have you turned a little foolish?” said the Gussy of old, with a laugh which was full of the tears with which her eyes were still shining and bright; and then she paused, and looking up at him, blushing, hazarded an inquiry—“Are you in love with me now?” she said.

“Now; and for how long?—three years—every day and all day long!” cried Edgar. “It could not do you any harm so far off. But I should not have dared to think of you so much if I had ever hoped for this.”

“Do not hold me so tight now,” said Gussy. “I shall not run away. Do you remember the last time—ah! we were not in love with each other then.”

“But loved each other—the difference is not very great,” he said, looking at her wistfully, making his eyes once more familiar with her face.

“Ah! there is a great difference,” said Gussy. “We were only, as you said, fond

of each other ; I began to feel it when you were gone. Tell me all that has happened since," she said, suddenly—"everything! You said you had been coming to ask me that dreadful morning. We have belonged to each other ever since ; and so much has happened to you. Tell me everything ; I have a right to know."

"Nothing has happened to me but the best of all things," said Edgar, "and the worst. I have broken my word ; I promised to your mother never to put myself in the way ; I have disgraced myself, and I don't care. And this has happened to me," he said low in her ear, "my darling! Gussy, you are sure you know what you are doing? I am poor, ruined, with no prospects for the moment——"

"Don't, please," said Gussy, throwing back her head with the old pretty movement. "I suppose you don't mean to be idle and lazy, and think me a burden ; and I can make myself very useful, in a great many ways. Why should I have to think

what I am doing more than I ought to have done three years ago, when you came to Thornleigh that morning? I had done my thinking then."

"And, please God, you shall not repent of it!" cried the happy young man—"you shall not repent it, if I can help it. But your mother will not think so, darling; she will upbraid me with keeping you back—from better things."

"That will be to insult me!" cried Gussy, flaming with hot, beautiful anger and shame. "Edgar, do you think I should have walked into your arms like this, not waiting to be asked, if I had not thought all this time that we have been as good as married these three years? Oh! what am I saying?" cried poor Gussy, overwhelmed with sudden confusion. It had seemed so natural, so matter-of-fact a statement to her—until she had said the words, and read a new significance in the glow of delight which flashed up in his eyes.

Is it necessary to follow this couple fur-

ther into the foolishness of their mutual talk?—it reads badly on paper, and in cold blood. They had forgotten what the hour was, and most other things, when Mr. Tottenham, very weary, but satisfied, came suddenly into the room, with his head full of the Entertainment. His eyes were more worn than ever, but the lines of care under them had melted away, and a fatigued, half-imbecile smile of pleasure was hanging about his face. He was too much worn out to judge anyone—to be hard upon anyone that night. Fatigue and relief of mind had affected him like a genial, gentle intoxication of the spirit. He stopped short, startled, and perhaps shocked for the moment, when Edgar, and that white little figure beside him, rose hastily from the chairs, which had been so very near each other. I am afraid that, for the first moment, Mr. Tottenham felt a chill of dread that it was one of his own young ladies from the establishment. He did not speak, and they did not speak for some moments.

Then, with an attempt at severity, Mr. Tottenham said,

“Gussy, is it possible? How should you have come here?”

“Oh! uncle, forgive us!” said Gussy, taking Edgar’s arm, and clinging to it, “and speak to mamma for us. I accepted him three years ago, Uncle Tom. He is the same man—or, rather, a far nicer man,” and here she gave a closer clasp to his arm, and dropped her voice for the moment, “only poor. Only poor!—does that make all the difference? Can you tell me any reason, Uncle Tottenham, why I should give him up, now he has come back?”

“My dear,” said Mr. Tottenham, alarmed yet conciliatory, “your mother—no, I don’t pretend I see it—your mother, Gussy, must be the best judge. Earnshaw, my dear fellow, was it not understood between us? I don’t blame you. I don’t say I wouldn’t have done the same; but was it not agreed between us? You should have given me

fair warning, and she should never have come here."

"I gave Lady Mary fair warning," said Edgar, who felt himself ready at this moment to confront the whole world. "I promised to deny myself; but no power in the world should make me deny Gussy anything she pleased; and this is what she pleases, it appears," he said, looking down upon her with glowing eyes. "A poor thing, sir, but her own—and she chooses it. I can give up my own will, but Gussy shall have her will, if I can get it for her. I gave Lady Mary fair warning; and then we met unawares."

"And it was all my doing, please, uncle," said Gussy, with a little curtsy. She was trembling with happiness, with agitation, with the mingled excitement and calm of great emotion; but still she could not shut out from herself the humour of the situation—"it was all my doing, please."

"Ah! I see how it is," said Mr. Tottenham. "You have been carried off, Earn-

shaw, and made a prey of against your will. Don't ask me for my opinion, yes or no. Take what good you can of to-night, you will have a pleasant waking up, I promise you, to-morrow morning. The question is, in the meantime, how are you to get home? Every soul is gone, and my little brougham is waiting, with places for two only, at the door. Send that fellow away, and I'll take you home to your mother."

But poor Gussy had very little heart to send her recovered lover away. She clung to his arm, with a face like an April day, between smiles and tears.

"He says quite true. We shall have a dreadful morning," she said, disconsolately. "When can you come, Edgar? I will say nothing till you come."

As Gussy spoke there came suddenly back upon Edgar a reflection of all he had to do. Life had indeed come back to him all at once, her hands full of thorns and roses piled together. He fixed the time of his visit to Lady Augusta next morning, as he

put Gussy into Mr. Tottenham's brougham, and setting off himself at a great pace, arrived at Berkeley Square as soon as they did, and attended her to the well-known door. Gussy turned round on the threshold of the house where he had been once so joyfully received, but where his appearance now, he knew, would be regarded with horror and consternation, and waved her hand to him as he went away. But having done so, I am afraid her courage failed, and she stole away rapidly upstairs, and took refuge in her own room, and even put herself within the citadel of her bed.

"I came home with Uncle Tottenham in his brougham," she said to Ada, who, half-alarmed, paid her a furtive visit, "and I am so tired and sleepy!"

Poor Gussy, she was safe for that night, but when morning came what was to become of her? So far from being sleepy, I do not believe that, between the excitement, the joy, and the terror, she closed her eyes that whole night.

Mr. Tottenham, too, got out of the brougham at Lady Augusta's door; his own house was on the other side of the Square. He sent the carriage away, and took Edgar's arm, and marched him solemnly along the damp pavement.

"Earnshaw, my dear fellow," he said, in the deepest of sepulchral tones, "I am afraid you have been very imprudent. You will have a *mauvais quart d'heure* to-morrow."

"I know it," said Edgar, himself feeling somewhat alarmed, in the midst of his happiness.

"I am afraid—you ought not to have let her carry you off your feet in this way; you ought to have been wise for her and yourself too; you ought to have avoided any explanation. Mind, I don't say that my feelings go with that sort of thing; but in common prudence—in justice to her——"

"Justice to her!" cried Edgar. "If she has been faithful for three years, do you think she is likely to change now? All that time not a word has passed between us;

but you told me yourself she would not hear of—anything ; that she spoke of retiring from the world. Would that be wiser or more prudent? Look here, nobody in the world has been so kind to me as you. I want you to understand me. A man may sacrifice his own happiness, but has he any right to sacrifice the woman he loves? It sounds vain, does it not?—but if she chooses to think this her happiness, am I to contradict her? I will do all that becomes a man,” cried Edgar, unconsciously adopting, in his excitement, the well-known words, “but do you mean to say it is a man’s duty to crush, and balk, and stand out against the woman he loves?”

“You are getting excited,” said Mr. Tottenham. “Speak lower, for heaven’s sake! Earnshaw; don’t let poor Mary hear of it to-night.”

There was something in the tone in which he said *poor* Mary, with a profound comic pathos, as if his wife would be the chief sufferer, which almost overcame Edgar’s

gravity. Poor Mr. Tottenham was weak with his own sufferings, and with the blessed sense that he had got over them for the moment.

“What a help you were to me this afternoon,” he said, “though I daresay your mind was full of other things. Nothing would have settled into place, and we should have had a failure instead of a great success but for you. You think it was a great success? Everybody said so. And your poor lady, Earnshaw—your—friend—what of her? Is it as bad as you feared?”

“It is as bad as it is possible to be,” said Edgar, suddenly sobered. “I must ask further indulgence from you, I fear, to see a very bad business to an end.”

“You mean, a few days’ freedom? Yes, certainly; perhaps it might be as well in every way. And money—are you sure you have money? Perhaps it is just as well you did not come to the Square, though they were ready for you. Do you come with me to-night?”

“I am at my old rooms,” said Edgar. “Now that the Entertainment is over, I shall not return till my business is done—or not then, if you think it best.”

“Nothing of the sort!” cried his friend—“only till it is broken to poor Mary,” he added, once more lachrymose. “But, Earnshaw, poor fellow, I feel for you. You’ll let me know what Augusta says?”

And Mr. Tottenham opened his door with his latch-key, and crept upstairs like a criminal. He was terrified for his wife, to whom he felt this bad news must be broken with all the precaution possible; and though he could not prevent his own thoughts from straying into a weak-minded sympathy with the lovers, he did not feel at all sure that she would share his sentiments.

“Mary, at heart, is a dreadful little aristocrat,” he said to himself, as he lingered in his dressing-room to avoid her questions; not knowing that Lady Mary’s was the rash hand which had set this train of inflammables first alight.

Next morning—ah ! next morning, there was the rub !—Edgar would have to face Lady Augusta, and Gussy her mother, and Mr. Tottenham, who felt himself by this time an accomplice, his justly indignant wife ; besides that the latter unfortunate gentleman had also to go to the shop, and face the resignations offered to himself, and deadly feuds raised amongst his “ assistants,” by the preliminaries of last night. In the meantime, all the culprits tried hard not to think of the terrible moment that awaited them, and I think the lovers succeeded. Lovers have the best of it in such emergencies ; the enchanted ground of recollection and imagination to which they can return being more utterly severed from the common world than any other refuge.

The members of the party who remained longest up were Lady Augusta and Ada, who sat over the fire in the mother’s bedroom, and discussed everything with a generally satisfied and cheerful tone in their communings.

“Gussy came home with Uncle Tottenham in his brougham,” said Ada. “She has gone to bed. She was out in her district a long time this morning, and I think she is very tired to-night.”

“Oh, her district!” cried Lady Augusta. “I like girls to think of the poor, my dear—you know I do—I never oppose anything in reason; but why Gussy should work like a slave, spoiling her hands and complexion, and exposing herself in all weathers for the sake of her district! And it is not as if she had no opportunities. I wish *you* would speak to her, Ada. She *ought* to marry, if it were only for the sake of the boys; and why she is so obstinate, I cannot conceive.”

“Mamma, don’t say so—you know well enough why,” said Ada quietly. “I don’t say you should give in to her; but at least you know.”

“Well, I must say I think my daughters have been hard upon me,” said Lady Augusta, with a sigh—“even you, my darling—though I can’t find it in my heart to blame

you. But, to change the subject, did you notice, Ada, how well Harry was looking? Dear fellow! he has got over his little troubles with your father. Tottenham's has done him good; he always got on well with Mary and your odd, good uncle. Harry is so good-hearted and so simple-minded, he can get on with anybody; and I quite feel that I had a good inspiration," said Lady Augusta, with a significant nod of her head, "when I sent him there. I am sure it has been for everybody's good."

"In what way, mamma?" said Ada, who was not at all so confident in Harry's powers.

"Well, dear, he has been on the spot," said Lady Augusta; "he has exercised an excellent influence. When poor Edgar, poor dear fellow, came up to me to-night, I could not think what to do for the best, for I expected Gussy to appear any moment; and even Mary and Beatrice, had they seen him, would have made an unnecessary fuss. But he took the hint at my first glance. I

can only believe it was dear Harry's doing, showing him the utter hopelessness—Poor fellow!" said Lady Augusta, putting her handkerchief to her eyes. "Oh! my dear, how inscrutable are the ways of Providence! Had things been ordered otherwise, what a comfort he might have been to us—what a help!"

"When you like him so well yourself, mamma," said gentle Ada, "you should understand poor Gussy's feelings, who was always encouraged to think of him—till the change came."

"That is just what I say, dear," said Lady Augusta; "if things had been ordered otherwise! We can't change the arrangements of Providence, however much we may regret them. But at least it is a great comfort about dear Harry. How well he was looking!—and how kind and affectionate! I almost felt as if he were a boy again, just come from school, and so glad to see his people. It was by far the greatest pleasure I had to-night."

And so this unsuspecting woman went to bed. She had a good night, for she was not afraid of the morrow, dismal as were the tidings it was fated to bring to her maternal ear.

CHAPTER V.

BERKELEY SQUARE.

AT eleven o'clock next morning, Edgar, with a beating heart, knocked at the door in Berkeley Square. The footman, who was an old servant, and doubtless remembered all about him, let him in with a certain hesitation—so evident that Edgar reassured him by saying, "I am expected," which was all he could manage to get out with his dry lips. Heaven send him better utterance when he gets to the moment of his trial! I leave the reader to imagine the effect produced when the door of the morning room, in which Lady Augusta was

seated with her daughters, was suddenly opened, and Edgar, looking very pale, and terribly serious, walked into the room.

They were all there. The table was covered with patterns for Mary's trousseau, and she herself was examining a heap of shawls, with Ada, at the window. Gussy, expectant, and changing colour so often that her agitation had already been remarked upon several times this morning, had kept close to her mother. Beatrice was practising a piece of music at the little piano in the corner, which was the girls' favourite refuge for their musical studies. They all stopped in their various occupations, and turned round when he came in. Lady Augusta sprang to her feet, and put out one hand in awe and horror, to hold him at arm's length. Her first look was for him, her second for Gussy, to whom she said, "Go—instantly!" as distinctly as eyes could speak; but, for once in her life, Gussy would not understand her mother's eyes. And, what was worst of all, the two young ones, Mary and Beatrice,

when they caught sight of Edgar, uttered each a cry of delight, and rushed upon him with eager hands outstretched.

“Oh! you have come home for It!—say you have come home for It!” cried Mary, to whom her approaching wedding was the one event which shadowed earth and heaven.

“Girls!” cried Lady Augusta, severely, “do not lay hold upon Mr. Earnshaw in that rude way. Go upstairs, all of you. Mr. Earnshaw’s business, no doubt, is with me.”

“Oh! mamma, mayn’t I talk to him for a moment?” cried Mary, aggrieved, and unwilling, in the fulness of her privileges, to acknowledge herself still under subjection.

But Lady Augusta’s eyes spoke very decisively this time, and Ada set the example by hastening away. Even Ada, however, could not resist the impulse of putting her hand in Edgar’s as she passed him. She divined everything in a moment. She said “God bless you!” softly, so that no one could hear

it but himself. Only Gussy did not move.

“I must stay, mamma,” she said, in tones so vehement that even Lady Augusta was awed by them. “I will never disobey you again, but I must stay!”

And then Edgar was left alone, facing the offended lady. Gussy had stolen behind her, whence she could throw a glance of sympathy to her betrothed, undisturbed by her mother. Lady Augusta did not ask him to sit down. She seated herself in a stately manner, like a queen receiving a rebel.

“Mr. Earnshaw,” she said, solemnly, “after all that has passed between us, and all you have promised—I must believe that there is some very grave reason for your unexpected visit to-day.”

What a different reception it was from that she had given him, when—coming, as she supposed, on the same errand which really brought him now—he had to tell her of his loss of everything! Then the whole house had been pleasantly excited over the impending proposal; and Gussy had been

kissed and petted by all her sisters, as the heroine of the drama; and Lady Augusta's motherly heart had swelled with gratitude to God that she had secured for her daughter not only a good match, but a good man. It was difficult for Edgar, at least, to shut out all recollection of the one scene in the other. He answered with less humility than he had shown before, and with a dignity which impressed her, in spite of herself,

“Yes, there is a very grave reason for it,” he said—“the gravest reason—without which I should not have intruded upon you. I made you a voluntary promise some time since, seeing your dismay at my re-appearance, that I would not interfere with any of your plans, or put myself in your way.”

“Yes,” said Lady Augusta, in all the horror of suspense. Gussy, behind, whispered, “You have not!—you have not!” till her mother turned and looked at her, when she sank upon the nearest seat, and covered her face with her hands.

“I might say that I have not, according

to the mere letter of my word," said Edgar ; "but I will not stand by that. Lady Augusta, I have come to tell you that I have broken my promise. I find I had no right to make it. I answered for myself, but not for another dearer than myself. The pledge was given in ignorance, and foolishly. I have broken it, and I have come to ask you to forgive me."

"You have broken your word? Mr. Earnshaw, I was not aware that gentlemen ever did so. I do not believe you are capable of doing so," she cried, in great agitation. "Gussy, go upstairs, you have nothing to do with this discussion—you were not a party to the bargain. I cannot—cannot allow myself to be treated in this way! Mr. Earnshaw, think what you are saying! You cannot go back from your word!"

"Forgive me," he said, "I have done it. Had I known all, I would not have given the promise; I told Lady Mary Tottenham so; my pledge was for myself, to restrain

my own feelings. From the moment that it was betrayed to me that she too had feelings to restrain, my very principle of action, my rule of honour, was changed. It was no longer my duty to deny myself to obey you. My first duty was to her, Lady Augusta—if in that I disappoint you, if I grieve you——”

“You do more than disappoint me—you *horrify* me!” cried Lady Augusta. “You make me think that nothing is to be relied upon—no man’s word to be trusted. No, no, we must have no more of this,” she said, with vehemence. “Forget what you have said, Mr. Earnshaw, and I will try to forget it. Go to your room, Gussy—this is no scene for you.”

Edgar stood before his judge motionless, saying no more. I think he felt now how completely the tables were turned, and what an almost cruel advantage he had over her. His part was that of fact and reality, which no one could conjure back into nothingness; and hers that of opposition, disapproval, resistance to the inevitable. He was the

rock, and she the vexed and vexing waves, dashing against it, unable to overthrow it. In their last great encounter these positions had been reversed, and it was she who had command of the situation. Now, howsoever parental authority might resist, or the world oppose, the two lovers knew very well, being persons in their full senses, and of full age, that they had but to persevere, and their point would be gained.

Lady Augusta felt it too—it was this which had made her so deeply alarmed from the first, so anxious to keep Edgar at arm's length. The moment she caught sight of him on this particular morning, she felt that all was over. But that certainty unfortunately does not quench the feelings of opposition, though it may take all hope of eventual success from them. All that this secret conviction of the uselessness of resistance did for Lady Augusta was to make her more hot, more desperate, more *acharnée* than she had ever been. She grew angry at the silence of her opponent—his very pa-

tience seemed a renewed wrong, a contemptuous evidence of conscious power.

“You do not say anything,” she cried. “You allow me to speak without an answer. What do you mean me to understand by this?—that you defy me? I have treated you as a friend all along. I thought you were good, and honourable, and true. I have always stood up for you—treated you almost like a son! And is this to be the end of it? You defy me! You teach my own child to resist my will! You do not even keep up the farce of respecting my opinion—now that she has gone over to your side!”

Here poor Lady Augusta got up from her chair, flushed and trembling, with the tears coming to her eyes, and an angry despair warring against very different feelings in her mind. She rose up, not looking at either of the culprits, and leant her arm on the mantelpiece, and gazed unawares at her own excited, troubled countenance in the glass. Yes, they had left her out of their calcula-

tions; she who had always (she knew) been so good to them! It no longer seemed worth while to send Gussy away, to treat her as if she were innocent of the complot. She had gone over to the other side. Lady Augusta felt herself deserted, slighted, injured, with the two against her—and determined, doubly determined, never to yield.

“Mamma,” said Gussy, softly, “do not be angry with Edgar. Don’t you know, as well as I, that I have always been on his side?”

“Don’t venture to say a word to me, Gussy,” said Lady Augusta. “I will not endure it from you!”

“Mamma, I must speak. It was you who turned my thoughts to him first. Was it likely that *I* should forget him because he was in trouble? Why, *you* did not! You yourself were fond of him all along, and trusted him so that you took his pledge to give up his own will to yours. But I never gave any pledge,” said Gussy, folding her hands. “You never asked me what I thought, or I should have told you. I have

been waiting for Edgar. He has not dared to come to me since he came back to England, because of his promise to you; and I have not dared to go to him, because—simply because I was a woman. But when we met, mamma—when we *met*, I say—not his seeking or my seeking—by accident, as you call it——”

“Oh! accident!” cried Lady Augusta, with a sneer, which sat very strangely upon her kind face. “Accident! One knows how such accidents come to pass!”

“If you doubt our truth,” cried Gussy, in a little outburst, “of course there is no more to say.”

“I beg your pardon,” said the mother, faintly. She had put herself in the wrong. The sneer, the first and only sneer of which poor Lady Augusta had known herself to be guilty, turned to a weapon against her. Compunction and shame filled up the last drop of the conflicting emotions that possessed her. “It is easy for you both to speak,” she said, “very easy; to you it is

nothing but a matter of feeling. You never ask yourself how it is to be done. You never think of the thousand difficulties with the world, with your father, with circumstances. What have I taken the trouble to struggle for? You yourself do me justice, Gussy! Not because I would not have preferred Edgar—oh! don't come near me!" she cried, holding out her hand to keep him back; as he approached a step at the softening sound of his name—"don't work upon my feelings! It is cruel; it is taking a mean advantage. Not because I did not prefer him—but because life is not a dream, as you think it, not a romance, nor a poem. What am I to do?" cried Lady Augusta, clasping her hands, and raising them with unconscious, most natural theatricalness. "What am I to do? How am I to face your father, your brothers, the world?"

I do not know what the two listeners could have done, after the climax of this speech, but to put themselves at her feet, with that instinct of nature in extreme cir-

cumstances which the theatre has seized for its own, and given a partially absurd colour to; but they were saved from thus committing themselves by the sudden and precipitate entrance of Lady Mary, who flung the door open, and suddenly rushed among them without warning or preparation.

“I come to warn you,” she cried, “Augusta!” Then stopped short, seeing at a glance the state of affairs.

They all stood gazing at each other for a moment, the others not divining what this interruption might mean, and feeling instinctively driven back upon conventional self-restraint and propriety, by the entrance of the new-comer. Lady Augusta unclasped her hands, and stole back guiltily to her chair. Edgar recovered his wits, and placed one for Lady Mary. Gussy dropped upon the sofa behind her mother, and cast a secret glance of triumph at him from eyes still wet with tears. He alone remained standing, a culprit still on his trial, who felt the number of his judges increased, without knowing

whether his cause would take a favourable or unfavourable aspect in the eyes of the new occupant of the judicial bench.

“What have you all been doing?” said Lady Mary—“you look as much confused and scared by my appearance as if I had disturbed you in the midst of some wrongdoing or other. Am I to divine what has happened? It is what I was coming to warn you against; I was going to say that I could no longer answer for Mr. Earnshaw—”

“I have spoken for myself,” said Edgar. “Lady Augusta knows that all my ideas and my duties have changed. I do not think I need stay longer. I should prefer to write to Mr. Thornleigh at once, unless Lady Augusta objects; but I can take no final negative now from anyone but Gussy herself.”

“And that he shall never have!” cried Gussy, with a ring of premature triumph in her voice. Her mother turned round upon her again with a glance of fire.

“Is that the tone you have learned

among the Sisters?" said Lady Augusta, severely. "Yes, go, Mr. Earnshaw, go—we have had enough of this."

Edgar was perhaps as much shaken as any of them by all he had gone through. He went up to Lady Augusta, and took her half-unwilling hand and kissed it.

"Do you remember," he said, "dear Lady Augusta, when you cried over me in my ruin, and kissed me like my mother? *I* cannot forget it, if I should live a hundred years. You have never abandoned me, though you feared me. Say one kind word to me before I go."

Lady Augusta tried hard not to look at the supplicant. She turned her head away, she gulped down a something in her throat which almost overcame her. The tears rushed to her eyes.

"Don't speak to me!" she cried—"don't speak to me! Shall I not be a sufferer too? God bless you, Edgar! I have always felt like your mother. Go away!—go away!—don't speak to me any more!"

Edgar had the sense to obey her without another look or word. He did not even pause to glance at Gussy (at which she was much aggrieved), but left the room at once. And then Gussy crept to her mother's side, and knelt down there, clinging with her arms about the vanquished Rhadamantha; and the three women kissed each other, and cried together, not quite sure whether it was for sorrow or joy.

"You are in love with him yourself, Augusta!" cried Lady Mary, laughing and crying together before this outburst was over.

"And so I am," said Gussy's mother, drying her kind eyes.

Edgar, as he rushed out, saw heads peeping over the staircase, of which he took no notice, though one of them was no less than the curled and shining head of the future Lady Granton, destined Marchioness (one day or other) of Hauteville. He escaped from these anxious spies, and rushed through the hall, feeling himself safest out of the house.

But on the threshold he met Harry Thornleigh, who looked at him from head to foot with an insolent surprise which made Edgar's blood boil.

"You here!" said Harry, with unmistakably disagreeable intention; then all at once his tone changed—Edgar could not imagine why—and he held out his hand in greeting. "Missed you at Tottenham's," said Harry; "they all want you. That little brute Phil is getting unendurable. I wish you'd whop him when you go back."

"I shall not be back for some days," said Edgar shortly. "I have business——"

"Here?" asked Harry, with well-simulated surprise. "If you'll let me give you a little advice, Earnshaw, and won't take it amiss—I can't help saying you'll get no good here."

"Thank you," said Edgar, feeling a glow of offence mount to his face. "I suppose every man is the best judge in his own case; but, in the meantime, I am leaving town—for a day or two."

“*Au revoir*, then, at Tottenham’s,” said Harry, with a nod, half-hostile, half-friendly, and marched into his own house, or what would one day be his own house, with the air of a master. Edgar left it with a curious sense of the discouragement meant to be conveyed to him, which was half-whimsical, half-painful. Harry meant nothing less than to make him feel that his presence was undesired and inopportune, without, however, making any breach with him; he had his own reasons for keeping up a certain degree of friendship with Edgar, but he had no desire that it should go any further than he thought proper and suitable. As for his sister’s feelings in the matter, Harry ignored and scouted them with perfect calm and self-possession. If she went and entered a Sisterhood, as they had all feared at one time, why, she would make a fool of herself, and there would be an end of it! “I shouldn’t interfere,” Harry had said. “It would be silly; but there would be an end of her—no more responsibility, and that

sort of thing. Let her, if she likes, so long as you're sure she'll stay." But to allow her to make "a low marriage" was an entirely different matter. Therefore he set Edgar down, according to his own consciousness, even though he was quite disinclined to quarrel with Edgar. He was troubled by no meltings of heart, such as disturbed the repose of his mother. He liked the man well enough, but what had that to do with it? It was necessary that Gussy should marry well if she married at all—not so much for herself as for the future interests of the house of Thornleigh. Harry felt that to have a set of little beggars calling him "uncle," in the future ages, and sheltering themselves under the shadow of Thornleigh, was a thing totally out of the question. The heir indeed might choose for himself, having it in his power to bestow honour, as in the case of King Cophetua. But probably even King Cophetua would have deeply disapproved, and indeed interdicted beggar-maids for his brother, how

much more beggar-men for his sisters—or any connection which could detract from the importance of the future head of the house.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUGGESTION.

HAVING found his family in considerable agitation, the cause of which they did not disclose to him, but from which he formed, by his unaided genius, the agreeable conclusion that Edgar had been definitely sent off, probably after some presumptuous offer, which Gussy at last was wise enough to see the folly of—"I see you've sent that fellow off for good," he said to his sister; "and I'm glad of it."

"Oh! yes, for good," said Gussy, with a flash in her eyes, which he, not very brilliant in his perceptions, took for indignation at Edgar's presumption.

“He is a cheeky beggar,” said unconscious Harry; “a setting down will do him good.”

But though his heart was full of his own affairs, he thought it best, on the whole, to defer the confidence with which he meant to honour Lady Augusta, to a more convenient season. Harry was not particularly bright, and he felt his own concerns to be so infinitely more important than anything concerning “the girls,” that the two things could not be put in comparison; but yet the immediate precedent of the sending away of Gussy’s lover was perhaps not quite the best that could be wished for the favourable hearing of Harry’s love. Besides, Lady Augusta was not so amiable that day as she often was. She was surrounded by a flutter of girls, putting questions, teasing her for replies, which she seemed very little disposed to give; and Harry had somewhat fallen in his mother’s opinion, since it had been proved that to have him “on the spot” had really been quite inefficacious for her purpose. Her confidence in him had been

so unjustifiably great, though Harry was totally ignorant of it, that her unexpected disapproval was in proportion now.

“It was not Harry’s fault,” Ada had ventured to say. “How could he guide events that happened in London when he was at Tottenham’s?”

“He ought to have paid more attention,” was all that Lady Augusta said. And unconsciously she turned a cold shoulder to Harry, rather glad, on the whole, that there was somebody, rightly or wrongly, to blame.

So Harry returned to Tottenham’s with his aunt, hurriedly proffering a visit a few days after. Nobody perceived the suppressed excitement with which he made this offer, for the house was too full of the stir of one storm, scarcely blown over, to think of another. He went back, accordingly, into the country stillness, and spent another lingering twilight hour with Margaret. How different the atmosphere seemed to be in which she was! It was another world to Harry; he seemed to himself a better man.

How kind he felt towards the little girl!— he who would have liked to kick Phil, and thought the Tottenham children so ridiculously out of place, brought to the front, as they always were. When little Sibby was “brought to the front,” her mother seemed but to gain a grace the more, and in the cottage Harry was a better man. He took down with him the loveliest bouquet of flowers that could be got in Covent Garden, and a few plants in pots, the choicest of their kind, and quite unlikely, had he known it, to suit the atmosphere of the poky little cottage parlour.

Mr. Franks had begun to move out of the doctor’s house, and very soon the new family would be able to make their entrance. Margaret and her brother were going to town to get some furniture, and Harry volunteered to give them the benefit of his experience, and join their party.

“But we want cheap things,” Margaret said, true to her principle of making no false pretences that could be dispensed with.

This did not in the least affect Harry; he would have stood by and listened to her cheapening a pot or kettle with a conviction that it was the very best thing to do. There are other kinds of love, and some which do not so heartily accept as perfect all that is done by their object; and there are different stages of love, in not all of which, perhaps, is this beautiful satisfaction apparent; but at present Harry could see nothing wrong in the object of his adoration. Whatever she did was right, graceful, beautiful—the wisest and the best. I do not suppose it is in the nature of things that this lovely and delightful state of sentiment could last—but for the moment so it was. And thus, while poor Lady Augusta passed her days peacefully enough—half happy, half wretched, now allowing herself to listen to Gussy's anticipations, now asking bitterly how on earth they expected to exist—*this* was preparing for her which was to turn even the glory of Mary's approaching wedding into misery, and overwhelm the whole house of Thornleigh with dismay. So blind

is human nature, that Lady Augusta had not the slightest apprehension about Harry. He, at least, was out of harm's way—so long as the poor boy could find anything to amuse him in the country—she said to herself, with a sigh of satisfaction and relief.

At the other Tottenham's, things were settling down after the Entertainment, and happily the result had been so gratifying and successful that all the feuds and searchings of hearts had calmed down. The supper had been "beautiful," the guests gracious, the enjoyment almost perfect. Thereafter, to his dying day, Mr. Robinson was able to quote what Her Grace the Duchess of Middlemarch had said to him on the subject of his daughter's performance, and the Duchess's joke became a kind of capital for the establishment, always ready to be drawn upon. No other establishment had before offered a subject of witty remark (though Her Grace, good soul, was totally unaware of having been witty) to a Duchess—no other young ladies and gentlemen at-

tached to a house of business had ever hobbled and nobbed with the great people in society. The individuals who had sent in resignations were too glad to be allowed to forget them, and Mr. Tottenham was in the highest feather, and felt his scheme to have prospered beyond his highest hopes.

“There is nothing so humanizing as social intercourse,” he said. “I don’t say my people are any great things, and we all know that society, as represented by Her Grace of Middlemarch, is not overwhelmingly witty or agreeable—eh, Earnshaw? But somehow, in the clash of the two extremes, something is struck out—a spark that you could not have otherwise—a really improving influence. I have always thought so; and, thank heaven, I have lived to carry out my theory.”

“At the cost of very hard work, and much annoyance,” said Edgar.

“Oh! nothing—nothing, Earnshaw—mere bagatelles. I was tired, and had lost my temper—very wrong, but I suppose it will

happen sometimes ; and not being perfect myself, how am I to expect my people to be perfect?" said the philanthropist. "Never mind these little matters. The pother has blown over, and the good remains. By the way, Miss Lockwood is asking for you, Earnshaw—have you cleared up that business of hers? She's in a bad way, poor creature! She would expose herself with bare arms and shoulders, till I sent her an opera-cloak, at a great sacrifice, from Robinson's department, to cover her up ; and she's caught more cold. Go and see her, there's a good fellow ; she's always asking for you."

Miss Lockwood was in the ladies' sitting-room, where Edgar had seen her before, wrapped in the warm red opera-cloak which Mr. Tottenham had sent her, and seated by the fire. Her cheeks were more hollow than ever, her eyes full of feverish brightness.

"Look here," she said, when Edgar entered, "I don't want you any longer. You've got it in your head I'm in a con-

sumption, and you are keeping my papers back, thinking I'm going to die. I ain't going to die—no such intention—and I'll trouble you either to go on directly and get me my rights, or give me back all my papers, and I'll look after them myself."

"You are very welcome to your papers," said Edgar. "I have written to Mr. Arden, to ask him to see me, but that is not on your account. I will give you, if you please, everything back."

This did not content the impatient sufferer.

"Oh! I don't want them back," she said, pettishly—"I want you to push on—to push on! I'm tired of this life—I should like to try what a change would do. If he does not choose to take me home, he might take me to Italy, or somewhere out of these east winds. I've got copies all ready directed to send to his lawyers, in case you should play me false, or delay. I'm not going to die, don't you think it; but now I've made up my mind to it, I'll have my rights!"

“I hope you will take care of yourself in the meantime,” said Edgar, compassionately, looking at her with a somewhat melancholy face.

“Oh! get along with your doleful looks,” said Miss Lockwood, “trying to frighten me, like all the rest. I want a change—that’s what I want—change of air and scene. I want to go to Italy or somewhere. Push on—push on, and get it settled. I don’t want your sympathy—*that’s* what I want of you.”

Edgar heard her cough echo after him as he went along the long narrow passage, where he had met Gussy, back to Mr. Tottenham’s room. His patron called him from within as he was passing by.

“Earnshaw!” he cried, dropping his voice low, “I have not asked you yet—how did you get on, poor fellow, up at the Square?”

“I don’t quite know,” said Edgar—“better than I hoped; but I must see Mr. Thornleigh, or write to him. Which will be the best?”

“Look here,” said Mr. Tottenham, “I’ll do that for you. I know Thornleigh; he’s not a bad fellow at bottom, except when he’s worried. He sees when a thing’s no use. I daresay he’d make a stand, if there was any hope; but as you’re determined, and Gussy’s determined——”

“We are,” said Edgar. “Don’t think I don’t grudge her as much as anyone can to poverty and namelessness; but since it is her choice——”

“So did Mary,” said Mr. Tottenham, following out his own thoughts, with a comprehensible disregard of grammar. “They stood out as long as they could, but they had to give in at last; and so must everybody give in at last, if only you hold to it. That’s the secret—stick to it!—nothing can stand against that.” He wrung Edgar’s hand, and patted him on the back, by way of encouragement. “But don’t tell anyone I said so,” he added, nodding, with a humorous gleam out of his grey eyes.

Edgar found more letters awaiting him at

his club—letters of the same kind as yesterday's, which he read with again a totally changed sentiment. Clare had gone into the background, Gussy had come uppermost. He read them eagerly, with his mind on the stretch to see what might be made of them. Everybody was kind. "Tell us what you can do—how we can help you," they said. After all, it occurred to him now, in the practical turn his mind had taken, "What could he do?" The answer was ready—"Anything." But then this was a very vague answer, he suddenly felt; and to identify any one thing or other that he could do, was difficult. He was turning over the question deeply in his mind, when a letter, with Lord Newmarch's big official seal, caught his eye. He opened it hurriedly, hoping to find perhaps a rapid solution of his difficulty there. It ran thus:—

"MY DEAR EARNSHAW,

"I am sorry to be obliged to inform you that, after keeping us in a state

of uncertainty for about a year, Runtherout has suddenly announced to me that he feels quite well again, and means to resume work at once, and withdraw his resignation. He attributes this fortunate change in his circumstances to Parr's Life Pills, or something equally venerable. I am extremely sorry for this *contretemps*, which at once defeats my desire of serving you, and deprives the department of the interesting information which I am sure your knowledge of foreign countries would have enabled you to transmit to us. The Queen's Messengers seem indeed to be in a preternaturally healthy condition, and hold out few hopes of any vacancy. Accept my sincere regrets for this disappointment, and if you can think of anything else I can do to assist you, command my services.

“ Believe me, dear Earnshaw,

“ Very truly yours,

“ NEWMARCH.

“ P.S.—What would you say to a Consulship?”

Edgar read this letter with a great and sharp pang of disappointment. An hour before, had anyone asked him, he would have said he had no faith whatever in Lord Newmarch; yet now he felt, by the keenness of his mortification, that he had expected a great deal more than he had ever owned even to himself. He flung the letter down on the table beside him, and covered his face with his hands. It seemed to him that he had lost one of the primary supports on which, without knowing, he had been building of late. Now was there nothing before Gussy's betrothed—he who had ventured to entangle her fate with his, and to ask of parents and friends to bless the bargain—but a tutorship in a great house, and kind Mr. Tottenham's favour, who was no great man, nor had any power, nor anything but mere money. He could not marry Gussy upon Mr. Tottenham's money, or take her to another man's house, to be a cherished and petted dependent, as they had made him. I don't think

it was till next day, when again the wheel had gone momentarily round, and he had set out on Clare's business, leaving Gussy behind him, that he observed the pregnant and pithy postscript, which threw a certain gleam of light upon Lord Newmarch's letter. "How should you like a Consulship?" Edgar had no great notion what a Consulship was. What kind of knowledge or duties was required for the humblest representative of Her Majesty, he knew almost as little as if this functionary had been habitually sent to the moon. "Should I like a Consulship?" he said to himself, as the cold, yet cheerful sunshine of early Spring streamed over the bare fields and hedgerows which swept past the windows of the railway carriage in which he sat. A vague exhilaration sprang up in his mind—perhaps from that thought, perhaps from the sunshine only, which always had a certain enlivening effect upon this fanciful young man. Perhaps, after all, though he did not at first know what it was, this was the thing that he could do,

and which all his friends were pledged to get for him. And once again he forgot all about his present errand, and amused himself, as he rushed along, by attempts to recollect what the Consul was like at various places he knew where such a functionary existed, and what he did, and how he lived. The only definite recollection in his mind was of an office carefully shut up during the heat of the day, with cool, green *persiane* all closed, a soft current of air rippling over a marble floor, and no one visible but a dreamy Italian clerk, to tell when H. B. M.'s official representative would be visible. "I could do that much," Edgar said to himself, with a smile of returning happiness; but what the Consul did when he was visible, was what he did not know. No doubt he would have to sing exceedingly small when there was an ambassador within reach, or even the merest butterfly of an *attaché*, but apart from such gorgeous personages, the Consul, Edgar knew, had a certain importance.

This inquiry filled his mind with anima-

tion during all the long, familiar journey towards Arden, which he had feared would be full of painful recollections. He was almost ashamed of himself, when he stopped at the next station before Arden, to find that not a single recollection had visited him. Hope and imagination had carried the day over everything else, and the problematical Consul behind his green *persiane* had routed even Clare.

The letter, however which had brought him here had been of a sufficiently disagreeable kind to make more impression upon him. Arthur Arden had never pretended to any loftiness of feeling, or even civility towards his predecessor, and Edgar's note had called forth the following response:—

“SIR,—I don't know by what claim you, an entire stranger to my family, take it upon you to thrust yourself into my affairs. I have had occasion to resent this interference before, and I am certainly still less inclined to support it now. I know nothing of any

person named Lockwood, who can be of the slightest importance to me. Nevertheless, as you have taken the liberty to mix yourself up with some renewed annoyance, I request you will meet me on Friday, at the 'Arden Arms,' at Whitmarsh, where I have some business—to let me know at once what your principal means—I might easily add to answer to me what you have to do with it, or with me, or my concerns.

“ A. ARDEN.

“ P.S.—If you do not appear, I will take it as a sign that you have thought better of it, and that the person you choose to represent has come to her senses.”

Edgar had been able to forget this letter, and the interview to which it conducted him, thinking of his imaginary Consul! I think the reader will agree with me that his mind must have been in a very peculiar condition. He kept his great-coat buttoned closely up, and his hat down over his eyes, as he got out at the little station. He was not known

at Whitmarsh, as he had been known at Arden, but still there was a chance that some one might recognize him. The agreeable thoughts connected with the Consul, fortunately, had left him perfectly cool, and when he got out in Clare's county, on her very land, the feeling of the past began to regain dominion over him. If he should meet Clare, what would she say to him? Would she know him? would she recognize him as her brother, or hold him at arm's length as a stranger? And what would she think, he wondered, with the strangest, giddy whirling round of brain and mind, if she knew that the dream of three years ago was, after all, to come true; that, though Arden was not his, Gussy was his; and that, though she no longer acknowledged him as her brother, Gussy had chosen him for her husband. It was the only question there was any doubt about at one time. Now it was the only thing that was true.

With this bewildering consciousness of the

revolutions of time, yet the steadfastness of some things which were above time, Edgar walked into the little old-fashioned country inn, scarcely venturing to take off his hat for fear of recognition, and was shown into the best parlour, where Mr. Arden awaited him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ARDENS.

ARTHUR ARDEN, Esq., of Arden, was a different man from the needy cousin of the Squire, the hanger-on of society, the fine gentleman out at elbows, whose position had bewildered yet touched the supposed legal proprietor of the estates, and head of the family, during Edgar's brief reign. A poor man knocking about the world, when he has once lost his reputation, has no particular object to stimulate him to the effort necessary for regaining it. But when a man who sins by will, and not by weakness of nature, gains a position in which virtue is necessary and becoming, and

where vice involves a certain loss of prestige, nothing is easier than moral reformation. Arthur Arden had been a strictly moral man for all these years; he had given up all vagabond vices, the peccadilloes of the Bohemian. He was *rangé* in every sense of the word. A more decorous, stately house was not in the county; a man more correct in all his duties never set an example to a parish. I do not know that the essential gain was very great. He took his vices in another way; he was hard as the nether millstone to all who came in his way, grasping and tyrannical. He did nothing that was not exacted from him, either by law, or public opinion, or personal vanity; on every other side he was in panoply of steel against all prayers, all intercessions, all complaints.

Mrs. Arden made him an excellent wife. She was as proud as he was, and held her head very high in the county. The Countess of Marchmont, Lord Newmarch's mother, was nothing in comparison with Mrs. Arden of Arden. But people said she was too

cold in her manners ever to be popular. When her husband stood for the county, and she had to show the ordinary gracious face to all the farmers and farm-men, Clare's manners lost more votes than her beauty and her family might have gained. She could not be cordial to save her life. But then the Ardens were always cold and proud—it was the characteristic of the family—except the last poor fellow, who was everybody's friend, and turned out to be no Arden at all, as anyone might have seen with half an eye.

Mr. Arden's horse and his groom were waiting in the stableyard of the "Arden Arms." He himself, looking more gloomy than usual, had gone upstairs to the best room, to meet the stranger, of whom all the "Arden Arms" people felt vaguely that they had seen him before. The landlady, passing the door, heard their voices raised high now and then, as if there was some quarrel between them; but she was too busy to listen, even had her curiosity carried her

so far. When Mrs. Arden, driving past, stopped in front of the inn, to ask for some poor pensioner in the village, the good woman rushed out, garrulous and eager.

“The Squire is here, ma’am, with a gentleman. I heard him say as his horse was dead beat, and as he’d have to take the train home. What a good thing as you have come this way! Please now, as they’ve done their talk, will your ladyship step upstairs?”

“If Mr. Arden is occupied with some one on business—” said Clare, hesitating; but then it suddenly occurred to her that, as there had been a little domestic jar that morning, it might be well to show herself friendly, and offer to drive her husband home. “You are sure he is not busy?” she said, doubtfully, and went upstairs with somewhat hesitating steps. It was a strange thing for Mrs Arden to do, but something impelled her unconscious feet, something which the ancients would have called fate, an impulse she could not resist. She knocked softly at the door, but received no reply; and there

was no sound of voices within to make her pause. The "business," whatever it was, must surely be over. Clare opened the door, not without a thrill at her heart, which she could scarcely explain to herself, for she knew of nothing to make this moment or this incident specially important. Her husband sat, with his back to her, at the table, his head buried in his hands; near him, fronting the door, his face very serious, his eyes shining with indignant fire, stood Edgar. Edgar! The sight of him, so unexpected as it was, touched her heart with a quick, unusual movement of warmth and tenderness. She gave a sudden cry, and rushed into the room.

Arthur Arden raised his head from his hands at the sound of her voice—he raised himself up, and glanced at her, half-stupefied.

"What has brought you here?" he cried, hoarsely.

But Clare had no eyes for him; for the moment. She went up to her brother, who stood, scarcely advancing to meet her, with

no light of pleasure on his face at the sight of her. They had not met for three years.

“Edgar!” she said, with pleasure so sudden that she had not time to think whether it was right and becoming on the part of Mrs. Arden of Arden to express such a sentiment. But, before she had reached him, his pained and serious look, his want of all response to her warm exclamation, and the curious atmosphere of agitation in the room, impressed her in spite of herself. She stopped short, her tone changed, the revulsion of feeling which follows an overture repulsed, suddenly clouded over her face. “I see I am an intruder,” she said. “I did not mean to interfere with—business.” Then curiosity got the upper hand. She paused and looked at them—Edgar so determined and serious, her husband agitated, sullen—and as pale as if he had been dying. “But what business can there be between you two?” she asked, with a sharp tone of anxiety in her voice. The two men were like criminals before her. “What is it?—what is it?” she cried.

“Something has happened. What brings you two together must concern me.”

“Go home, Clare, go home,” said Arthur Arden, hoarsely. “We don’t want you here, to make things worse—go home.”

She looked at Edgar—he shook his head and turned his eyes from her. He had given her no welcome, no look even of the old affection. Clare’s blood was up.

“I have a right to know what has brought you together,” she said, drawing a chair to the table, and suddenly seating herself between them. “I will go home when you are ready to come with me, Arthur. What is it? for, whatever it is, I have a right to know.”

Edgar came to her side and took her hand, which she gave to him almost reluctantly, averting her face.

“Clare,” he said, almost in a whisper, “this is the only moment for all these years that I could not be happy to see you. Go home, for God’s sake, as he says——”

“I will not,” said Clare. “Some new

misfortune has occurred to bring you two together. Why should I go home, to be wretched, wondering what has happened? For my children's sake, I will know what it is."

Neither of them made her any answer. There were several papers lying on the table between them—one a bulky packet, directed in what Clare knew to be his solicitor's handwriting, to Arthur Arden. Miss Lockwood had played Edgar false, and, even while she urged him on, had already placed her papers in the lawyer's hands. Arden had thus known the full dangers of the exposure before him, when, with some vague hopes of a compromise, he had met Edgar, whom he insisted on considering Miss Lockwood's emissary. He had been bidding high for silence, for concealment, and had been compelled to stomach Edgar's indignant refusal, which for the moment he dared not resent, when Clare thus burst upon the scene. They were suddenly arrested by her appearance, stopped in mid-career.

“Is it any renewal of the past?—any new discovery? Edgar, you have found something out—you are, after all——”

He shook his head.

“Dear Clare, it is nothing about me. Let me come and see you after, and tell you about myself. This is business—mere business,” said Edgar, anxiously. “Nothing,” his voice faltered, “to interest you.”

“You tell lies badly,” she said; “and he says nothing. What does it mean? What are these papers?—always papers—more papers—everything that is cruel is in them. Must I look for myself?” she continued, her voice breaking, with an agitation which she could not explain. She laid her hand upon some which lay strewed open upon the table. She saw Edgar watch the clutch of her fingers with a shudder, and that her husband kept his eyes upon her with a strange, horrified watchfulness. He seemed paralyzed, unable to interfere till she had secured them, when he suddenly grasped her hand roughly, and cried, “Come,

give them up; there is nothing there for you!"

Clare was not dutiful or submissive by nature. At the best of times such an order would have irritated rather than subdued her.

"I will not," she repeated, freeing her hand from the clutch that made it crimson. Only one of the papers she had picked up remained, a scrap that looked of no importance. She rose and hurried to the window with it, holding it up to the light.

"She must have known it one day or other," said Edgar, speaking rather to himself than to either of his companions. It was the only sound that broke the silence. After an interval of two minutes or so, Clare came back, subdued, and rather pale.

"This is a marriage certificate, I suppose," she said. "Yours, Arthur! You were married, then, before? You might have told me. Why didn't you tell me? I should have had no right to be vexed if I had known before."

“Clare!” he stammered, looking at her in consternation.

“Yes, I can’t help being vexed,” she said, her lip quivering a little, “to find out all of a sudden that I am not the first. I think you should have told me, Arthur, not left me to find it out. But, after all, it is only a shock and a mortification, not a crime, that you should look so frightened,” she added, forcing a faint smile. “I am not a termagant, to make your life miserable on account of the past.” Here Clare paused, looked from one to the other, and resumed, with a more anxious voice: “What do you mean, both of you, by looking at me? Is there more behind? Ay, I see!” her lip quivered more and more, her face grew paler, she restrained herself with a desperate effort. “Tell me the worst,” she said, hurriedly. “There are other children, older than mine! My boy will not be the heir?”

“Clare! Clare!” cried Edgar, putting his arm round her, forgetting all that lay between them, tears starting to his eyes, “my dear, come away! Don’t ask any more

questions. If you ever looked upon me as your brother, or trusted me, come—come home, Clare.”

She shook off his grasp impatiently, and turned to her husband.

“Arthur, I demand the truth from you,” she cried. “Let no one interfere between us. Is there—an older boy than mine? Let me hear the worst! Is not my boy your heir?”

Arthur Arden, though he was not soft-hearted, uttered at this moment a lamentable groan.

“I declare before God I never thought of it!” he cried. “I never meant it for a marriage at all!”

“Marriage!” said Clare, looking at him like one bewildered. “Marriage!—I am not talking of marriage! Is there—a boy—another heir?”

And then again there was a terrible silence. The man to whom Clare looked so confidently as her husband, demanding explanations from him, shrank away from

her, cowering, with his face hidden by his hands.

“Will no one answer me?” she said. Her face was ghastly with suspense—every drop of blood seemed to have been drawn out of it. Her eyes went from her husband to Edgar, from Edgar back to her husband. “Tell me, yes or no—yes or no! I do not ask more!”

“Clare, it is not that! God forgive me! The woman is alive!” said Arthur Arden, with a groan that seemed to come from the bottom of his heart.

“The woman is alive!” she cried, impatiently. “I am not asking about any woman. What does he mean? The woman is alive!” She stopped short where she stood, holding fast by the back of her chair, making an effort to understand. “The woman! What woman? What does he mean?”

“His wife,” said Edgar, under his breath.

Clare turned upon him a furious, fiery glance. She did not understand him. She

began to see strange glimpses of light through the darkness, but she could not make out what it was.

“Will not you speak?” she cried piteously, putting her hand upon her husband’s shoulder. “Arthur, I forgive you for keeping it from me; but why do you hide your face?—why do you turn away? All you can do for me now is to tell me everything. My boy!—is he disinherited? Stop,” she cried wildly; “let me sit down. There is more—still more! Edgar, come here, close beside me, and tell me in plain words. The woman! What does he mean?”

“Clare,” cried Edgar, taking her cold hands into his, “don’t let it kill you, for your children’s sake. They have no one but you. The woman—whom he married then—is living now.”

“The woman—whom he married then!” she repeated, with lips white and stammering. “The woman!” Then stopped, and cried out suddenly—“My God! my God!”

“Clare, before the Lord I swear to you

I never meant it—I never thought of it!” exclaimed Arden, with a hoarse cry.

Clare took no notice; she sat with her hands clasped, staring blankly before her, murmuring, “My God! my God!” under her breath. Edgar held her hands, which were chill and trembled, but she did not see him. He stood watching her anxiously, fearing that she would faint or fall. But Clare was not the kind of woman who faints in a great emergency. She sat still, with the air of one stupefied; but the stupor was only a kind of external atmosphere surrounding her, within the dim circle of which—a feverish circle—thought sprang up, and began to whirl and twine. She thought of everything all in a moment—her children first, who were dishonoured; and Arden, her home, where she had been born; and her life, which would have to be wrenched up—plucked like a flower from the soil in which she had bloomed all her life. They could not get either sound or movement from her, as she sat there

motionless. They thought she was dulled in mind by the shock, or in body, and that it was a merciful circumstance to deaden the pain, and enable them to get her home.

While she sat thus, her husband raised himself in terror, and consulted Edgar with his eyes.

“Take her home—take her home,” he whispered behind Clare’s back—“take her home as long as she’s quiet; and till she’s got over the shock, I’ll keep myself out of the way.”

Clare heard him, even through the mist that surrounded her, but she could not make any reply. She seemed to have forgotten all about him—to have lost him in those mists. When Edgar put his hand on her shoulder, and called her gently, she stirred at last, and looked up at him.

“What is it?—what do you want with me?” she asked.

“I want you to come home,” he said softly. “Come home with me; I will take care of you; it is not a long drive.”

Poor Edgar! he was driven almost out of his wits, and did not know what to say. She shuddered with a convulsive trembling in all her limbs.

“Home!—yes, I must go and get my children,” she said. “Yes, you are quite right. I want some one to take care of me. I must go and get my children; they are so young—so very young! If I take them at once, they may never know——”

“Clare,” cried her husband, moaning, “you won’t do anything rash? You won’t expose our misery to all the world?”

She cast a quick glance at him—a glance full of dislike and horror.

“Take me away,” she said to Edgar—“take me away! I must go and fetch the children before it is dark.” This with a pause and a strange little laugh. “I speak as if they had been out at some baby-party,” she said. “Give me your arm. I don’t see quite clear.”

Arden watched them as they went out of the room—she tottering, as she leant on Edgar’s

arm, moving as he moved, like one blind. Arthur Arden was left behind with his papers, and with the thought of that other woman, who had claimed him for her husband. How clearly he remembered her—her impertinence, her rude carelessness, her manners, that were of the shop, and knew no better training! Their short life together came back to him like a picture. How soon his foolish passion for her (as he described it to himself) had blown over!—how weary of her he had grown! And now, what was to become of him? If Clare did anything desperate—if she went and blazoned it about, and removed the children, and took the whole matter in a passionate way, it would not be she alone who would be the sufferer. The woman is the sufferer, people say, in such cases; but this man groaned when he thought, if he could not do something to avert it, what ruin must overtake him. If Clare left his house, all honour, character, position would go with her; he could never hold up his head again. He would retain

everything he had before, yet he would lose everything—not only her and his children, of whom he was as fond as it was possible to be of any but himself, but every scrap of popular regard, society, the support of his fellows. All would go from him if this devil could not be silenced—if Clare could not be conciliated.

He rose to his feet, feeling sick and giddy, and from a corner, behind the shadow of the window-curtains, saw his wife—that is, the woman who was no longer his wife—drive away from the door. He was so wretched that he could not even relieve his mind by swearing at Edgar. He had not energy enough to think of Edgar, or any one else. Sometimes, indeed, with a sharp pang, there would gleam across him a sudden vision of his little boy, Clare's son, the beautiful child he had been so proud of, but who—even if Clare should make it up, and brave the shame and wrong—was ruined and disgraced, and no more the heir of Arden than any beggar on the road. Poor wretch! when

that thought came across him, I think all the wrongs that Arthur Arden had done in this world were avenged. He writhed under the sudden thought. He burst out in sudden crying and sobbing for one miserable moment. It was intolerable—he could not bear it; yet had to bear it, as we all have, whether our errors are of our own making or not.

And Clare drove back over the peaceful country, beginning to green over faintly under the first impulse of Spring—between lines of ploughed and grateful fields, and soft furrows of soft green corn. She did not even put her veil down, but with her white face set, and her eyes gazing blankly before her, went on with her own thoughts, saying nothing, seeing nothing. All her faculties had suddenly been concentrated within her—her mind was like a shaded lamp for the moment, throwing intense light upon one spot, and leaving all others in darkness. Edgar held her hand, to which she did not object, and watched

her with a pity which swelled his heart almost to bursting. He could take care of her tenderly in little things—lift her out of the carriage, give her the support of his arm, throw off the superabundant wraps that covered her. But this was all; into the inner world, where she was fighting her battle, neither he nor any man could enter—there she had to fight it out alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD HOME.

CLARE went to her own room, and shut herself up there. She permitted Edgar to go with her to the door, and there dismissed him, almost without a word. What Edgar's feelings were on entering the house where he had once been master, and with which so many early associations both of pleasure and pain were connected, I need not say; he was excited painfully and strangely by everything he saw. It seemed inconceivable to him that he should be there; and every step in the staircase, every turn in the corridor, reminded him of

something that had happened in that brief bit of the past in which his history was concentrated, which had lasted so short a time, yet had been of more effect than many years. The one thing, however, that kept him calm, and restrained his excitement, was the utter absorption of Clare in her own troubles, which were more absorbing than anything that had ever happened to him. She showed no consciousness that it was anything to him to enter this house, to lead her through its familiar passages. She ignored it so completely that Edgar, always impressionable, felt half ashamed of himself for recollecting, and tried to make believe, even to himself, that he ignored it too. He took her to the door of her room, his head throbbing with the sense that he was here again, where he had never thought to be; and then went downstairs, to wait in the room which had once been his own library, for Arthur Arden's return. Fortunately the old servants were all gone, and if any of the present household recognised Edgar at all,

their faces were unfamiliar to him. How strange to look round the room, and note with instinctive readiness all the changes which another man's taste had made! The old cabinet, in which the papers had been found which proved him no Arden, stood still against the wall, as it had always done. The books looked neglected in their shelves, as though no one ever touched them. It was more of a business room than it once was, less of a library, nothing at all of the domestic place, dear to man and woman alike, which it had been when Edgar never was so happy as with his sister beside him. How strange it was to be there—how dismal to be there on such an errand. In this room Clare had given him the papers which were his ruin; here she had entreated him to destroy them; here he had made the discovery public; and now to think the day should have come when he was here as a stranger, caring nothing for Arden, thinking only how to remove her of whom he seemed to have become the sole brother and protector,

from the house she had been born in!

He walked about and about the rooms, till the freshness of these associations was over, and he began to grow impatient of the stillness and suspense. He had told Clare that he would wait, and that she should find him there when he was wanted. He had begged her to do nothing that night—to wait and consider what was best; but he did not even know whether she was able to understand him, or if he spoke to deaf ears. Everything had happened so quickly that a sense of confusion was in Edgar's mind, confusion of the moral as well as the mental functions; for he was not at all sure whether the link of sympathetic horror and wonder between Arden and himself, as to what Clare would do, did not approach him closer, rather than separate him further from this man, who hated him, to begin with, and who was yet not his sister's husband. Somehow these two, who, since they first met, had been at opposite poles from each other, seemed to be drawn together by one

common misfortune, rather than placed in a doubly hostile position, as became the injurer and the defender of the injured.

When Arden came in some time after, this feeling obliterated on both sides the enmity which, under any other circumstances, must have blazed forth. Edgar, as he looked at the dull misery in Arthur's face, felt a strange pity for him soften his heart. This man, who had done so well for himself, who had got Arden, who had married Clare, who had received all the gifts that heaven could give, what a miserable failure he was after all, cast down from all that made his eminence tenable or good to hold. He was the cause of the most terrible misfortune to Clara and her children, and yet Edgar felt no impulse to take him by the throat, but was sorry for him in his downfall and misery. As for Arthur Arden, his old dislike seemed exorcised by the same spirit. In any other circumstances he would have resented Edgar's interference deeply—but now a gloomy indifference to everything

that could happen, except one thing, had got possession of him.

“What does she mean to do?” he said, throwing himself into a chair. All power of self-assertion had failed in him. It seemed even right and natural to him that Edgar should know this better than he himself did, and give him information what her decision was.

“I think,” said Edgar, instinctively accepting the rôle of adviser, “that the best and most delicate thing you could do would be to leave the house to her for a few days. Let it be supposed you have business somewhere. Go to London, if you think fit, and investigate for yourself; but leave Clare to make up her mind at leisure. It would be the most generous thing to do.”

Arthur stared at him blankly for a moment, with a dull suspicion in his eyes at the strange, audacious calmness of the proposal. But seeing that Edgar met his gaze calmly, and said these words in perfect single-mindedness, and desire to do

the best in the painful emergency, he accepted them as they were given; and thus they remained together, though they did not talk to each other, waiting for Clare's appearance, or some intimation of what she meant to do, till darkness began to fall. When it was nearly night a maid appeared, with a scared look in her face, and that strange consciousness of impending evil which servants often show, like animals, without a word being said to them—and brought to Edgar the following little note from Clare:—

“I am not able to see you to-night; and I cannot decide where to go without consulting you; besides that there are other reasons why I cannot take the children away, as I intended, at once. I have gone up to the nursery beside them, and will remain there until to-morrow. Tell him this, and ask if we may remain so, in his house, without being molested, till to-morrow.”

Edgar handed this note to Arden without a word. He saw the quick flutter of excite-

ment which passed over Arthur's face. If the letter had been more affectionate, I doubt whether Clare's husband could have borne it; but as it was he gulped down his agitation, and read it without betraying any angry feeling. When he had glanced it over, he looked almost piteously at his companion.

"You think that is what I ought to do?" he said, almost with an appeal against Edgar's decision. "Then I'll go; you can write and tell her so. I'll stay away if she likes, until—until she wants me," he broke off abruptly, and got up and left the room, and was audible a moment after, calling loudly for his servant in the hall.

Edgar wrote this information to Clare. He told her that Arden had decided to leave the house to her, that she might feel quite free to make up her mind; and that he too would go to the village, where he would wait her call, whensoever she should want him. He begged her once more to compose herself, not to hasten her final decision,

and to believe that she would be perfectly free from intrusion or interference of any kind—and bade God bless her, the only word of tenderness he dared venture to add.

When he had written this, he walked down the avenue alone, in the dusk, to the village. Arden had gone before him. The lodge-gates had been left open, and gave to the house a certain forlorn air of openness to all assault, which, no doubt, existed chiefly in Edgar's fancy, but impressed him more than I can say. To walk down that avenue at all was for him a strange sensation; but Edgar by this time had got over all the weaknesses of recollection. It was not hard for him at any time to put himself to one side. He did it now completely. He felt like a man walking in a dream; but he no longer consciously recalled to himself the many times he had gone up and down there, and how it had once been to him his habitual way home—the entrance to his kingdom. No doubt in his painful circum-

stances these thoughts would have been hard upon him. They died quite naturally out of his mind now. What was to become of Clare?—where could he best convey her for shelter or safety?—and how provide for her? His own downfall had made Clare penniless, and now that she was no longer Arthur Arden's wife, she could and would, he knew, accept nothing from *him*. How was she to be provided for? This was a far more important question to think of than any maunderings of personal regret over the associations of his past life.

Next morning he went up again to the Hall, after a night passed not very comfortably at the "Arden Arms," where everyone looked at him curiously, recognising him, but not venturing to say so. As he went up the avenue, Arthur Arden overtook him, arriving, too, from a different direction. A momentary flash of indignation came over Edgar's face.

"You promised to leave Arden," he said.

"And so I did," said the other. "But I

did not say I would not come back to hear what she said. My God, I may have been a fool, but may I not see my—my own children before they go? I am not made of wood or stone, do you suppose, though I may have been in the wrong?"

His eyes were red and bloodshot, his appearance neglected and wild. He looked as if he had not slept, nor even undressed, all night.

"Look here," he said hoarsely, "I have got another letter, saying *she* would accept money—a compromise. Will you persuade Clare to stay, and make no exposure, and hush it all up, for the sake of the children—if we have *her* solemnly bound over to keep the secret and get her sent away? Will you? What harm could it do you? And it might be the saving of the boy."

"Arden, I pity you from my heart!" said Edgar; "but I could not give such advice to Clare."

"It's for the boy," cried Arden. "Look here. We've never been friends, you and

I, and it's not natural we should be ; but that child shall be brought up to think more of you than of any man on earth—to think of you as his friend, his—well, his uncle, if you will. Grant that I'm done for in this world, and poor Clare too, poor girl ; but, Edgar, if you liked, you might save the boy."

"By falsehood," said Edgar, his heart wrung with sympathetic emotion—"by falsehood, as I was myself set up, till the time came, and I fell. Better, surely, that he should be trained to bear the worst. You would not choose for him such a fate as mine ?"

"It has not done you any harm," said Arden, looking keenly at the man he had dispossessed—from whom he had taken everything. "You have always had the best of it!" he cried, with sudden fire. "You have come out of it all with honour, while everyone else has had a poor enough part to play. But in this case," he added, anxiously, in a tone of conciliation, "nothing of the kind can happen. Who like her son and

mine could have the right here—every right of nature, if not the legal right? And I declare to you, before God, that I never meant it. I never intended to marry—that woman.”

“You intended only to betray her.” It was on Edgar’s lips to say these words, but he had not the heart to aggravate the misery which the unhappy man was already suffering. They went on together to the house, Arden repeating at intervals his entreaties, to which Edgar could give but little answer. He knew very well Clare would listen to no such proposal; but so strangely did the pity within him mingle with all less gentle sentiments, that Edgar’s friendly lips could not utter a harsh word. He said what he could, rather, to soothe; for, after all, his decision was of little importance, and Clare did not take the matter so lightly as to make a compromise a possible thing to think of.

The house had already acquired something of that look of agitation which steals

so readily into the atmosphere wherever domestic peace is threatened. There were two or three servants in the hall, who disappeared in different directions when the gentlemen were seen approaching; and Edgar soon perceived, by the deference with which he himself was treated, that the instinct of the household had jumped to a conclusion very different from the facts, but so pleasing to the imagination as to be readily received. He had been recognised, and it was evident that he was thought to be "righted," to have got "his own again." Arthur Arden was anything but beloved at home, and the popular heart as well as imagination sprang up, eager to greet the return of the real master, the true heir.

"Mrs. Arden, sir, has ordered the carriage to meet the twelve o'clock train. She's in the morning-room, sir," said the butler, with solemnity.

He spoke to Arthur, but he looked at Edgar. They were all of one way of thinking; further evidence had been found out,

or something had occurred to turn the wheel of fortune, and Edgar had been restored to "his own."

Clare was seated alone, dressed for a journey, in the little room which had always been her favourite room. She was dressed entirely in black, which made her extraordinary paleness more visible. She had always been pale, but this morning her countenance was like marble—not a tinge of colour on it, except the pink, pale also, of her lips. She received them with equal coldness, bending her head only when the two men, both of them almost speechless with emotion, came into her presence. She was perfectly calm; that which had befallen her was too tremendous for any display of feeling; it carried her beyond the regions of feeling into those of the profoundest passion—that primitive, unmingled condition of mind which has to be diluted with many intricate combinations before it drops into ordinary, expressible emotion. Clara had got beyond the pain that could be put into

words, or cries, or tears ; she was stern, and still, and cold, like a woman turned to stone.

“ I want to explain what I am about to do,” she said, in a low tone. “ We are leaving, of course, at once. Mr. Arden ” (her voice faltered for one moment, but then grew more steady than ever), “ I have taken with me what money I have ; there is fifty pounds—I will send it back to you when I have arranged what I am to do. You will wish to see the children ; they are in the nursery waiting. Edgar will go with me to town, and help me to find a place to live in. I do not wish to make any scandal, or cause any anxiety. Of course I cannot change my name, as it is my own name, as well as yours, and my children will be called what their mother is called, as I believe children in their unfortunate position always are.”

“ Clare, for God’s sake do not be so pitiless ! Hear me speak. I have much—

much to say to you. I have to beg your pardon on my knees——”

“Don't !” she cried suddenly ; then went on in her calm tone—“ We are past all the limits of the theatre, Mr. Arden,” she said. “ Your knees can do me no good, nor anything else. All that is over. I cannot either upbraid or pardon. I will try to forget your existence, and you will forget mine.”

“ That is impossible !” he cried, going towards her. His eyes were so wild, and his manner so excited, that Edgar drew near to her in terror ; but Clare was not afraid. She looked up at him with the large, calm, dilated eyes, which seemed larger and bluer than ever, out of the extreme whiteness of her face.

“ When I swear to you that I never meant it, that I am more wretched—far more wretched—than you can be—that I would hang myself, or drown myself like a dog, if that would do any good—— !”

“ Nothing can do any good,” said Clare.

Something like a moan escaped from her breast. "What are words?" she went on, with a certain quickening of excitement. "I could speak too, if it came to that. There is nothing—nothing to be said or done. Edgar, when one loses name and fame, and home, *you* know what to do."

"I know what I did; but I am different from you," said Edgar—"you, with your babies. Clare, let us speak; we are not stones—we are men."

"Ah! stones are better than men—less cruel, less terrible!" she cried. "No, no; I cannot bear it. We will go in silence; there is nothing that anyone can say."

"You see," said Edgar, turning to Arden—"what is my advice or my suggestions now? To speak of compromise or negotiation——"

"Compromise!" said Clare, her pale cheek flaming; she rose up with a sudden impulse of insupportable passion—"compromise!—to me!" Then, turning to Edgar, she clutched at his arm, and he felt

what force she was putting upon herself, and how she trembled. "Come," she said, "this air kills me ; take me away !"

He let her guide him, not daring to oppose her, out to the air—to the door, down the great steps. She faltered more and more at every step she took, then, suddenly stopping, leaned against him.

"Let me sit down somewhere. I am growing giddy," she said.

She sat down on the steps, on the very threshold of the home she was quitting, as she thought, for ever. The servants, in a group behind, tried to gaze over their master's shoulders at this extraordinary scene. Where was she going?—what did she mean? There was a moment during which no one spoke, and Clare, to her double horror, felt her senses forsaking her. Her head swam, the light fluttered in her eyes. A moment more, and she would be conscious of nothing round her. I have said she was not the kind of woman who faints at a great crisis, but the body has its revenges, its moments

of supremacy, and she had neither slept nor eaten, neither rested nor forgotten, for all these hours.

It was at this moment that the messenger from the "Arden Arms," a boy, whom no one had noticed coming up the avenue, thrust something into Edgar's hand.

"Be that for you, sir?" said the boy.

The sound of this new, strange voice roused everybody. Clare came out of her half-faint, and regained her full sense of what was going on, though she was unable to rise. Arthur Arden came close to them down the steps, with wild eagerness in his eyes. Edgar only would have thrust the paper away which was put into his hands. "Tush!" he said, with the momentary impulse of tossing it from him; then, suddenly catching, as it were, a reflection of something new possible in Arden's wild look, and even a gleam of some awful sublime of tragic curiosity in the opening eyes of Clare, he looked at the paper itself, which came to him at that moment of fate. It was a tele-

gram, in the vulgar livery which now-a-days the merest trifles and the most terrible events wear alike in England. He tore it open ; it was from Mr. Tottenham, dated that morning, and contained these words only :—

“ Miss Lockwood died here at nine o’clock.”

Edgar thrust it into Arden’s hand. He felt something like a wild sea surging in his ears ; he raised up Clare in his arms, and drew her wondering, resisting, up the great steps.

“ Come back,” he cried—“ come home, Clare.”

CHAPTER IX.

HARRY'S TURN.

IT would be vain to tell all that was said, and all that was done, and all the calculations that were gone through in the house in Berkeley Square, where Edgar's visit had produced so much emotion. The interviews carried on in all the different rooms would furnish forth a volume. The girls, who had peered over the staircase to see him go away, and whose state of suspense was indescribable, made a dozen applications at Gussy's door before the audience of Ada, who had the best right to hear, was over. Then Mary insisted upon getting admission in her right of bride, as one able to

enter into Gussy's feelings, and sympathise with her ; and poor little Beatrice, left out in the cold, had to content herself with half a dozen words, whispered in the twilight, when they all went to dress for dinner. Beatrice cried with wounded feeling, to think that because she, by the decrees of Providence, was neither the elder sister, nor engaged to be married, she was therefore to be shut out from all participation in Gussy's secrets.

“Could I be more interested if I was twice as old as Ada, and engaged to six Lord Grantons!” cried the poor child. And Gussy's prospects were in that charming state of uncertainty that they would stand discussing for hours together ; whereas, by the time Lord Granton had been pronounced a darling, and the dresses all decided upon, even down to the colour of the bridesmaids' parasols, there remained absolutely nothing new to be gone over with Mary, but just the same thing again and again.

"When do you think you shall be married?" said Beatrice, tremulously.

"I don't know, and I don't very much care, so long as it is all right," said Gussy, half laughing, half crying.

"But what if papa will not consent?" said Mary, with a face of awe.

"Papa is too sensible to fight when he knows he should not win the battle," said the deliciously, incomprehensibly courageous Gussy.

There was some gratification to be got out of a betrothed sister of this fashion. Beatrice even began to look down upon Mary's unexciting loves.

"As for your affair, it is so dreadfully tame," she said, contemptuously lifting her little nose in the air. "Everybody rushing to give their consent, and presents raining down upon you, and you all so self-satisfied and confident."

Mary was quite taken down from her pedestal of universal observation. She became the commonest of young women about

to be married, by Gussy's romantic side.

Alas! the Thornleighs were by no means done with sensation in this *genre*. Two days after these events, before Edgar had come back, Harry came early to the house one morning and asked to see his mother alone. Lady Augusta was still immersed in patterns, and she had that morning received a letter from her husband, which had brought several lines upon her forehead. Mr. Thornleigh had the reputation, out of doors, of being a moderate, sensible sort of man, not apt to commit himself, though perhaps not brilliant, nor very much to be relied upon in point of intellect. He deserved, indeed, to a considerable extent this character; but what the world did not know, was that his temper was good and moderate, by reason of the domestic safety-valve which he had always by him. When anything troublesome occurred he had it out with his wife, giving her full credit for originating the whole business.

“You ought to have done this, or you ought to have done that,” he would say,

“and then, of course, nothing of the kind could have happened.” After, he would go upstairs, and brush his hair, and appear as the most sensible and good-tempered of men before the world. Mr. Thornleigh had got Mr. Tottenham’s letter informing him of the renewed intercourse between Edgar and Gussy; and the Squire had, on the spot, indited a letter to his wife, breathing fire and flame. This was the preface of a well-conditioned, gentlemanly letter to Mr. Tottenham, in which the father expressed a natural regret that Gussy should show so little consideration of external advantages, but fully acknowledged Edgar’s excellent qualities, and asked what his prospects were, and what he thought of doing.

“I will never be tyrannical to any of my children,” Mr. Thornleigh said; “but, on the other hand, before I can give my sanction, however unwillingly, to any engagement, I must fully understand his position, and what he expects to be able to do.”

But Lady Augusta's letter was not couched in these calm and friendly terms; and knowing as she did the exertions she had made to keep Edgar at arm's length, poor Lady Augusta felt that she did not deserve the assault made upon her, and consequently took longer to calm down than she generally did. It was while her brow was still puckered, and her cheek flushed with this unwelcome communication, that Harry came in. When he said, "I want to speak to you, mother," her anxious mind already jumped at some brewing harm. She took him into the deserted library, feeling that this was the most appropriate place in which to hear any confession her son might have to make to her. The drawing-room, where invasion was always to be feared, and the morning-room, which was strowed with patterns and girls, might do very well for the confession of feminine peccadilloes, but a son's ill-doing was to be treated with a graver care. She led Harry accordingly into the library, and

put herself into his father's chair, and said, "What is it, my dear boy?" with a deeper gravity than usual. Not that Harry was to be taken in by such pretences at severity. He knew his mother too well for that.

"Mother," he said, sitting down near her, but turning his head partially away from her gaze, "you have often said that my father wanted me—to marry."

"To marry!—why, Harry? Yes, dear, and so he does," said Lady Augusta; "and I too," she added, less decidedly. "I wish it, too—if it is some one very nice."

"Well," said Harry, looking at her with a certain shamefaced ostentation of boldness, "I have seen some one whom I could marry at last."

"At last! You are not so dreadfully old," said the mother, with a smile. "You, too! Well, dear, tell me who it is. Some one you have met at your Aunt Mary's? Oh! Harry, my dear boy, I trust most earnestly it is some one very nice!"

"It is some one much better than nice—

the most lovely creature, mother, you ever saw in your life. I never even dreamt of anything like her," said Harry, with a sigh.

"I hope she is something more than a lovely creature," said Lady Augusta. "Oh! Harry, your father is so put out about Gussy's business; I do hope, dear, that this is something which will put him in good-humour again. I can take her loveliness for granted. Tell me—do tell me who she is?"

"You don't mean to say that you are going to let that fellow marry Gussy?" said Harry, coming to a sudden pause.

"Harry, if this is such a connection as I hope, it will smooth everything," said Lady Augusta. "My dearest boy, tell me who she is."

"She is the only woman I will ever marry," said Harry, doggedly.

And then his poor mother divined, without further words, that the match was not an advantageous one, and that she had another disappointment on her hands.

"Harry, you keep me very anxious. Is

she one of Mary's neighbours? Tell me her name."

"Yes, she is one of Aunt Mary's neighbours and chief favourites," said Harry. "Aunt Mary is by way of patronizing her." And here he laughed; but the laugh was forced, and had not the frank amusement in it which he intended it to convey.

Lady Augusta's brow cleared for a moment, then clouded again.

"You do not mean Myra Witherington?" she said, faintly. "Oh! not one of that family, I hope!"

"Myra Witherington!" he cried. "Mother, what do you take me for? It is clear you know nothing about my beautiful Margaret. In her presence, you would no more notice Myra Witherington than a farthing candle in the sun!"

Poor Lady Augusta took courage again. The very name gave her a little courage. It is the commonest of all names where Margaret came from; but not in England, where its rarity gives it a certain distinction.

“My dear boy,” she said tremulously, “don’t trifle with me—tell me her name.”

A strange smile came upon Harry’s lips. In his very soul he, too, was ashamed of the name by which some impish trick of fortune had shadowed his Margaret. An impulse came upon him to get it over at once; he felt that he was mocking both himself and his mother, and her, the most of all, who bore that terrible appellation. He burst into a harsh, coarse laugh, a bravado of which next moment he was heartily ashamed.

“Her name,” he said, with another outburst, “is—Mrs. Smith!”

“Good heavens, Harry!” cried Lady Augusta, with a violent start. Then she tried to take a little comfort from his laughter, and said, with a faint smile, though still trembling, “You are laughing at me, you unkind boy!”

“I am not laughing at all!” cried Harry, “except, indeed, at the misfortune which gave her such a name. It is one of Aunt Mary’s favourite jokes.” Then he changed

his tone, and took his mother's hand and put it up caressingly to his cheek to hide the hot flush that covered it. "Mother, you don't know how I love her. She is the only woman I will ever marry, though I should live a hundred years."

"Oh! my poor boy—my poor boy!" cried Lady Augusta. "This is all I wanted to make an end of me. I think my heart will break!"

"Why should your heart break?" said Harry, putting down her hand and looking half cynically at her. "What good will that do? Look here, mother. Something much more to the purpose will be to write to my father, and break the news quietly to him—gently, so as not to bother him, as I have done to you; you know how."

"Break the news to him!" she said. "I have not yet realised it myself. Harry, wait a little. Why, she is not even——. Mrs. Smith! You mean that she is a widow, I suppose?"

"You did not think I could want to

marry a wife, did you?" he growled. "What is the use of asking such useless questions? Of course she is a widow—with one little girl. There, now you know the worst!"

"A widow, with one little girl!"

Lady Augusta looked at him aghast. What could make up for these disadvantages? The blood went back upon her heart, then rallied slightly as she remembered her brother-in-law's shop-keeping origin, and that the widow might be some friend of his.

"Is she—very rich?" she stammered.

To do her justice, she was thinking then of her husband, not herself; she was thinking how she could write to him, saying, "These are terrible drawbacks, but nevertheless——"

But nevertheless—Harry burst into another loud, coarse laugh. Poor fellow! nobody could feel less like laughing; he did it to conceal his confusion a little, and the terrible sense he began to have that, so far as

his father and mother were concerned, he had made a dreadful mistake.

“I don't know how rich she is, nor how poor. That is not what I ever thought of,” he cried, with lofty scorn.

This somehow appeased the gathering terror of Lady Augusta.

“I don't suppose you did think of it,” she said; “but it is a thing your father will think of. Harry, tell me in confidence—I shall never think you mercenary—what is her family? Are they rich people? Are they friends of your uncle Tottenham? Dear Harry, why should you make a mystery of this with me?”

“Listen, then,” he said, setting his teeth, “and when you know everything you will not be able to ask any more questions. She is a cousin of your Edgar's that you are so fond of. Her brother is the new doctor at Harbour Green, and she lives with him. There, now you know as much as I know myself.”

Words would fail me to tell the wide-eyed consternation with which Lady Au-

gusta listened. It seemed to her that everything that was obnoxious had been collected into this description. Poor, nobody, the sister of a country doctor; a widow with a child; and finally, to wind up everything, and make the combination still more and more terrible, Edgar's cousin! Heaven help her! It was hard enough to think of this for herself; but to let his father know!—this was more than any woman could venture to do. She grew sick and faint in a horrible sense of the desperation of the circumstances; the girls might be obstinate, but they would not take the bit in their teeth and go off, determined to have their way, like the boy, who was the heir, and knew his own importance; and what could any exhortation of hers do for Harry, who knew as well as she did the frightful consequences, and had always flattered himself on being a man of the world? She was so stupefied that she scarcely understood all the protestations that he poured into her ear after this. What was it to

her that Margaret was the loveliest creature in the world? Faugh! Lady Augusta turned sickening from the words. Lovely creatures who rend peaceful families asunder; who lead young men astray, and ruin all their hopes and prospects; who heighten all existing difficulties, and make everything that was bad before worse a thousand times—is it likely that a middle-aged mother should be moved by their charms?

“It is ruin and destruction!—ruin and destruction!” she repeated to herself.

And soon the whole house had received the same shock, and trembled under it to its foundations. Harry went off in high dudgeon, not finding the sympathy he (strangely enough, being a man of the world) had looked forward to as his natural right. The house, as I have said, quivered with the shock; a sense of sudden depression came over them all. Little Mary cried, thinking what a very poor-looking lot of relations she would carry with her into the noble house she was about to enter. Gussy,

with a more real sense of the fatal effect of this last complication, felt, half despairing, that her momentary gleam of hope was dying away in the darkness, and began to think the absence of Edgar at this critical moment almost a wrong to her. He had been absent for years, and she had kept steadily faithful to him, hopeful in him; but his absence of to-day filled her with a hopeless, nervous irritability and pain. As for Lady Augusta, she lost heart altogether.

“Your father will never listen to it,” she said—“never, never; he will think they are in a conspiracy. You will be the sufferer, Gussy, you and poor Edgar, for Harry will not be restrained; he will take his own way.”

What could Gussy reply? She was older than Harry; she was sick of coercion—why should not she, too, have her own way? But she did not say this, being grieved for the unfortunate mother, whom this last shock had utterly discomposed. Ada could do nothing but be the grieved spec-

tator and sympathizer of all; as for the young Beatrice, her mind was divided between great excitement over the situation generally, and sorrow for poor Gussy, and an illegitimate, anxious longing to see the "lovely creature" of whom Harry had spoken in such raptures. Why should not people love and marry, without all these frightful complications? Beatrice was not so melancholy as the rest. She got a certain amount of pleasure out of the imbroglio; she even hoped that for herself there might be preparing something else even more romantic than Gussy's—more desperate than Harry's. Fate, which had long forgotten the Thornleigh household, and permitted them to trudge on in perfect quiet, had now roused out of sleep, and seemed to intend to give them their turn of excitement again.

Edgar made his appearance next day, looking so worn and fatigued that Lady Augusta had not the heart to warn him, as she had intended to do, that for the present she could not receive his visits—and that

Gussy had not the heart to be cross. He told them he had been to Arden on business concerning Clare, and that Arthur Arden had come to town with him, and that peace and a certain friendship reigned, at least for the moment, between them. He did not confide even to Gussy what the cause of this singular amity was; but after he had been a little while in her company, his forehead began to smoothe, his smile to come back, the colour to appear once more in his face. He took her aside to the window, where the girls had been arranging fresh Spring flowers in a *jardinière*. He drew her arm into his, bending over the hyacinths and cynamens. Now, for the first time, he could ask the question which had been thrust out of his mind by all that had happened within the last few days. A soft air of Spring, of happiness, of all the sweetness of life, which had been so long plucked from him, seemed to blow in Edgar's face from the flowers.

“How should we like a Consulship?” he

said, bending down to whisper in her ear.

“A what?” cried Gussy, astonished. She thought for the moment that he was speaking of some new flower.

Then Edgar took Lord Newmarch's letter from his pocket, and held out the postscript to her, holding her arm fast in his, and his head close to hers.

“How should you like a Consulship?” he said.

Then the light and the life in his face communicated itself to her.

“A Consulship! Oh! Edgar, what does it mean?”

“To me it means you,” he said—“it means life; it means poverty too, perhaps, and humility, which are not what I would choose for my Gussy; but to me it means life, independence, happiness. Gussy, what am I to say?”

“Say!” she cried—“yes, of course—yes. What else? Italy, perhaps, and freedom—freedom once in our lives—and our own way; but, ah! what is the use of speaking

of it?" said Gussy, dropping away from his arm, and stamping her foot on the ground, and falling into sudden tears, "when we are always to be prevented by other people's folly, always stopped by something we have nothing to do with? Ask mamma, Edgar, what has happened since you went away."

Then Lady Augusta drew near, having been a wondering and somewhat anxious spectator all the time of this whispered conversation, and told him with tears of her interview with Harry.

"What can I do?" she cried. "I do not want to say a word against your cousin. She may be nice, as nice as though she were a duke's daughter; but Harry is our eldest son, and all my children have done so badly in this way except little Mary. Oh! my dears, I beg your pardon!" cried poor Lady Augusta, drying her eyes, "but what can I say? Edgar, I have always felt that I could ask you to do anything, if things should ever be settled between Gussy and you. Oh!

save my boy! She cannot be very fond of him, she has known him so little; and his father will be furious, and will never consent—never! And until Mr. Thornleigh dies, they would have next to nothing. Oh! Edgar, if she is sensible, and would listen to reason, I would go to her myself—or Gussy could go.”

“Not I,” said Gussy, stealing a deprecating look at Edgar, who stood stupefied by this new complication—“how could I? It is terrible. How can I, who am pleasing myself, say anything to Harry because he wants to please himself?—or to *her*, who has nothing to do with our miserable and mercenary ways? Oh! yes, they are miserable and mercenary!” cried Gussy, crying in her turn; “though I can’t help feeling as you do, though my mind revolts against this poor girl, whom I don’t know, and I want to save Harry, too, as you say. But how dare I make Harry unhappy, in order to be happy myself? Oh! mamma, seek some

other messenger—not me!—not me!”

“My darling,” said Lady Augusta, “it is for Harry’s good.”

“And it was for my good a little while ago!” cried Gussy. “You meant it, and so did they all. If you could have persuaded me to marry some one I cared nothing for, with my heart always longing for another, you would have thought it for my good; and now must I try to buy my happiness by ruining Harry’s?” cried the girl; “though I, too, am so dreadful, that I think it would be for Harry’s good. Oh! no, no, let it be some one else!”

“Edgar,” said Lady Augusta, “speak to her, show her the difference. Harry never saw this—this young woman till about a fortnight since. What can he know of her, what can she know of him, to be ready to marry him in a fortnight? Oh! Edgar, try to save my boy! Even if you were to represent to him that it would be kind to let your business be settled first,” she went

on, after a pause. "A little time might do everything. I hope it is not wrong to scheme a little for one's own children and their happiness. You might persuade him to wait, for Gussy's sake—not to make his father furious with two at a time."

Thus the consultation went on, if that could be called a consultation where the advice was all on one side. Edgar was fairly stupefied by this new twist in his affairs. He saw the fatal effect as clearly as even Lady Augusta could see it, but he could not see his own way to interfere in it, as she saw. To persuade Harry Thornleigh to give up or postpone his own will, in order that he, Edgar Earnshaw, might get his—an object in which Harry, first of all, had not the slightest sympathy—was about as hopeless an attempt as could well be thought of; and what right had he to influence Margaret, whom he did not know, to give up the brother, in order that he himself might secure the sister? Edgar left the house in as sore a dilemma as ever man was in. To

give up Gussy now was a simple impossibility, but to win her by persuading her brother to the sacrifice of his love and happiness, was surely more impossible still.

CHAPTER X.

OTHER PEOPLE'S AFFAIRS.

THUS, after the long lull that had happened in his life, Edgar found himself deep in occupation, intermingled in the concerns of many different people. Arthur Arden had come with him to town, and, by some strange operation of feeling, which it is difficult to follow, this man, in his wretchedness, clung to Edgar, who might almost be supposed the means of bringing it about. All his old jealousy, his old enmity, seemed to have disappeared. He who had harshly declined to admit that the relationship of habit and affection between his wife and her

supposed brother must survive even when it was known that no tie of blood existed between them, acknowledged the fact now without question, almost with eagerness, speaking to the man he had hated, and disowned all connection with, of "your sister," holding by him as a link between himself and the wife he had so nearly lost. This revolution was scarcely less wonderful than the position in which Edgar found himself in respect to Clare. Not a reference to their old affection had come from her lips, not a word of present regard. She had scarcely even given him her hand voluntarily; but she had accepted him at once and instinctively as her natural support, her "next friend," whose help and protection she took as a matter of course. Clare treated him as if his brotherhood had never been questioned, as if he was her natural and legal defender and sustainer: up to this moment she had not even opened her mind to him, or told him what she meant to do, but she had so far accepted his guidance,

and still more accepted his support, without thanking him or asking him for it, as a matter of course.

Edgar knew Clare too well to believe that when the marriage ceremony should be repeated between her husband and herself—which was the next step to be taken—their life would simply flow on again in the same channel, as if this tragical interruption to its course had never occurred. This was what Arthur Arden fondly pictured to himself, and a great many floating intentions of being a better husband, and a better man, after the salvation which had suddenly come to him, in the very moment of his need, were in his mind, softening the man imperceptibly by their influence. But Edgar did not hope for this; he made as little answer as he could to Arthur's anticipations of the future, to his remorseful desire to be friendly.

“After it's all over you must not drift out of sight again,—you must come to us when you can,” Arden said. “You've always behaved like a brick in all circumstances; I

see it now. You've been my best friend in this terrible business. I wish I may never have a happy hour if I ever think otherwise of you than as Clare's brother again."

All this Edgar did his best to respond to, but he could not but feel that Arden's hopes were fallacies. Clare had given him no insight into her plans, perhaps, even, had not formed any. She had gone back into the house at Edgar's bidding; she had dully accepted the fact that the situation was altered, and consented to the private repetition of her marriage; but she had never looked at her husband, never addressed him; and Edgar felt, with a shudder, that, though she would accept such atonement as was possible, she was far, very far, from having arrived at the state of mind which could forgive the injury. That a woman so deeply outraged should continue tranquilly the life she had lived before she was aware of the outrage, was, he felt, impossible. He had done what he could to moderate Arden's expectations on this point, but with no

effect; and, as he did not really know, but merely feared, some proceeding on Clare's part which should shatter the expected happiness of the future, he held his peace, transferring, almost involuntarily, a certain share of his sympathy to the guilty man, whose guilt was not to escape retribution.

Edgar's next business was with Mr. Tottenham, who, all unaware of Harry's folly, showed to him, with much pleasure, and some self-satisfaction, the moderate and sensible letter of Mr. Thornleigh above referred to, in which he expressed his natural regret, etc., but requested to know what the young man's prospects were, and what he meant to do. Then Edgar produced once more Lord Newmarch's letter, and, in the consultation which followed, almost forgot, for the moment, all that was against him. For Mr. Tottenham thought it a good opening enough, and began, with sanguine good-nature, to prophesy that Edgar would soon distinguish himself—that he would be speedily raised from post to post, and that, “with

the excellent connections and interest you will have," advancement of every kind would be possible.

"Why, in yesterday's *Gazette*," said Mr. Tottenham, "no farther gone, there is an appointment of Brown, Consul-General, to be Ambassador somewhere—Argentine States, or something of that sort. And why should not you do as well as Brown? A capital opening! I should accept it at once."

And Edgar did so forthwith, oblivious of the circumstance that the Consulship, such as it was, the first step upon the ladder, had been, not offered, but simply suggested to him—nay, scarcely even that. This little mistake, however, was the best thing that could have happened; for Lord Newmarch, though at first deeply puzzled and embarrassed by the warm acceptance and thanks he received, nevertheless was ashamed to fall back again, and, bestirring himself, did secure the appointment for his friend. It was not very great in point of importance,

but it was ideal in point of situation; and when, a few days after, Edgar saw his name gazetted as Her Majesty's Consul at Spezzia, the emotions which filled his mind were those of happiness as unmingled as often falls to the lot of man. He was full of cares and troubles at that particular moment, and did not see his way at all clear before him; but he suddenly felt as a boat might feel (if a boat could feel anything) which has been lying high and dry ashore, when at last the gentle persuasion of the sunshiny waves reaches it, lifts, floats it off into soft, delicious certainty of motion; or perhaps it would be more correct to say, as shipwrecked sailors might feel when they see their cobbled boat, their one ark of salvation, float strong and steady on the treacherous sea. This was the little ark of Edgar's happier fortunes, and lo! at last it was afloat!

After he had written his letter to Lord Newmarch, he went down to Tottenham's, from which he had been absent for a fortnight, to the total neglect of Phil's lessons,

and Lady Mary's lectures, and everything else that had been important a fortnight ago. He went by railway, and they met him at the station, celebrating his return by a friendly demonstration. On the road by the green they met Harry, walking towards Mrs. Sims' lodgings. He gave Edgar a very cold greeting.

"Oh! I did not know you were coming back," he said, and pursued his way, affecting to take a different turn, as long as they were in sight.

Harry's countenance was lowering and overcast, his address scarcely civil. He felt his interests entirely antagonistic to those of his sister and her betrothed. The children burst into remarks upon his bearishness as they went on.

"He was bearable at first," said Phil, "but since you have been away, and while papa has been away, he has led us such a life, Mr. Earnshaw."

"He is always in the village—always, always in the village; and Sibby says she

hates him !” cried little Molly, who was enthusiastic for her last new friend.

“ Hush, children—don’t gossip, ” said their mother ; but she too had a cloud upon her brow.

Then Edgar had a long conversation with Lady Mary in the conservatory, under the palm-tree, while the children had tea. He told her of all his plans and prospects, and of the Consulship, upon which he reckoned so confidently, and which did not, to Lady Mary’s eyes, look quite so fine an opening as it seemed to her husband.

“ Of course, then, we must give you up, ” she said, regretfully ; “ but I think Lord Newmarch might have done something better for an old friend.”

Something better ! The words seemed idle words to Edgar, so well pleased was he with his prospective appointment. Then he told her of Mr. Thornleigh’s letter, which was so much more gracious than he could have hoped for ; and then the cloud returned to Lady Mary’s brow.

“I am not at all easy about Harry,” she said. “Mr. Earnshaw—no, I will call you Edgar, because I have always heard you called Edgar, and always wanted to call you so; Edgar, then—now don’t thank me, for it is quite natural—tell me one thing. Have you any influence with your cousin?”

“The doctor?”

“No, not the doctor; if I wanted anything of him, I should ask it myself. His sister; she is a very beautiful young woman, and, so far as I can see, very sensible and well-behaved, and discreet—no one can say a word against her; but if you had any influence with her, as being her cousin——”

“Is it about Harry?” asked Edgar, anxiously.

“About Harry!—how do you know?—have you heard anything?”

“Harry has told his mother,” said Edgar; “they are all in despair.”

“Oh! I knew it!” cried Lady Mary. “I told Tom so, and he would not believe me. What, has it come so far as that, that he has

spoken to his mother? Then, innocent as she looks, she must be a designing creature, after all."

"He may not have spoken to her, though he has spoken to his mother," said Edgar. Was it the spell of kindred blood working in him? for he did not like this to be said of Margaret, and instinctively attempted to defend her.

Lady Mary shook her head.

"Do you think any man would be such a fool as to speak to his parents before he had spoken to the woman?" she said. "One never knows how such a boy as Harry may act, but I should not have thought that likely. However, you have not answered my question. Do you think you have any influence, being her cousin, over her?"

"I do not know her," said Edgar. "I have only spoken to her once."

Would this be sufficient defence for him? he wondered, or must he hear himself again appealed to, to interfere in another case so like his own?

“That is very unfortunate,” said Lady Mary, with a sigh; but, happily for him, she there left the subject. “I cannot say that she has ever given him any encouragement,” she said presently, in a subdued tone. Margaret had gained her point; she was acquitted of this sin, at least; but Lady Mary pronounced the acquittal somewhat grudgingly. Perhaps, when a young man is intent upon making a foolish marriage, it is the best comfort to his parents and friends to be able to feel that *she* is artful and designing, and has led the poor boy away.

Edgar went out next morning to see his cousins; he announced his intention at the breakfast-table, to make sure of no encounter with poor Harry, who was flighty and unpleasant in manner, and seemed to have some wish to fix a quarrel upon him. Harry looked up quickly, as if about to speak, but changed his mind, and said nothing. And Edgar went his way—hoping the doctor might not be gone upon his round of visits, yet hoping he might; not wishing to see Mar-

garet, and yet wishing to see her—in a most uncomfortable and painful state of mind. To his partial surprise and partial relief, he met her walking along the green towards the avenue with her little girl. It was impossible not to admire her grace, her beautiful, half-pathetic countenance, and the gentle maternity of the beautiful young woman never separate from the beautiful child, who clung to her with a fondness and dependence which no indifferent mother ever earns. She greeted Edgar with the sudden smile which was like sunshine on her face, and held out her hand to him with frank sweetness.

“I am very glad you have come back,” she said. “It has been unfortunate for us your being away.”

“Only unfortunate for me, I think,” said Edgar, “for you seem to have made friends with my friends as much as if I had been here to help it on. Is this Sibby? I have heard of nothing but Sibby since I came back.”

“Lady Mary has been very kind,” said Margaret, with, he thought, a faint flush over her pale, pretty cheek.

“And you like the place? And Dr. Charles has got acquainted with his patients?”

“My brother would like to tell you all that himself,” said Margaret; “but I want to speak to you of Loch Arroch, and of the old house, and dear granny. Did you know that she was ill again?”

Margaret looked at him with her beautiful eyes full of tears. Edgar was not for a moment unfaithful to his Gussy, but after that look I believe he would have dared heaven and earth, and Mr. Thornleigh, rather than interfere with anything upon which this lovely creature had set her heart. Could it be that she had set her heart on Harry Thornleigh, he asked himself with a groan?

“No,” he said; “they write to me very seldom. When did you hear?”

“Mr. Earnshaw, I have had a letter this morning—it has shaken me very much,”

said Margaret. "Will you come to the cottage with me till I tell you? Do you remember?—but you could not remember—it was before your time."

"What?—I may have heard of it—something which agitates you?"

"Not painfully," said Margaret, with a faltering voice and unsteady smile; "gladly, if I could put faith in it. Jeanie had a brother that was lost at sea, or we thought he was lost. It was his loss that made her so—ill; and she took you for him—you are like him, Mr. Earnshaw. Well," said Margaret, two tears dropping out of her eyes, "they have had a letter—he is not dead, he is perhaps coming home."

"What has become of him, then?—and why did he never send word?" cried Edgar. "How heartless, how cruel!"

Margaret laid her hand softly on his arm.

"Ah! you must not say that!" she cried. "Sailors do not think so much of staying away a year or two. He was shipwrecked, and lost everything, and he could not come

home in his poverty upon granny. Oh! if we were all as thoughtful as that! Mr. Earnshaw, sailors are not just to be judged like other men."

"He might have killed his poor little sister!" cried Edgar, indignantly; "that is a kind of conduct for which I have no sympathy. And granny, as you call her——"

"Ah! you never learnt to call her granny," said Margaret, with animation. "Dear granny has never been strong since her last attack—the shock, though it was joy, was hard upon her. And she was afraid for Jeanie; but Jeanie has stood it better than anybody could hope; and perhaps he is there now," said Margaret, with once more the tears falling suddenly from her eyes.

"You know him?" said Edgar.

"Oh! *know* him! I knew him like my own heart!" cried Margaret, a flush of sudden colour spreading over her pale face. She did not look up, but kept her eyes upon the ground, going softly along by Edgar's

side, her beautiful face full of emotion. "He would not write till he had gained back again what was lost. He is coming home captain of his ship," she said, with an indescribable soft triumph.

At that moment a weight was lifted off Edgar's mind—it was as when the clouds suddenly break, and the sun bursts forth. He too could have broken forth into songs or shoutings, to express his sense of release. "I am glad that everything is ending so happily," he said, in a subdued tone. He did not trust himself to look at her, any more than Margaret could trust herself to look at him. When they reached the cottage, she went in, and got her letter, and put it into his hand to read; while she herself played with Sibby, throwing her ball for her, entering into the child's glee with all the lightness of a joyful heart. Edgar could not but look at her, between the lines of Jeanie's simple letter. He seemed to himself so well able to read the story, and to understand what Margaret's soft

blush and subdued excitement of happiness meant.

And yet Harry Thornleigh was still undismissed, and hoped to win her. He met him as he himself returned to the house. Harry was still uncivil, and had barely acknowledged Edgar's presence at breakfast; but he stopped him now, almost with a threatening look. .

"Look here, Earnshaw," he said, "I daresay they told you what is in my mind. I daresay they tried to set you over me as a spy. Don't you think I'll bear it. I don't mean to be tricked out of my choice by any set of women, and I have made my choice now."

"Do you know you are mighty uncivil?" said Edgar. "If you had once thought of what you were saying, you would not venture upon such a word as spy to me."

"Venture!" cried the young man. Then, calming himself, "I didn't mean it—of course I beg your pardon. But these women are enough to drive a man frantic; and I've

made my choice, let them do what they will, and let my father rave as much as he pleases."

"This is not a matter which I can enter into," said Edgar; "but just one word. Does the lady know how far you have gone?—and has she made her choice as well as you?"

Harry's face lighted up, then grew dark and pale.

"I thought so once," he said, "but now I cannot tell. She is as changeable as—as all women are," he broke off, with a forced laugh. "It's their way."

Edgar did not see Harry again till after dinner, and then he was stricken with sympathy to see how ill he looked. What had happened? But there was no time or opportunity to inquire what had happened to him. That evening the mail brought him a letter from Robert Campbell, at Loch Arroch Head, begging him, if he wanted to see his grandmother alive, to come at once. She was very ill, and it was not possible that she

could live more than a day or two. He made his arrangements instantly to go to her, starting next morning, for he was already too late to catch the night mail. When he set out at break of day, in order to be in time for the early train from London, he found Margaret already at the station. She had been summoned also. He had written the night before a hurried note to Gussy, announcing his sudden call to Loch Arroch, but he was not aware then that he was to have companionship on his journey. He put his cousin into the carriage, not ill-pleased to have her company, and then, leaving many misconceptions behind him, hurried away, to wind up in Scotland one portion of his strangely-mingled life.

CHAPTER XI.

MARGARET.

THE relations between Harry Thornleigh and Margaret had never come to any distinct explanation. They had known each other not much more than a fortnight, which was quite reason enough, on Margaret's side, at least, for holding back all explanation, and discouraging rather than helping on the too eager young lover.

During all the time of Edgar's absence, it would be useless to deny that Harry's devotion suggested very clearly to the penniless young widow, the poor doctor's sister, such an advancement in life as might well


have turned any woman's head. She who had nothing, who had to make a hard fight to get the ends to meet for the doctor and herself, who had for years exercised all the shifts of genteel poverty, and who, before that, had been trained to a homely life anything but genteel—had suddenly set open to her the gates of that paradise of wealth, and rank, and luxury, which is all the more ecstatic to the poor for being unknown. She, too, might "ride in her carriage," might wear diamonds, might go to Court, might live familiarly with the great people of the land, like Lady Mary, she who had been bred at the Castle Farm on Loch Arroch, and had known what it was to "supper the beasts," and milk the kye; she who had not disdained the household work of her own little house, in the days of the poor young Glasgow clerk whom she had married. There had been some natural taste for elegance in the brother and sister, both handsome young people, which had developed into gentility by reason of his pro-

fession, and their escape from all the associations of home, where no one could have been deceived as to their natural position. But Dr. Charles had made no money anywhere; he had nothing but debts; though from the moment when he had taken his beautiful sister to be his housekeeper and companion, he had gradually risen in pretension and aim. Their transfer to England, a step which always sounds very grand in homely Scotch ears, had somehow dazzled the whole kith and kin. Even Robert Campbell, at Loch Arroch Head, had been induced to draw his cautious purse, and contribute to this new establishment. And now the first fruits of the venture hung golden on the bough—Margaret had but to put forth her hand and pluck them; nay, she had but to be passive, and receive them in her lap. She had held Harry back from a premature declaration of his sentiments, but she had done this so sweetly that Harry had been but more and more closely enveloped in her toils; and she had made up her mind that

his passion was to be allowed to ripen, and that finally she would accept him, and reign like a princess, and live like Lady Mary, surrounded by all the luxuries which were sweet to her soul.

It is not necessary, because one is born poor, that one should like the conditions of that lowly estate, or have no taste for better things. On the contrary, Margaret was born with a love of all that was soft, and warm, and easy, and luxurious. She loved these things and prized them; she felt it in her to be a great lady; her gentle mind was such that she would have made an excellent princess, all the more sweet, gracious, and good the less she was crossed, and the more she had her own way.

I am disposed to think, for my own part, that for every individual who is mellowed and softened by adversity, there are at least ten in the world whom prosperity would mollify and bring to perfection; but then that latter process of development is more difficult to attain to. Margaret felt that



it was within her reach. She would have done nothing unwomanly to secure her lover; nay, has it not been already said that she had made up her mind to be doubly prudent, and to put it in no one's power to say that she had "given him encouragement?" But with that modest reserve, she had made up her mind to Harry's happiness and her own. In her heart she had already consented, and regarded the bargain as concluded. She would have made him a very sweet wife, and Harry would have been happy. No doubt he was sufficiently a man of the world to have felt a sharp twinge sometimes, when his wife's family was brought in question; but he thought nothing of that in his hot love, and I believe she would have made him so good a wife, and been so sweet to Harry, that this drawback would have detracted very little from his happiness.

So things were going on, ripening pleasantly towards a *dénouement* which could not be very far off, when that unlucky letter

arrived from Loch Arroch, touching the re-appearance of Jeanie's brother, the lost sailor, who had been Margaret's first love. This letter upset her, poor soul, amid all her plans and hopes. If it had not, however, unluckily happened that the arrival of Edgar coincided with her receipt of the letter, and that both together were followed by the expedition to Loch Arroch, to the grandmother's deathbed, I believe the sailor's return would only have caused a little tremulousness in Margaret's resolution, a momentary shadow upon her sweet reception of Harry, but that nothing more would have followed, and all would have gone well. Dear reader, forgive me if I say all would have gone well; for, to tell the truth, though it was so much against Edgar's interests, and though it partook of the character of a mercenary match, and of everything that is most repugnant to romance, I cannot help feeling a little pang of regret that any untoward accident should have come in Margaret's way. Probably the infusion of

her good, wholesome Scotch blood, her good sense, and her unusual beauty, would have done a great deal more good to the Thornleigh race than a Right Honourable grandfather; and she would have made such a lovely great lady, and would have enjoyed her greatness so much (far more than any Lady Mary ever could enjoy it), and been so good a wife, and so sweet a mother! That she should give up all this at the first returning thrill of an old love, is perhaps very much more poetical and elevating; but I who write am not so young or so romantic as I once was, and I confess that I look upon the interruption of the story, which was so clearly tending towards another end, with a great deal of regret. Even Edgar, when he found her ready to accompany him to Scotland, felt a certain excitement which was not unmingled with regret. He felt by instinct that Harry's hopes were over, and this thought gave him a great sense of personal comfort and relief. It chased away the difficulties out of his own

way; but at the same time he could not but ask himself what was the inducement for which she was throwing away all the advantages that Harry Thornleigh could give her?—the love of a rough sailor, captain at the best, of a merchant-ship, who had been so little thoughtful of his friends as to leave them three or four years without any news of him, and who probably loved her no longer, if he had ever loved her. It was all to Edgar's advantage that she should come away at this crisis, and what was it to him if she threw her life away for a fancy? But Edgar had never been in the way of thinking of himself only, and the mingled feelings in his mind found utterance in a vague warning. He did not know either her or her circumstances well enough to venture upon more plain speech.

“Do you think you are right to leave your brother just at this moment, when he is settling down?” Edgar said.

A little cloud rose upon Margaret's face.

Did not she know better than anyone how foolish it was ?

“ Ah !” she said, “ but if granny is dying, as they say, I must see her,” and the ready tears sprung to her eyes.

Edgar was so touched by her looks, that, though it was dreadfully against his own interest, he tried again.

“ Of all the women in the world,” he said, “ she is the most considerate, the most understanding. It is a long and an expensive journey, and your life, she would say, is of more importance than her dying.”

He ventured to look her in the face as he spoke these words, and Margaret grew crimson under his gaze.

“ I do not see how it can affect my life, if I am away for a week or two,” she said lightly, yet with a tone which showed him that her mind was made up. Perhaps he thought she was prudently retiring to be quit of Harry—perhaps withdrawing from a position which became untenable ; or why might it not be pure gratitude and

love to the only mother she had known in her life? Anyhow, whatever might be the reason, there was no more to be said.

I will not attempt to describe the feelings of Harry Thornleigh, when he found that Margaret had gone away, and gone with Edgar. He came back to Lady Mary raving and white with rage, to pour out upon her the first outburst of his passion.

“The villain!—the traitor!—the low, sneaking rascal!” Harry cried, foaming. “He has made a catspaw of Gussy and a fool of me. We might have known it was all a lie and pretence. He has carried her off under our very eyes.”

Even Lady Mary was staggered, strong as was her faith in Edgar; and Harry left her doubtful, and not knowing what to make of so strange a story, and rushed up to town, to carry war and devastation into his innocent family. He went to Berkeley Square, and flung open the door of the morning-room, where they were all seated, and threw himself among them like a thun-

derbolt. Gussy had received Edgar's note a little while before, and she had been musing over it, pensive, not quite happy, not quite pleased, and saying to herself how very wrong and how very foolish she was. Of course, if his old mother were dying, he must go to her—he had no choice; but Gussy, after waiting so long for him, and proving herself so exceptionally faithful, felt that she had a certain right to Edgar's company now, and to have him by her side, all the more that Lady Augusta had protested that she did not think it would be right to permit it in the unsettled state of his circumstances, and of the engagement generally. To have your mother hesitate, and declare that she does not think she ought to admit him, and then to have your lover abstain from asking admission, is hard upon a girl. Lord Granton (though, to be sure, he was a very young man, with nothing to do) was dangling constantly about little Mary; and Gussy felt that Edgar's many businesses, which led him here, and

led him there, altogether out of her way, were inopportune, to say the least.

Harry assailed his mother fiercely, without breath or pause. He accused her of sending "that fellow" down to Tottenham's, on purpose to interfere with him, to be a spy upon him, to ruin all his hopes.

"I have seen a change since ever he came!" he cried wildly. "If it is your doing, mother, I will never forgive you! Don't think I am the sort of man to take such a thing without resenting it! When you see me going to the devil, you will know whose fault it is. *Her* fault?—no, she has been deceived. You have sent that fellow down upon her with his devilish tongue, to persuade her and delude her. It is he that has taken her away. No, it is not her fault, it is your fault!" cried Harry. "I should have grown a good man. I should have given up everything she did not like; and now you have made up some devilish conspiracy, and you have taken her away."

“Harry, do you remember that you are talking to your mother?” cried Lady Augusta, with trembling lips.

“My mother! A mother helps one, loves one, makes things easy for one!” he cried. “That’s the ordinary view. Excuses you, and does her best for you, not her worst; when you take up your *rôle* as you ought, I’ll take mine. But since you’ve set your mind on thwarting, deceiving, injuring me in my best hopes!” cried Harry, white with rage, “stealing from me the blessing I had almost got, that I would have got, had you stopped your d—d interference!”

His voice broke here; he had not meant to go so far. As a gentleman at least, he ought, he knew, to use no oath to ladies; but poor Harry was beside himself. He stopped short, half-appalled, half-satisfied that he had spoken his mind.

“Harry, how dare you?” cried Gussy, facing him. “Do you not see how you are wounding mamma? Has there ever been

a time when she has not stood up for you? And now because she is grieved to think that you are going to ruin yourself, unwilling that you should throw yourself away——”

“All this comes beautifully from you!” cried Harry, with a sneer—“you who have never thought of throwing yourself away. But I am sorry for you, Gussy. I don’t triumph over you. You have been taken in, poor girl, the worst of the two!”

Gussy was shaken for the moment by his change of tone, by his sudden compassion. She felt as if the ground had suddenly been cut from under her feet, and a dizzy sense of insecurity came over her. She looked at her mother, half frightened, not knowing what to think or say.

“When you have come to your senses, Harry, you will perhaps tell us the meaning of this!” cried Lady Augusta. “Girls, it is time for you to keep your appointment with Elise. Ada will go with you to-day, for I don’t feel quite well. If you have anything

to say to me another time," she added with dignity, addressing her son, "especially if it is of a violent description, you will be good enough to wait until Mary has left the room. I do not choose that she should carry away into her new family the recollection of brutality at home."

Lady Augusta's grand manner was known in the household. Poor Gussy, though sad and sorry enough, found it difficult to keep from a laugh in which there would have been but little mirth. But Harry's perceptions were not so lively, or his sense of the ridiculous so strong. He was somehow cowed by the idea of his little sister carrying a recollection of brutality into so new and splendid a connection as the Marquis of Hauteville's magnificent family.

"Oh, bosh!" he said; but it was almost under his breath. And then he told them of Edgar's departure from Tottenham's, and of the discovery he had made that Margaret had gone too. "You set him on, I suppose, to cross me," said Harry; "because I let you

know there was one woman in the world I could fancy—therefore you set him on to take her from me.”

“Oh! Harry, how can you say so? *I* set him on!” cried Lady Augusta. “What you are telling me is all foolishness. You are both of you frightening yourselves about nothing. If there is anyone dying, and they were sent for, there is no harm in two cousins travelling together. Harry, did this lady—know what your feelings were?”

“I suppose,” said Harry, after a moment’s hesitation, “women are not such fools but that they must know.”

“Then you had said nothing to her?” said his mother, pursuing the subject. Perhaps she permitted a little gleam of triumph to appear in her eye, for he jumped up instantly, more excited than ever.

“I am going after them,” he said. “I don’t mean to be turned off without an answer. Whether she has me or not, she shall decide herself; it shall not be done by any plot against us. This is what you drive me to, with

your underhand ways. I shall not wait a day longer. I'll go down to Scotland to-night."

"Do not say anything to him, Gussy," cried Lady Augusta. "Let him accuse his mother and sister of underhand ways, if he likes. And you can go, sir, if you please, on your mad errand. If the woman is a lady, she will know what to think of your suspicions. If she is not a lady——"

"What then?" he cried, in high wrath.

"Probably she will accept you," said Lady Augusta, pale and grand. "I do not understand the modes of action of such people. You will have had your way, in any case—and then you will hear what your father has to say."

Harry flung out of the house furious. He was very unhappy, poor fellow! He was chilled and cast down, in spite of himself, by his mother's speech. Why should he follow Margaret as if he suspected her? What right had he to interfere with her actions? If he went he might be supposed to insult her—if he stayed he should lose her. What was

he to do? Poor Harry!—if Dr. Murray had not been so obnoxious to him, I think he would have confided his troubles to, and asked advice from, Margaret's brother; but Dr. Charles had replied to his inquiry with a confidential look, and a smile which made him furious.

“She will be back in a week or two. I am not afraid just now, in present circumstances, that she will forsake me for long,” he had said. “We shall soon have her back again.”

We!—whom did the fellow mean by we? Harry resolved on the spot that, if she ever became his wife, she should give up this cad of a brother. Which I am glad to say, for her credit, was a thing that Margaret would never have consented to do.

But the Thornleigh family was not happy that day. Gussy, though she had never doubted Edgar before, yet felt cold shivers of uncertainty shoot through her heart now. Margaret was beautiful, and almost all women exaggerate the power of beauty.

They give up instinctively before it, with a conviction, which is so general as to be part of the feminine creed, that no man can resist that magic power. No doubt Edgar meant to do what was best; no doubt, she said to herself, that in his heart he was true—but with a lovely woman there, so lovely, and with claims upon his kindness, who could wonder if he went astray? And this poor little scanty note which advised Gussy of his necessary absence, said not a word about Margaret. She read it over and over again, finding it each time less satisfactory. At the first reading it had been disappointing, but nothing more; now it seemed cold, unnecessarily hurried, careless. She contrasted it with a former one he had written to her, and it seemed to her that no impartial eye could mistake the difference. She sympathized with her brother, and yet she envied him, for he was a man, and could go and discover what was false and what was true; but she had to wait and be patient, and betray to no one what was the matter,

though her heart might be breaking—yes, though her heart might be breaking! For, after all, might it not be said that it was she who made the first overtures to Edgar, not he to her? It might be pity only for her long constancy that had drawn him to her, and the sight of this woman's beautiful face might have melted away that false sentiment. When the thoughts once fall to such a catastrophe as this, the velocity with which they go (does not science say so?) doubles moment by moment. I cannot tell you to what a pitch of misery Gussy had worn herself before the end of that long—terribly long, silent, and hopeless Spring day.

CHAPTER XII.

LOCH ARROCH ONCE MORE.

EDGAR and Margaret (accompanied, as she always was, by her child) arrived at Loch Arroch early on the morning of the second day. They were compelled to stay in Glasgow all night—she with friends she had there, he in an inn. It was a rainy, melancholy morning when they got into the steamer, and crossed the broad Clyde, and wound upward among the hills to Loch Arroch Head, where Robert Campbell, with an aspect of formal solemnity, waited with his gig to drive them to the farm.

“You’re in time—oh ay, you’re in time; but little more,” he said, and went on at

intervals in a somewhat solemn monologue, as they drove down the side of the grey and misty loch, under dripping cloaks and umbrellas. "She's been failing ever since the new year," he said. "It's no to be wondered at, at her age; neither should we sorrow, as them that are without hope. She's lived a good and useful life, and them that she brought into the world have been enabled to smoothe her path out of it. We've nothing to murmur at; she'll be real glad to see you both—you, Marg'ret, and you, Mr. Edgar. Often does she speak of you. It's a blessing of Providence that her life has been spared since the time last Autumn when we all thought she was going. She's had a real comfortable evening time, with the light in it, poor old granny, as she had a right to, if any erring mortal can be said to have a right. And now, there's Willie restored, that was thought to be dead and gone."

"Has Willie come back?" asked Margaret hastily.

“He’s expected,” said Robert Campbell, with a curious dryness, changing the lugubrious tone of his voice; “and I hope he’ll turn out an altered man; but it’s no every-one going down to the sea in ships that sees the wisdom o’ the Lord in the great waters, as might be hoped.”

The rain blew in their faces, the mists came down over the great mountain range which separates Loch Arroch from Loch Long, and the Castle Farm lay damp and lonely in its little patch of green, with the low ruins on the other side of the house shining brown against the cut fields and the slaty blueness of the loch. It was not a cheerful prospect, nor was it cheerful to enter the house itself, full of the mournful bustle and suppressed excitement of a dying—that high ceremonial, to which, in respect, or reverence, or dire curiosity, or acquisitiveness, more dreadful still, so many spectators throng in the condition of life to which all Mrs. Murray’s household belonged.

In the sitting-room there were several people seated. Mrs. MacColl, the youngest daughter, in her mother's chair, with her handkerchief to her eyes, and Mrs. Campbell opposite, telling her sister, who had but lately arrived, the details of the illness; Jeanie MacColl, who had come with her mother, sat listlessly at the window, looking out, depressed by the day and the atmosphere, and the low hum of talk, and all the dismal accessories of the scene. James Murray's wife, a hard-featured, homely person, plain in attire, and less refined in manner than any of the others, went and came between the parlour and the kitchen.

"They maun a' have their dinner," she said to Bell, "notwithstanding that there's a dying person in the house;" and with the corners of her mouth drawn down, and an occasional sigh making itself audible, she laid the cloth, and prepared the table.

Now and then a sound in the room above would make them pause and listen—for, indeed, at any moment they might all be

called to witness the exit of the departing soul. Bell's steps in the kitchen, which were unsubduable in point of sound, ran through all the more gentle stir of this melancholy assembly. Bell was crying over her work, pausing now and then to go into a corner, and wipe the tears from her cheeks; but she could not make her footsteps light, or diminish the heaviness of her shoes.

There was a little additional bustle when the strangers arrived, and Margaret and her child, who were wrapped up in cloaks and shawls, were taken into the kitchen to have their wraps taken off, and to be warmed and comforted. Edgar gave his own dripping coat to Bell, and stole upstairs out of "the family," in which he was not much at home. Little Jeanie had just left her grandmother's room on some necessary errand, when he appeared at the top of the stair. She gave a low cry, and the little tray she was carrying trembled in her hands. Her eyes were large with watching, and her cheeks

pale, and the sudden sight of him was almost more than the poor little heart could bear ; but, after a moment's silence, Jeanie, with an effort, recovered that command of herself which is indispensable to women.

“ Oh ! but she'll be glad—glad to see you !” she cried—“ it's you she's aye cried for night and day.”

Edgar stood still and held her hand, looking into the soft little face, in which he saw only a tender sorrow, not harsh or despairing, but deep and quiet.

“ Before even I speak of her,” he said, “ my dear little Jeanie, let me say how happy I am to hear about your brother—he is safe after all.”

Jeanie's countenance was moved, like the loch under the wind. Her great eyes, diluted with sorrow, swelled full ; a pathetic smile came upon her lips.

“ He was dead, and is alive again,” she said softly ; “ he was lost and is found.”

“ And now you will not be alone, whatever happens,” said Edgar.

I don't know what mixture of poignant pain came over the grateful gleam in little Jeanie's face. She drew her hand from him, and hastened downstairs. "What does it matter to him, what does it matter to anyone, how lonely I am?" was the thought that went through her simple heart. Only one creature in the world had ever cared, chiefly, above everything else, for Jeanie's happiness, and that one was dying, not to be detained by any anxious hold. Jeanie, simple as she was, knew better than to believe that anything her brother could give her would make up for what she was about to lose.

Edgar went into the sick-room reverently, as if he had been going into a holy place. Mrs. Murray lay propped up with pillows on the bed. For the first moment it seemed to him that the summons which brought him there must have been altogether uncalled for and foolish. The old woman's eyes were as bright and soft as Jeanie's; the pale faint pink of a Winter rose lingered in

her old cheeks ; her face seemed smoothed out of many of the wrinkles which he used to know ; and expanded into a calm and largeness of peace which filled him with awe. Was it that all mortal anxieties, all fears and questions of the lingering day were over ? By the bedside, in her own chair, sat the minister of the parish, an old man, older than herself, who had known her all her life. He had been reading to her, with a voice more tremulous than her own ; and the two old people had been talking quietly and slowly of the place to which they were so near. I have no doubt that in the pulpit old Mr. Campbell, like other divines, talked of golden streets, and harps and crowns, in the new Jerusalem above. But here there was little room for such anticipations. A certain wistfulness was in their old eyes, for the veil before them was still impenetrable, though they were so near it ; but they were not excited.

“ You’re sure of finding Him,” the old man was saying ; “ and where He is, there shall His people be.”

“Ay,” said Mrs. Murray. “And, oh! it’s strange lying here, no sure sometimes if it’s me or no; no sure which me it is—an auld woman or a young woman; and then to think that a moment will make a’ clear.”

This was the conversation that Edgar interrupted. She held out her withered hand to him with a glow of joy that lighted up her face.

“*My* son,” she said. There was something in the words that seemed to fill the room, Edgar thought, with an indescribable warmth and fulness of meaning, yet with that strange uncertainty which belongs to the last stage of life. He felt that she might be identifying him, unawares, with some lost son of thirty years ago, not forgetting his own individuality, yet mingling the two in one image. “This is the one I told you of,” she said, turning to her old friend.

“He is like his mother,” said the old man dreamily, putting out a hand of silent welcome.

They might have been two spirits talk-

ing over him, Edgar felt, as he stood, young, anxious, careful, and troubled, between the two who were lingering so near the calm echoes of the eternal sea.

“You’ve come soon, soon, my bonnie man,” said Mrs. Murray, holding his hand between hers; “and, oh, but I’m glad to see you! Maybe it’s but a fancy, and maybe it’s sinful vanity, but, minister, when I look at him, he minds me o’ mysel’. Ye’ll say it’s vain—the like of him, a comely young man, and me; but it’s no in the outward appearance. I’ve had much, much to do in my generation,” she said, slowly looking at him, with a smile in her eyes. “And, Edgar, my bonnie lad, I’m thinking, so will you——”

“Don’t think of me,” he said; “but tell me how you are. You are not looking ill, my dear old mother. You will be well again before I go.”

“Oh! ay, I’ll be well again,” she said. “I’m no ill—I’m only slipping away; but I would like to say out my say. The minis-

ter has his ain way in the pulpit," she went on, with a smile of soft humour, and with a slowness and softness of utterance which looked like the very perfection of art to cover her weakness; "and so may I on my death-bed, my bonnie man. As I was saying, I've had much, much to do in my generation, Edgar—and so will you."

She smoothed his hand between her own, caressing it, and looking at him always with a smile.

"And you may say it's been for little, little enough," she went on. "Ah! when my bairns were bairns, how muckle I thought of them! I toiled, and I toiled, and rose up early and lay down late, aye thinking they must come to mair than common folk. It was vanity, minister, vanity; I ken that weel. You need not shake your head. God be praised, it's no a' in a moment you find out the like o' that. But I'm telling you, Edgar, to strengthen your heart. They're just decent men and decent women, nae mair—and I've great, great reason to be

thankful ; and it's you, my bonnie man, the seed that fell by the wayside—none o' my training, none o' my nourishing——Eh ! how the Lord maun smile at us whiles,” she added, slowly, one lingering tear running over her eyelid, “and a' our vain hopes !—no laugh. He's ower tender for that.”

“Or weep, rather,” said Edgar, penetrated by sympathetic understanding of the long-concealed, half-fantastic pang of wounded love and pride, which all these years had wrung silently the high heart now so near being quieted for ever. She could smile now at her own expectations and vanities—but what pathos was in the smile !

“We must not put emotions like our own into His mind that's over all,” said the old minister. “Smiling or weeping's no for Him.”

• “Eh, but I canna see that,” said the old woman. “Would He be kinder down yonder by the Sea of Tiberias than He is up there in His ain house ? It's at hame that the gentle heart's aye kindest, minister.

Mony a day I've wondered if it mightna be just like our own loch, that Sea of Galilee—the hills about, and the white towns, as it might be Loch Arroch Head (though it's more grey than white), and the fishing-cobbles. But I'm wandering—I'm wandering. Edgar, my bonnie man, you're tired and hungry; go down the stair and get a rest, and something to eat."

Little though Edgar was disposed to resume the strange relationship which linked him to the little party of homely people in the farm parlour, with whom he felt so little sympathy, he had no alternative but to obey. The early dinner was spread when he got downstairs, and a large gathering of the family assembled round the table. All difference of breeding and position disappear, we are fond of saying, in a common feeling—a touch of nature makes the whole world kin; but Edgar felt, I am afraid, more like the unhappy parson at tithing time, in Cowper's verses, than any less prosaic hero. With whimsical misery he felt the trouble of

being too fine for his company—he, the least fine of mortal men.

Margaret, upon whom his eye lingered almost lovingly, as she appeared among the rest, a lily among briars, was not ill at ease as he was; perhaps, to tell the truth, she was more entirely at her ease than when she had sat, on her guard, and very anxious not to “commit any solecism,” at Lady Mary’s table. To commit a solecism was the bugbear which had always been held before her by her brother, whose fears on this account made his existence miserable. But here Margaret felt the sweetness of her own superiority, without being shocked by the homeliness of the others. She had made a hurried visit to her grandmother, and had cried, and had been comforted, and was now smiling softly at them all, full of content and pleasant anticipations. Jeanie, who never left her grandmother, was not present; the Campbells, the Mac-colls and the Murrays formed the company, speaking low, yet eating heartily, who thus waited for

the death which was about to take place above.

“I never thought you would have got away so easy,” said Mrs. Campbell. “I would scarcely let your uncle write. ‘How can she leave Charles, and come such a far gait, maybe just for an hour or two?’ I said. But here you are, Margaret, notwithstanding a’ my doubts. Ye’ll have plenty of servant-maids, and much confidence in them, that ye can leave so easy from a new place?”

“We are not in our house yet, and we have no servant,” said Margaret. “Charles is in lodgings, with a very decent person. It was easy enough to get away.”

“Lodgings are awful expensive,” said Mrs. Mac-coll. “I’m sure when we were in lodgings, Mr. Mac-coll and me, the Exhibition year, I dare not tell what it cost. You should get into a house of your ain—a doctor is never anything thought of without a house of his ain.”

“I hope you found the information correct?” said Robert Campbell, addressing

Edgar. "The woman at Dalmally minded the couple fine. It was the same name as your auld friend yonder," and he pointed with his thumb over his left shoulder, to denote England, or Arden, or the world in general. "One of the family, perhaps?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I want to spy into no secrets. Things of this kind are often turning up. They may say what they like against our Scotch law, but it prevents villainy now and then, that's certain. Were you interested for the man or the leddy, if it's a fair question? For it all depends upon that."

"In neither of them," said Edgar. "It was a third party, whom they had injured, that I cared for. When is—Jeanie's brother—expected back?"

"He may come either the day or the morn," said Mrs. Mac-coll. "I wish he was here, for mother's very weak. Do you not think she's weaker since the morning? I thought her looking just wonderful when I saw her first, but at twelve o'clock— What did the doctor think?"

“He canna tell more than the rest of us,” said James Murray’s wife. “She’s going fast—that’s all that can be said.”

And then there was a little pause, and everybody looked sad for the moment. They almost brightened up, however, when some hasty steps were heard overhead, and suspended their knives and forks and listened. Excitement of this kind is hard to support for a stretch. Nature longs for a crisis, even when the crisis is more terrible than their mild sorrow could be supposed to be. When it appeared, however, that nothing was about to happen, and the steps overhead grew still again, they all calmed down and resumed their dinner, which was an alleviation of the tedium.

“She’s made a’ the necessary dispositions?” said James Murray’s wife, interrogatively. “My man is coming by the next steamer. No that there can be very muckle to divide.”

“Nothing but auld napery, and the auld sticks of furniture. It will bring very little—and the cow,” said Robert Campbell.

“Jean likes the beast, so we were thinking of making an offer for the cow.”

“You’ll no think I’m wanting to get anything by my mother’s death,” said Mrs. Mac-coll; “for I’m real well off, the Lord be thanked! with a good man, and the bairns doing well; I would rather give than take, if there was any occasion; but Robert has aye had a great notion of the old clock on the stairs. There’s a song about it that one of the lassies sings. I would like that, to keep the bairns in mind o’ their granny. She’s been a kind granny to them all.”

She put her handkerchief to her eyes, and Margaret and Jeanie Mac-coll cried a little. The rest of the company shook their heads, and assented in different tones.

“Real good and kind, good and kind to everybody! Ower guid to some that little deserved it!” was the general burden, for family could not but have its subdued fling at family, even in this moment of melancholy accord.

“You are forgetting,” said Edgar, “the only one of the family who is not provided for. What my grandmother leaves should be for little Jeanie. She is the only helpless one of all.”

At this there was a little murmur round the table, of general objection.

“Jeanie has had far more than her share already,” said one.

“She’s no more to granny than all the rest of the bairns,” cried another.

Robert Campbell, the only other man present, raised his voice, and made himself heard.

“Jeanie will never want,” he said ; “here’s her brother come back, no very much of a man, but still with heart enough in him to keep her from wanting. Willie’s but a roving lad, but the very rovingness of him is good for this, that he’ll not marry ; and Jeanie will have a support, till she gets a man, which is aye on the cards for such a bonnie lass.”

This was said with more than one mean-

ing. Edgar saw Margaret's eyelashes flutter on her cheek, and she moved a little uneasily, as though unable to restrain all evidence of a painful emotion. Just at this moment, however, a shadow darkened the window. Margaret, more keenly on the watch than anyone, lifted her eyes suddenly, and, rising to her feet, uttered a low cry. A young man in sailor's dress came into the room, with a somewhat noisy greeting.

“What, all of you here! What luck!” he cried. “But where's granny?”

He had to be hushed into silence, and to have all the circumstances explained to him; while Jeanie Mac-coll, half-reluctant to go, was sent upstairs to call her cousin and namesake, and to take her place as nurse for the moment. Edgar called her back softly, and offered himself for this duty. He cast a glance at the returned prodigal as he left the room, the brother for whom Jeanie had taken him, and whom everybody had acknowledged his great likeness to.

Edgar looked at him with mingled amusement and curiosity, to see what he himself must look like. Perhaps Willie had not improved during his adventurous cruise. Edgar did not think much of himself as reflected in his image; and how glad he was to escape from his uncle and his aunt, and their family talk, to the stillness and loftier atmosphere of the death-chamber upstairs!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END OF A DRAMA.

MRS. MURRAY lived two days longer. They were weary days to Edgar. It seems hard to grudge another hour, another moment to the dying, but how hard are those last lingerings, when hope is over, when all work is suspended, and a whole little world visibly standing still, till the lingerer can make up his mind to go! The sufferer herself was too human, too deeply experienced in life, not to feel the heavy interval as much as they did. "I'm grieved, grieved," she said, with that emphatic repetition which the Scotch peasant uses in common with all naturally eloquent races, "to

keep you waiting, bairns." Sometimes she said this with a wistful smile, as claiming their indulgence; sometimes with a pang of consciousness that they were as weary as she was. She had kissed and blessed her prodigal returned, and owned to herself with a groan, which was, however, breathed into her own breast, and of which no one was the wiser, that Willie, too, was "no more than common folk."

I cannot explain more than the words themselves do how this high soul in homely guise felt the pang of her oft-repeated disappointment. Children and grandchildren, she had fed them not with common food, the bread earned with ordinary labours, but with her blood, like the pelican; with the toil of man and woman, of ploughman and hero, all mingled into one. High heart, heroic in her weakness as in her strength! They had turned out but "common folk," and, at each successive failure, that pang had gone through and through her which common folk could not comprehend. She

looked at Willie the last, with a mingled pleasure and anguish in her dying mind—I say pleasure, and not joy, for the signs of his face were not such as to give that last benediction of happiness. Nature was glad in her to see the boy back whom she had long believed at the bottom of the sea; but her dying eyes looked at him wistfully, trying to penetrate his heart, and reach its excuses.

“You should have written, to ease our minds,” she said gently.

“How was I to know you would take it to heart so? Many a man has stayed away longer, and no harm come of it,” cried Willie, self-defending.

The old woman put her hand upon his bended head, as he sat by her bedside, half sullen, half sorry. She stroked his thick curling locks softly, saying nothing for a few long silent moments. She did not blame him further, nor justify him, but simply was silent. Then she said,

“You will take care of your sister,

Willie, as I have taken care of her? She has suffered a great deal for you."

"But oh!" cried Jeanie, when they were alone together—kneeling by the bedside, with her face upon her grandmother's hand, "you never called him but Willie—you never spoke to him soft and kind, as you used to do."

"Was I no kind?" said the dying woman, with a mingled smile and sigh; but she kept "My bonnie man!" her one expression of homely fondness, for Edgar's ear alone.

They had more than one long conversation before her end came. Edgar was always glad to volunteer to relieve the watchers in her room, feeling infinitely more at home there than with the others below. On the night before her death, she told him of the arrangements she had made.

"You gave me your fortune, Edgar, ower rashly, my bonnie man. Your deed was so worded, they tell me, that I might have willed your siller away from you, had I no been an honest woman."

“And so I meant,” said Edgar, though he was not very clear that at the time he had any meaning at all. “And there is Jeanie——”

“You will not take Jeanie upon you,” said the old woman—“I charge ye not to do it. The best thing her brother can have to steady him and keep him right, is the thought of Jeanie’ on his hands—Jeanie to look for him when he comes home. You’ll mind what I say. Meddling with nature is aye wrong; I’ve done it in my day, and I’ve repented. To make a’ sure, I’ve left a will, Edgar, giving everything to you—everything. What is it? My auld napery, and the auld, auld remains of my mother’s—most of it her spinning and mine. Give it to your aunts, Edgar, for they’ll think it their due; but keep a something—what are the auld rags worth to you?—keep a little piece to mind me by—a bit of the fine auld damask—so proud as I was of it once! I’ve nae rings nor bonny-dies, like a grand leddy, to keep you in mind of me.”

She spoke so slowly that these words took her a long time to say, and they were interrupted by frequent pauses; but her voice had not the painful labouring which is so common at such a moment; it was very low, but still sweet and clear. Then she put out her hand, still so fine, and soft, and shapely, though the nervous force had gone out of it, upon Edgar's arm.

"I'm going where I'll hear nothing of you, maybe, for long," she said. "I would like to take all the news with me—for there's them to meet yonder that will want to hear. There's something in your eye, my bonnie man, that makes me glad. You're no just as you were—there's more light and more life. Edgar, you're seeing your way?"

Then, in the silence of the night, he told her all his tale. The curtains had been drawn aside, that she might see the moon shining over the hills. The clearest still night had succeeded many days of rain; the soft "hus-sh" of the loch lapping upon the beach was the only sound that broke the

great calm. He sat between her and that vision of blue sky and silvered hill which was framed in by the window ; by his side a little table, with a candle on it, which lighted one side of his face ; behind him the shadowy dimness of the death-chamber ; above him that gleam of midnight sky. He saw nothing but her face ; she looked wistfully, fondly, as on a picture she might never see more, upon all the circumstances of this scene. He told her everything—more than he ever told to mortal after her—how he had been able to serve Clare, and how she had been saved from humiliation and shame ; how he had met Gussy, and found her faithful ; and how he was happy at the present moment, already loved and trusted, but happier still in the life that lay before him, and the woman who was to share it. She listened to every word with minute attention, following him with little exclamations, and all the interest of youth.

“And oh ! now I’m glad !” cried the

old woman, making feeble efforts, which wasted almost all the little breath left to her, to draw something from under her pillow—"I'm glad I have something that I never would part with. You'll take her this, Edgar—you'll give her my blessing. Tell her my man brought me this when I was a bride. It's marked out mony a weary hour and mony a light one; it's marked the time of births and of deaths. When my John died, my man, it stoppit at the moment, and it was long, long or I had the heart to wind it again and set it going. It's worn now, like me; but you'll bid her keep it, Edgar, my bonnie man! You'll give her my blessing, and you'll bid her to keep it, for your old inother's sake."

Trembling, she put into his hand an old watch, which he had often seen, but never before so near. It was large and heavy, in an old case of coppery gold, half hid under partially-effaced enamel, wanting everything that a modern watch should have, but precious as an antiquity and work of art.

“ A trumpery thing that cost five pounds would please *them* better,” she said. “ It’s nae value, but it’s old, old, and came to John from a far-off forbear. You’ll give it to her with my blessing. Ay, blessings on her !—blessings on her sweet face !—for sweet it’s bound to be ; and blessings on her wise heart, that’s judged weel ! eh, but I’m glad to have one thing to send her. And, Edgar, now I’ve said all my say, turn me a little, that I may see the moon. Heaven’s but a step on such a bonnie night. If I’m away before the morning, you’ll shed nae tear, but praise the Lord the going’s done. No, dinna leave it ; take it away. Put it into your breast-pocket, where you canna lose it. And now say fare-ye-weel to your old mother, my bonnie man.”

These were the last words she said to him alone. When some one came to relieve him, Edgar went out with a full heart into the silvery night. Not a sound of humanity broke the still air, which yet had in it a sharpness of the spring frosts. The loch

rose and fell upon its pebbles, as if it hushed its own very waves in sorrow. The moon shone as if with a purpose—as if holding her lovely lamp to light some beloved way-farer up the shining slope.

“Heaven’s but a step on such a night,” he said to himself, with tears of which his manhood was not ashamed. And so the moon lighted the traveller home.

With the very next morning the distractions of common earth returned. Behind the closed shutters, the women began to examine the old napery, and the men to calculate what the furniture, the cow, the cocks and hens would bring. James Murray valued it all, pencil and notebook in hand. Nothing would have induced the family to show so little respect as to shorten the six or seven days’ interval before the funeral, but it was a very tedious interval for them all. Mrs. Campbell drove off with her husband to her own house on the second day, and James Murray returned to Greenock; but the Mac-colls stayed, and Margaret, and

made their "blacks" in the darkened room below, and spoke under their breath, and wearied for the funeral day which should release them.

Margaret, perhaps, was the one on whom this interval fell most lightly; but yet Margaret had her private sorrows, less easy to bear than the natural grief which justified her tears. The sailor Willie paid but little attention to her beauty and her pathetic looks. He was full of plans about his little sister, about taking her with him on his next voyage, to strengthen her and "divert" her; and poor Margaret, whose heart had gone out of her breast at first sight of him, as it had done in her early girlhood, felt her heart sicken with the neglect, yet could not believe in it. She could not believe in his indifference, in his want of sympathy with those feelings which had outlived so many other things in her mind. She went to Edgar a few days after their grandmother's death with a letter in her hand. She went to him for advice, and I cannot tell what it

was she wished him to advise her. She did not know herself; she wanted to do two things, and she could but with difficulty and at a risk to herself do one.

“This is a letter I have got from Mr. Thornleigh,” she said, with downcast looks. “Oh! Cousin Edgar, my heart is breaking! Will you tell me what to do?”

Harry’s letter was hot and desperate, as was his mind. He implored her, with abject entreaties, to marry him, not to cast him off; to remember that for a time she had smiled upon him, or seemed to smile upon him, and not to listen now to what anyone might say who should seek to prejudice her against him. “What does my family matter when I adore you?” cried poor Harry, unwittingly betraying himself. And he begged her to send him one word, only one word—permission to come down and speak for himself. Edgar felt, as he read this piteous epistle, like the wolf into whose fangs a lamb had thrust its unsuspecting head.

“How can I advise you how to answer?” he said, giving her back the letter, glad to get it out of his hands. “You must answer according to what is in your heart.”

Upon this Margaret wept, wringing her lily hands.

“Mr. Edgar,” she said, “you cannot think that I am not moved by such a letter. Oh! I’m not mercenary, I don’t think I am mercenary! but to have all this put at my feet, to feel that it would be for Charles’s good and for Sibby’s good, if I could make up my mind!”

Here she stopped, and cast a glance back at the house again. Edgar had been taking a melancholy walk along the side of the loch, where she had joined him. Her heart was wrung by a private conflict, which she could not put into words, but which he divined. He felt sure of it, from all he had seen and heard since they came, as well as from the impression conveyed to his mind the moment she had named the sailor Willie’s name. I do not know why it

should be humbling for a woman to love without return, when it is not humbling for a man; but it is certain that for nothing in the world would Margaret have breathed the cause of her lingering unwillingness to do anything which should separate her from Willie; and that Edgar felt hot and ashamed for her, and turned away his eyes, that she might not see any insight in them. At the same time, however, the question had another side for him, and involved his own fortunes. He tried to dismiss this thought altogether out of his mind, but it was hard to do so. Had she loved Harry Thornleigh, Edgar would have felt himself all the more pledged to impartiality, because this union would seriously endanger his own; but to help to ruin himself by encouraging a mercenary marriage, this would be hard indeed!

“Are you sure that you would get so many advantages?—to Charles and to Sibby?” he cried, with a coldness impossible to conceal.

She looked at him startled, the tears arrested in her blue eyes. She had never doubted upon this point. Could she make up her mind to marry Harry, every external advantage that heart could desire she felt would be secured. This first doubt filled her with dismay.

“Would I no?” she cried, faltering. “He is a rich man’s heir, Lady Mary’s nephew—a rich gentleman. Oh! Cousin Edgar, what will you think of me? I have always been poor, and Charles is poor—how can I put that out of my mind?”

“I do not blame you,” said Edgar, feeling ashamed both of himself and her. And then he added, “He is a rich man’s son, but his father is not old; and he would not receive you gladly into his family. Forgive me that I say so—I ought to tell you that I am not a fair judge. I am going to marry Harry’s sister, and they object very much to me.”

“Object to *you!*—they are ill to please,” cried Margaret, with simple natural indigna-

tion. "But if you were in the family, that would make things easier for us," she added, wistfully, looking up in his face.

"You have made up your mind, then, to run the risk?" said Edgar, feeling his heart sink.

"I did not say that." She gave another glance at the house again. Willie was standing at the door, in the morning sunshine, and beckoned to her to come back. She turned to him, as a flower turns to the sun. "No, I am far, far from saying that," said the young woman, with a mixture of sadness and gladness, turning to obey the summons.

Edgar stood still, looking after her with wondering gaze. The good-looking sailor, whose likeness to himself did not make him proud, was a poor creature enough to be as the sun in the heavens to this beautiful, stately young woman, who looked as if she had been born to be a princess. What a strange world it is, and how doubly strange is human nature! Willie had but to hold up a finger,

and Margaret would follow him to the end of the earth ; though the rest of his friends judged him rightly enough, and though even little Jeanie, though she loved, could scarcely approve her brother, Margaret was ready to give up even her hope of wealth and state, which she loved, for this Sultan's notice. Strange influence, which no man could calculate upon, which no prudence restrained, nor higher nor lower sentiment could quite subdue !

Edgar followed his beautiful cousin to the house with pitying eyes. He did not want her to marry Harry Thornleigh, but even to marry Harry Thornleigh, though she did not love him, seemed less degrading than to hang upon the smile, the careless whistle to his hand, of a man so inferior to her. I don't know if, in reality, Willie was inferior to Margaret. She, for one, would have been quite satisfied with him ; but great beauty creates an atmosphere about it which dazzles the beholder. It was not fit, Edgar felt, in spite of himself, that a woman

so lovely should thus be thrown away.

As this is but an episode in my story, I may here follow Margaret's uncomfortable wooing to its end. Poor Harry, tantalized and driven desperate by a letter, which seemed, to Margaret, the most gently temporising in the world, and which was intended to keep him from despair, and to retain her hold upon him until Willie's purposes were fully manifested, at last made his appearance at Loch Arroch Head, where she was paying the Campbells a visit, on the day after Edgar left the loch. He came determined to hear his fate decided one way or another, almost ill with the excitement in which he had been kept, wilder than ever in the sudden passion which had seized upon him like an evil spirit. He met her, on his unexpected arrival, walking with Willie, who, having nothing else to do, did not object to amuse his leisure with his beautiful cousin, whose devotion to him, I fear, he knew. Poor Margaret! I know her behaviour was ignoble, but I regret—as I have

confessed to the reader—that she did not become the great lady she might have been ; and, notwithstanding that Edgar's position would have been deeply complicated thereby, I wish the field had been left clear for Harry Thornleigh, who would have made her a good enough husband, and to whom she would have made, in the end, a very sweet wife. . Forgive me, young romancist, I cannot help this regret. Even at that moment Margaret did not want to lose her young English Squire, and her friends were so far from wanting to lose him that Harry, driven to dire disgust, hated them ever after with a strenuous hatred, which he transferred to their nation generally, not knowing any better. He lingered for a day or more, waiting for the answer which Margaret was unwilling to give, and tortured by Willie, who, seeing the state of affairs, felt his vanity involved, and was more and more loverlike to his cousin. The issue was that Harry rushed away at last half mad, and went abroad, and wasted his substance more

than he had ever done up to that moment, damaged his reputation, and encumbered his patrimony, and fell into that state of cynical disbelief in everybody, which, bad as are its effects even upon the cleverest and brightest intelligence, has a worse influence still upon the stupid, to whom there is no possibility of escape from its withering power.

When Harry was fairly off the scene, his rival slackened in his attentions ; and after a while Margaret returned to her brother, and they did their best to retrieve their standing at Tottenham's, and to make the position of the doctor's family at Harbour Green a pleasant one. But Lady Mary, superior to ordinary prejudices as she was, was not so superior as to be altogether just to Margaret, who, though she deserved blame, got more blame than she deserved. The Thornleighs all believed that she had "laid herself out" to "entrap" Harry—which was not the case ; and Lady Mary looked coldly upon the woman who had permitted herself

to be loved by a man so far above her sphere. And then Lady Mary disliked the doctor, who never could think even of the most interesting "case" so much as to be indifferent to what people were thinking of himself. So Harbour Green proved unsuccessful, as their other experiments had proved, and the brother and sister drifted off again into the world, where they drift still, from place to place, always needy, anxious, afraid of their gentility, yet with that link of fraternal love between them, and with that toleration of each other and mutual support, which gives a certain beauty, wherever they go, to the family group formed by this handsome brother and sister, and the beautiful child, whom her uncle cherishes almost as dearly as her mother does.

Ah, me! if Margaret had made that "good match," though it was not all for love, would it not have been better for everybody concerned?

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER WINDING UP.

I HOPE it will not give the reader a poor idea of Edgar's heart if I say that it was with a relief which it was impossible to exaggerate that he felt the last dreary day of darkness pass, and was liberated from his melancholy duties. This did not affect his sorrow for the noble old woman who had made him at once her confidant and her inheritor—inheritor not of land or wealth, but of something more subtle and less tangible. But indeed for her there was no sorrow needed. Out of perennial disappointments she had gone to her kind, to those with whom she could no longer be

disappointed. Heaven had been "but a step" to her, which she took smiling. For her the hearse, the black funeral, the nodding plumes, were inappropriate enough; but they pleased the family, of whom it never could be said by any detractor that they had not paid to their mother "every respect."

Edgar felt that his connection with them was over for ever when he took leave of them on the evening of the funeral. The only one over whom his heart yearned a little was Jeanie, who was the true mourner of the only mother she had ever known, but who, in the midst of her mourning, poor child, felt another pang, perhaps more exquisite, at the thought of seeing him, too, no more. All the confusion of sentiment and feeling, of misplaced loves and indifferences, which make up the world were in this one little family. Jeanie had given her visionary child's heart to Edgar, who, half aware of, half disowning the gift, thought of her ever with tender sympathy

and reverence, as of something sacred. Margaret, less exquisite in her sentiments, yet a loving soul in her way, had given hers to Willie, who was vain of her preference, and laughed at it—who felt himself a finer fellow, and she a smaller creature because she loved him. Dr. Charles, uneasy soul, would have given his head had he dared to marry Jeanie, yet would not, even had she cared for him, have ventured to burden his tottering gentility with a wife so homely.

Thus all were astray from the end which might have made each a nobler and certainly a happier creature. Edgar never put these thoughts into words, for he was too chivalrous a man even to allow to himself that a woman had given her heart to him unsought; but the complications of which he was conscious filled him with a vague pang—as the larger complications of the world—that clash of interests, those broken threads, that never meet, those fulnesses and needinesses, which never can be brought to bear upon each other—perplex and pain the

spectator. He was glad, as we all are, to escape from them ; and when he reached London, where his love was, and where, the first thing he found on his arrival was the announcement of his appointment, his heart rose with a sudden leap, spurning the troubles of the past, in elastic revulsion. He had his little fortune again, not much, at any time, but yet something, which Gussy could hang at her girdle, and his old mother's watch for her, quaint, but precious possession. He was scarcely anxious as to his reception, though she had written him but one brief note since his absence ; for Edgar was himself so absolutely true that it did not come into his heart that he could be doubted. But he could not go to Gussy at once, even on his arrival. Another and a less pleasant task remained for him. He had to meet his sister at the hotel she had gone to, and be present at the clandestine marriage—for it was no better—which was at last to unite legally the lives of Arthur Arden and Clare.

Clare had arrived in town the evening before. He found her waiting for him, in her black dress, her children by her, in black also. She was still as pale as when he left her at Arden, but she received him with more cordiality than she had shown when parting with him. There was something in her eyes which alarmed him—an occasional vagueness, almost wildness.

“We did wrong, Edgar,” she said, when the children were sent away, and they were left together—“we did wrong.”

“In what did we do wrong, Clare?”

“In ever thinking of those—those papers. We should have burnt them, you and I together. What was it to anyone what happened between us? We were the sole Ardens of the family—the only ones to be consulted.”

“Clare! Clare! I am no Arden at all. Would you have had me live on a lie all my life, and build my own comfort upon some one else’s wrong?”

“You were always too high-flown, Ed-

gar," she said, with the practical quiet of old. "Why did you come to me whenever you heard that trouble was coming? Because you were my brother. Instinct proves it. If you are my brother, then it is you who should be master at Arden, and not—anyone else."

"It is true I am your brother," he said, sitting down by her, and looking tenderly into her colourless face.

"Then we were wrong, Edgar—we were wrong—I know we were wrong; and now we must suffer for it," she said, with a low moan. "My boy will be like you, the heir, and yet not the heir; but for him I will do more than I did for you. I will not stop for lying. What is a lie? A lie does not break you off from your life."

"Does it not? Clare, if you would think a moment——"

"Oh! I think!" she cried—"I think!—I do nothing but think! Come, now, we must not talk any more; it is time to go."

They drove together in a street cab to an

obscure street in the city, where there was a church which few people ever entered. I doubt if this choice was so wise as they thought, but the incumbent was old, the clerk old, and everything in their favour, so far as secrecy was concerned. Arthur Arden met them there, pale, but eager as any bridegroom could be. Clare had her veil—a heavy veil of black lace—over her face; the very pew-opener shuddered at such a dismal wedding, and naturally all the three officials, clergyman, clerk, and old woman, exerted all their aged faculties to penetrate the mystery. The bridal party went back very silently in another cab to Clare's hotel, where Arthur Arden saw his children, seizing upon them with hungry love and caresses. He did not suspect, as Edgar did, that the play was not yet played out.

“You have never said that you forgive me, Clare,” he said, after, to his amazement, she had sent her boy and girl away.

“I cannot say what I do not mean,” she

said, in a very low and tremulous voice. "I have said nothing all this time; now it is my turn to speak. Oh! don't look at me so, Edgar!—don't ask me to be merciful with your beseeching eyes! We were not merciful to you."

"What does she mean?" said Arthur Arden, looking dully at him; and then he turned to his wife. "Well, Clare, you've had occasion to be angry—I don't deny it. I don't excuse myself. I ought to have looked deeper into that old affair. But the punishment has been as great on me as on you."

"Oh, the punishment!" she cried. "What is the punishment in comparison? It is time I should tell you what I am going to do."

"There, there now!" he said, half frightened, half coaxing. "We are going home. Things will come right, and time will mend everything. No one knows but Edgar, and we can trust Edgar. I will not press you

for pardon. I will wait ; I will be patient——”

“I am not going home any more. I have no home,” she said.

“Clare, Clare!”

“Listen to what I say. I am ill. There shall be no slander—no story for the world to talk of. I have told everybody that I am going to Italy for my health. It need not even be known that you don’t go with me. I have made all my arrangements. You go your way, and I go mine. It is all settled, and there is nothing more to say.”

She rose up and stood firm before them, very pale, very shadowy, a slight creature, but immovable, invincible. Arthur Arden knew his wife less than her brother did. He tried to overcome her by protestations, by entreaties, by threats, by violence. Nothing made any impression upon her ; she had made her decision, and Heaven and earth could not turn her from it. Edgar had to

hold what place he could between them—now seconding Arden's arguments, now subduing his violence; but neither the one nor the other succeeded in their efforts. She consented to wait in London a day or two, and to allow Edgar to arrange her journey for her—a journey upon which she needed and would accept no escort—but that was all. Arden came away a broken man, on Edgar's arm, almost sobbing in his despair.

“You won't leave me, Edgar—you'll speak for me—you'll persuade her it is folly—worse than folly!” he cried.

It was long before Edgar could leave him, a little quieted by promises of all that could be done. Arden clung to him as to his last hope. Thus it was afternoon when at last he was able to turn his steps towards Berkeley Square.

Gussy knew he was to arrive in town that morning, and, torn by painful doubts as she was, every moment of delay naturally seemed to her a further evidence that

Edgar had other thoughts in his mind more important to him than she was. She had said nothing to anyone about expecting him, but within herself had privately calculated that by eleven o'clock at least she might expect him to explain everything and make everything clear. Eleven o'clock came, and Gussy grew *distracte*, and counted unconsciously the beats of the clock, with a pulsation quicker and quite as loud going on in her heart. Twelve o'clock, and her heart grew sick with the deferred hope, and the explanation seemed to grow dim and recede further and further from her. He had never mentioned Margaret in his letters, which were very short, though frequent; and Gussy knew that her brother, in wild impatience, had gone off two days before to ascertain his fate. But she was a woman, and must wait till her fate came to her, counting the cruel moments, and feeling the time pass slowly, slowly dragging its weary course. One o'clock; then luncheon, which she had to make a pretence to eat, amid the

chatter of the girls, who were so merry and so loud that she could not hear the steps without and the knocks at the door.

When they were all ready to go out after, Gussy excused herself. She had a headache, she said, and indeed she was pale enough for any headache. He deserved that she should go out as usual, and wait no longer to receive him; but she would not treat him as he deserved. When they were all gone she could watch at the window, in the shade of the curtains, to see if he was coming, going over a hundred theories to explain his conduct. That he had been mistaken in his feeling all along, and never had really cared for her; that Margaret's beauty had been too much for him, and had carried him away; that he cared for her a little, enough to fulfil his engagements, and observe a kindly sort of duty towards her, but that he had other friends to see, and business to do, more important than she was. All these fancies surged through her head

as she stood, the dark damask half hiding her light little figure at the window.

The days had lengthened, the sounds outside were sounds of spring, the trees in the square garden were coloured faintly with the first tender wash of green. Steps went and came along the pavement, carriages drew up, doors opened and shut, but no Edgar. She was just turning from the window, half blind and wholly sick with the strain, when the sound of a light, firm foot on the stair caught her ears, and Edgar made his appearance at last. There was a glow of pleasure on his face, but care and wrinkles on his forehead. Was the rush with which he came forward to her, and the warmth of his greeting, and the light on his face, fictitious? Gussy felt herself warm and brighten, too, involuntarily, but yet would have liked best to sit down in a corner and cry.

“How glad I am to find you alone!” he said. “What a relief it is to get here at last! I am tired, and dead beat, and sick

and sorry, dear. Now I can breathe and rest."

"You have been long, long of coming," said Gussy, half wearily, half reproachfully.

"Haven't I? It seems about a year since I arrived this morning, and not able to get near you till now. Gussy, tell me, first of all, did you see it?—do you know?"

"What?" Her heart was melting—all the pain and all the anger, quite unreasonably as they had risen, floating away.

"Our Consulship," he said, opening up his newspaper with one hand, and spreading it out, to be held by the other hand, on the other side of her. The two heads bent close together to look at this blessed announcement. "Not much for you, my darling—for me everything," said Edgar, with a voice in which bells of joy seemed to be ringing, dancing, jostling against each other for very gladness. "I was half afraid you would see it before I brought the news."

"I had no heart to look at the paper this morning," she said.

“No heart! Something has happened? Your father—Harry—what is it?” cried Edgar, in alarm.

“Oh! nothing,” cried Gussy, crying. “I was unhappy, that was all. I did not know what you would say to me. I thought you did not care for me. I had doubts, dreadful doubts! Don’t ask me any more.”

“Doubts—of me!” cried Edgar, with a surprised, frank laugh.

Never in her life had Gussy felt so much ashamed of herself. She did not venture to say another word about those doubts which, with such laughing, pleasant indifference, he had dismissed as impossible. She sat in a dream while he told her everything, hearing it all like a tale that she had read in a book. He brought out the old watch and gave it to her, and she kissed it and put it within her dress, and cried when he described to her the last words of his old mother. Loch Arroch and all its homely circumstances became as a scene of the Scriptures to Gussy; she seemed to see a glory

of ideal hills and waters, and the moonlight filling the sky and earth, and the loveliness of the night which made it look "but a step" between earth and heaven. Her heart grew so full over those details that Edgar, unsuspecting, never discovered the compunction which mingled in that sympathetic grief. He told her about his journey; then paused, and looked her in the eyes.

"Last year it was you who travelled with me. You were the little sister?" he said. "Ah! yes, I know it was you. You came and kissed me in my sleep——"

"Indeed I did not, sir!" cried Gussy, in high indignation. "I would not have done such a thing for all the world."

Edgar laughed, and held her so fast that she could not turn from him.

"You did in spirit," he said; "and I had it in a dream. Ever since I have had a kind of hope in my life; I dreamt that you put the veil aside, and I saw you. When I woke I could not believe it, though

I knew it; but the other sister, the real one, would not tell me your name."

"Poor sister Susan!" cried Gussy, the tears disappearing, the sunshine bursting out over all her face; "she will not like me to go back into the world."

"Nor to go out to Italy as a Consul," said Edgar, gay as a boy in his new happiness, "to talk to all the ships' captains, and find out about the harbour dues."

"Foolish! there are no ship captains, nor ships either, nor dues of any kind—"

"Nothing but the bay and the hills, and the sunsets and the moonrises; the Riviera, which means Paradise—"

"And to be together—"

"Which has the same meaning," he said. And then they stopped in this admirable fooling, and laughed the foolish laughter of mere happiness, which is not such a bad thing, when one can have it, once in a way.

"What a useless, idle, Sybarite life you have sketched out for us!" Gussy said at last. "I hope it is not a mere sunshiny sine-

cure. I hope there is something to do.”
“I am very good at doing nothing,”
Edgar replied—too glad, at last, to return to homely reality and matter of fact; and until the others came home, these two talked as much nonsense as it is given to the best of us to talk; and got such good of it as no words can describe.

When Lady Augusta returned, she pretended to frown upon Edgar, and smiled; and then gave him her hand, and then inclined her cheek towards him. They had the paper out again, and she shook her head; then kissed Gussy, and told them that Spezzia was the most lovely place in all the world. Edgar stayed to dinner, as at last a recognised belonging of the household, and met Lord Granton, who was somewhat frightened of him, and respectful, having heard his praises celebrated by Mary as something more than flesh and blood; and for that evening “the Grantons” that were to be, were nobodies—not even redeemed from insignificance by the fact that

their marriage was approaching, while the other marriage was still in the clouds.

“How nice it would be if they could be on the same day!” little Mary whispered, rather, I fear, with the thought of recovering something of her natural consequence as bride than for any other reason.

“As if the august ceremonial used at an Earl’s wedding would do for a Consul’s!” cried saucy Gussy, tossing her curls as of old. And notwithstanding Edgar’s memories, and the dark shadow of Clare’s troubles that stood by his side, and the fear that now and then overwhelmed them all about Harry’s movements—in spite of all this, I do not think a merrier evening was ever spent in Berkeley Square. Gussy had been in a cloud, in a veil, for all these years; she had not thought it right to laugh much, as the Associate of a Sisterhood—which is to say that Gussy was not happy enough to want to laugh, and founded that grey, or brown, or black restriction for herself, with

the ingenuity of an unscrupulous young woman. But now sweet laughter had become again as natural to her as breath.

CHAPTER XV.

H.B.M.'S CONSUL.—CONCLUSION.

CLARE carried out her intentions, unmoved by all the entreaties addressed to her. She heard everything that was said with perfect calm; either her capabilities of emotion were altogether exhausted, or her passionate sense of wrong was too deep to show at the surface, and she was calm as a marble statue; but she was equally inflexible. Edgar turned, in spite of himself, into Arthur Arden's advocate; pleaded with her, setting forth every reason he could think of, partly against his own judgment—and failed. Her husband,

against whom she did not absolutely close her door, threw himself at her feet, and entreated, for the children's sake, for the sake of all that was most important to them both—the credit of their house, the good name of their boy. These were arguments which with Clare, in her natural mind, would have been unanswerable; but that had happened to Clare which warps the mind from its natural modes of thought. The idea of disgrace had got into her very soul, like a canker. She was unable to examine her reasons—unable to resist, even in herself, this overwhelming influence; it overcame her principles, and even her prejudices, which are more difficult to overcome. The fear of scandal, which those who knew Clare would have supposed sufficient to make her endure anything, failed totally here. She knew that her behaviour would make the world talk, and she even felt that, with this clue to some profound disagreement between her husband and herself, the whole story

might be more easily revealed, and her boy's heirship made impossible; but even with this argument she could not subdue herself, nor suffer herself to be subdued. The sense of outrage had taken possession of her; she could not forget it—could not realize the possibility of ever forgetting it. It was not that she had been brought within the reach of possible disgrace. She *was* disgraced; the very formality of the new marriage, though she consented to it without question, as a necessity, was a new outrage. In short, Clare, though she acted with a determination and steadiness which seemed to add force to her character, and showed her natural powers as nothing else had ever done, was not, for the first time in her life, a free agent. She had been taken possession of by a passionate sense of injury, which seized upon her as an evil spirit might seize upon its victim. In the very fierceness of her individual resentment, she ceased to be an individual, and became an abstraction, a woman wronged,

capable of feeling, knowing, thinking of nothing but her wrong. This made all arguments powerless, all pleas foolish. She could not admit any alternative into her mind; her powers of reasoning failed her altogether on this subject; on all others she was sane and sensible, but on this had all the onesidedness, the narrowness of madness—or of the twin-sister of madness—irrepressible and irrepressed passion.

Without knowing anything of the real facts of the story, the Thornleighs were admitted to see her, on Clare's own suggestion; for her warped mind was cunning to see where an advantage could be drawn from partial publicity. They found her on her sofa, looking, in the paleness which had now become habitual to her, like a creature vanishing out of the living world.

“Why did you not let us know you were ill? You must have been suffering long, and never complained!” cried Lady Augusta, moved almost to tears.

"Not very long," said Clare.

She had permitted her husband to be present at this interview, to keep up appearances to the last; and Arthur felt as if every word was a dart aimed at him, though I do not think she meant it so.

"Not long! My dear child, you are quite thin and wasted; this cannot have come on all at once. But Italy will do you all the good in the world," Lady Augusta added, trying to be cheerful. "*They*, you know, are going to Italy too."

"But not near where I shall be," said Clare.

"You must go further south? I am very sorry. Gussy and you would have been company for each other. You are not strong enough for company? My poor child! But once out of these cold spring winds, you will do well," said kind Lady Augusta.

But though she thus took the matter on the surface, she felt that there was more below. Her looks grew more and more

perplexed as they discussed Edgar's appointment, and the humble beginning which the young couple would make in the world.

"It is very imprudent—very imprudent," Lady Augusta said, shaking her head. "I have said all I can, Mrs. Arden, and so has Mr. Thornleigh. I don't know how they are to get on. It is the most imprudent thing I ever heard of."

"Nothing is imprudent," said Clare, with a hard, dry intonation, which took all pleasant meaning out of the words, "when you can trust fully for life or death; and my brother Edgar is one whom everybody can trust."

"At all events, we are both of us old enough to know our own minds," said Gussy, hastily, trying to laugh off this impression. "If we choose to starve together, who should prevent us?"

Arthur Arden took them to their carriage, but Lady Augusta remarked that he did not go upstairs again. "There is

something in all this more than meets the eye," she said, oracularly.

Many people suspected this, after Lady Augusta, when Clare was gone, and when it came out that Mr. Arden was not with her, but passing most of his time in London, knocking about from club to club, through all the dreary winter. He made an effort to spend his time as virtuously as possible that first year; but the second year he was more restless and less virtuous, having fallen into despair. Then everybody talked of the breach between them, and a great deal crept out that they had thought buried in silence. Even the real facts of the case were guessed at, though never fully established, and the empty house became the subject of many a tale. People remarked that there were many strange stories about the Ardens; that they had behaved very strangely to the last proprietor before Arthur; that nobody had ever heard the rights of that story, and that Edgar had been badly used.

Whilst all this went on, Clare lived gloomy and retired by herself, in a little village on the Neapolitan coast. She saw nobody, avoiding the wandering English, and everybody who could have known her in better times; and I don't know how long her reason could have stood the wear and tear, but for the illness and death of the poor little heir, whose hapless position had given the worst pang to her shame and horror. Little Arthur died, his mother scarcely believing it, refusing to think such a thing possible. Her husband had heard incidentally of the child's illness, and had hurried to the neighbourhood, scarcely hoping to be admitted. But Clare neither welcomed him nor refused him admission, but permitted his presence, and ignored it. When the child was gone, however, it was Arthur's vehement grief which first roused her out of her stupor.

"It is you who have done it!" she cried, turning upon him with eyes full of tearless passion. But she did not send him out of

her house. She felt ill, worn out in body and mind, and left everything in his hands. And by-and-by, when she came to herself, Clare allowed herself to be taken home, and fled from her duties no longer.

This was the end of their story. They were more united in the later portion of their lives than in the beginning, but they have no heir to come after them. The history of the Ardens will end with them, for the heir-at-law is distant in blood, and has a different name.

As for the other personages mentioned in this story, Mr. Tottenham still governs his shop as if it were an empire, and still comes to a periodical crisis in the shape of an Entertainment, which threatens to fail up to the last moment, and then is turned into a great success. The last thing I have heard of Tottenham's was, that it had set up a little daily newspaper of its own, written and printed on the establishment, which Mr. Tottenham thought very likely to bring forward some latent talent which

otherwise might have been lost in dissertations on the prices of cotton, or the risings and fallings of silks. After Gussy's departure, I hear the daily services fell off in the chapel; flowers were no longer placed fresh and fragrant on the temporary altar, there was no one to play the harmonium, and the attendance gradually decreased. It fell from a daily to a weekly service, and then came to an end altogether, for it was found that the young ladies and the gentlemen preferred to go out on Sunday, and to choose their own preachers after their differing tastes. How many of them strayed off to chapel instead of church, it would have broken Gussy's heart to hear. I do not think, however, that this disturbed Mr. Tottenham much, who was too viewy not to be very tolerant, and who liked himself to hear what every new opinion had to say for itself. Lady Mary was very successful with her lectures, and I hope improved the feminine mind very much at Harbour Green. She thought she improved

her own mind, which was of course a satisfaction; and did her best to transmit to little Molly very high ideas of intellectual training; but Molly was a dunce, as providentially happens often in the families of very clever people; and distinguished herself by a curious untractableness, which did not hinder her from being her mother's pride, and the sweetest of all the cousins—or so at least Lady Mary thought.

The marriage of “the Grantons” took place in April, with the greatest *éclat*. It was at Easter, when everybody was in the country; and was one of the prettiest of weddings, as well as the most magnificent, which Thornleigh ever saw. Mary's presents filled a large room to overflowing. She got everything possible and impossible that ever bride was blessed with; and the young couple went off with a maid, and a valet, and a courier, and introductions to every personage in Europe. Their movements were chronicled in the newspapers; their letters went and came in ambassa-

dorial despatch boxes. Short of royalty, there could have been nothing more splendid, more "perfectly satisfactory," as Lady Augusta said. The only drawback was that Harry would not come to his sister's wedding; but to make up for that everybody else came—all the great Hauteville connections, and Lady Augusta's illustrious family, and all the Thornleighs, to the third and fourth generations. Not only Thornleigh itself, but every house within a radius of ten miles was crowded with fine people and their servants; and the bells were rung in half a dozen parish churches in honour of the wedding. It was described fully in the *Morning Post*, with details of all the dresses, and of the bride's ornaments and *coiffure*.

"We shall have none of these fine things, I suppose," Gussy said, when it was all over, turning to Edgar with a mock sigh.

"No, my dear; and I don't see how you could expect them," said Lady Augusta. "Instead of spending our money vainly on making a great show for you, we had much better save it, to buy some useful necessary

things for your housekeeping. Mary is in quite a different case."

"Buy us pots and pans, mamma," said Gussy, laughing; "though perhaps earthen pipkins would do just as well in Italy. We shall not be such a credit to you, but we shall be much cheaper. There is always something in that."

"Ah! Gussy, it is easy to speak now; but wait till you are buried in the cares of life," said her mother, going away to superintend the arrangements for the ball in the evening. So grand a wedding was certainly very expensive; she never liked to tell anyone how much that great ceremonial cost.

A little later, the little church dressed itself in a few modest spring flowers, and the school-children, with baskets full of primroses—the last primroses of the season—made a carpet under Gussy's feet as she, in her turn, went along the familiar path between the village gravestones, a bride. There were not more than a dozen people at the breakfast, and Lady Augusta's little brougham took them to the sta-

tion afterwards, where they set out quite humbly and cheerily by an ordinary train.

“Quite good enough for a Consul,” Gussy said, always the first to laugh at her own humbleness. She wore a grey gown to go away in, which did not cost a tenth part so much as Lady Granton’s, and the *Post* took no notice of them. They wandered about their own country for a week or two, like the Babes in the Wood, Gussy said, expected in no great country house, retiring into no stately seclusion, but into the far more complete retirement of common life and common ways. Gussy, as she was proud to tell, had learned to do many things in her apprenticeship to the sisters of the Charity-house as associate of the order; and I think the pleasure to her of this going forth unattended, unsuspected, in the freedom of a young wife—the first smack of absolute freedom which women ever taste—had something far more exquisite in it to Gussy than any delight her sister could have in her more splendid honeymoon. Lord and Lady Granton were limited, and kept in curb

by their own very greatness; they were watched over by their servants, and kept by public opinion in the right way; but Edgar and Gussy went where they would, as free as the winds, and thought of nobody's opinion. The Consul in this had an unspeakable advantage over the Earl.

They got to their home at last on a May evening, when Italy is indeed Paradise; they had driven all day long from the Genoa side along the lovely Riviera di Levante, tracing the gracious curves from village to village along that enchanting way. The sun was setting when they came in sight of Spezzia, and before they reached the house which had been taken for them, the Angelus was sounding from the church, and the soft dilating stars of Italian skies had come out to hear the homely litany sung shrilly in side-chapels, and out of doors, among the old nooks of the town, of the angelic song, "Hail, Mary, full of grace!" The women were singing in an old three-cornered piazzetta, close under the loggia of the Consul's house, which looked upon the sea. On the sea itself

the magical sky was shining with all those listening stars. In Italy the stars take more interest in human life than they do in this colder sphere. Those that were proper to that space of heaven, crowded together, Edgar thought to himself, to see his bride. On the horizon the sea and sky blended in one infinite softness and blueness; the lights began to twinkle in the harbour and in its ships; the far-off villages among the woods lent other starry tapers to make the whole landscape kind and human. Heaven and earth were softly illuminated, not for them—for the dear common uses and ends of existence; yet unconsciously with a softer and fuller lustre, because of the eyes that looked upon them so newly, as if earth and heaven, and the kindly light, and all the tender bonds of humanity, had been created fresh that very day.

THE END.

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