

PHŒBE, JUNIOR.

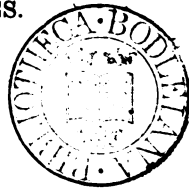
A Fast Chronicle of Carlingsford.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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CHAPTER I.

SOCIETY.

NOTWITHSTANDING such little social crosses, however, the society at the Parsonage, as thus constituted, was very agreeable. Mr. May, though he had his faults, was careful of his daughter. He sat in the drawing-room every evening till she retired, on the nights their visitors came, and even when it was Clarence only who remained, an inmate of the house, and free to go and come as he pleased. Ur-

sula, he felt, must not be left alone, and though it is uncertain whether she fully appreciated the care he took of her, this point in his character is worth noting. When the young party went out together, to skate, for instance, as they did, for several merry days, Reginald and Janey were, he considered, sufficient guardians for their sister. Phœbe had no chaperon —“ Unless you will take that serious office upon you, Ursula,” she said, shrugging her shoulders prettily; but she only went once or twice, so well was she able, even when the temptation was strongest, to exercise self-denial, and show her perfect power of self-guidance. As for old Tozer and his wife, the idea of a chaperon never entered their homely heads. Such articles are unnecessary in the lower levels of society. They were anxious that their child should enjoy herself, and could not understand the reason of her staying at home on a bright frosty day, when the

Mays came to the door in a body to fetch her.

“No, if they'd have gone down on their knees, nor if I had gone down on mine, would that girl have left me,” cried the old lady, with tears in her eyes. “She do behave beautiful to her old granny. If so be as I haven't a good night, no power on earth would make that child go pleasuring. It's 'most too much at her age.”

But Phœbe confided to Ursula that it was not altogether anxiety about her grandmother.

“I have nobody of my own to go with. If I took grandpapa with me, I don't think it would mend matters. Once or twice it was possible, but not every day. Go and enjoy yourself, dear,” she said, kissing her friend.

Ursula was disposed to cry rather than to enjoy herself, and appealed to Reginald, who was deeply touched by Phœbe's fine feeling. He took his sister to the ice, but that day he went so far as to go back himself

to No. 6, actually into the house, to make a humble protest, yet to insinuate his admiration. He was much impressed, and approved highly of this reticence, having a very high standard of minor morals for ladies, in his mind, like most young men.

“She is not one of the girls who rush about everywhere, and whom one is sick of seeing,” he said.

“I think it is very silly,” cried Janey. “Who cares for a chaperon! and why shouldn’t Phœbe have her fun, like the rest, instead of shutting herself up in a stuffy room with that dreadful old Mrs. Tozer?”

Her brother reproved her so sharply for this speech that Janey withdrew in tears, still asking “Why?” as she rushed to her room. Clarence Copperhead, for his part, stroked his moustache and said it was a bore.

“For she is the best skater of all the ladies here,” he said. “I beg your pardon,

Miss Ursula. She's got so much go in her, and keeps it up like fun. She's the best I know for keeping a fellow from getting tired ; but as it's Thursday, I suppose she'll be here in the evening."

Clarence never called them anything but Miss Ursula and Miss Phœbe, dropping the prefix in his thoughts. He felt that he was "a little sweet upon" them both ; and, indeed, it had gleamed dully across his mind that a man who could marry them both need never be bored, but was likely always to find something "to do." Choice, however, being necessary, he did not see his way so clearly as to which he would choose. "The mountain sheep are sweeter, but the valley sheep are fatter," he said to himself, if not in these immortal words, yet with full appreciation of the sentiment. Ursula began to understand dinners with a judicious intelligence, which he felt was partly created by his own instructions and remarks ; but in the evening it was Phœbe who reigned supreme.

She was so sensible that most likely she could invent a *menu* all out of her own head, he thought, feeling that the girl who got him through the "Wedding March" with but six mistakes, was capable of any intellectual feat. He had not the slightest doubt that it was in his power to marry either of the girls as soon as he chose to intimate his choice; and in the meantime he found it very agreeable to maintain a kind of mental possibility of future proprietorship of them both.

And thus the pleasant life ran on in the most agreeable absorption and abstraction from the world outside. "Don't ask anyone else; why should we have anyone else?" they all said, except Janey, who had condescended to appear in the evening in her best frock, though she was not admitted at dinner, and who thought a few additional guests, and a round game now and then, would be delightful variations upon the ordinary programme; but the others did not agree with her. They

became more and more intimate, mingling the brother and sister relationship with a something unnamed, unexpressed, which gave a subtle flavour to their talks and flirtations. In that incipient stage of love-making this process is very pleasant even to the spectators, full of little excitements and surprises, and sharp stings of momentary quarrel, and great revolutions, done with a single look, which are infinitely amusing to the lookers-on. The house became a real domestic centre, thought of by each and all with tender sentiment, such as made its owners somewhat proud of it, they could scarcely tell why. Even Mr. May felt a certain complacence in the fact that the young men were so fond of the Parsonage, and when he heard complaints of the coldness and dullness of domestic intercourse, smiled, and said that he did not feel it so, with that pleasant sense of something superior in himself to cause this difference, which is sweet to the greatest Stoic; for he was not as yet en-

lightened as to the entire indifference of the little circle to any charm in him, and would have been utterly confounded had anyone told him that to the grave and reflective Northcote, whom he had treated with such magnanimous charity, binding him (evidently) by bonds of gratitude to himself for ever, it was little Ursula, and not her father, who was the magnet of attraction. Mr. May was a clever man, and yet it had not occurred to him that any comparison between his own society and that of Ursula was possible. Ursula! a child! He would have laughed aloud at the thought.

But all this pleasant society, though father and daughter both agreed that it cost nothing, for what is a cake and a cup of tea? and the late dinners, and the extra maid, and the additional fires, and general enlargement of expenditure made immense inroads it must be allowed into the additional income brought by Clarence Copperhead. The first quarter's payment was spent, and more than spent, before it

came. The money that was to be laid up for that bill of Tozer's—perhaps—had now no saving peradventure left in it; for the second half would not be due till two months after the Tozer bill, and would but be half, even if procurable at once. Mr. May felt a slight shock when this gleamed across his mind, but only for a moment. There was still a month, and a month is a long time, and in the meantime James was almost certain to send something, and his Easter offerings might, probably would, this year, be something worth having. Why they should be better than usual this year Mr. May did not explain to himself; his head was a little turned it must be supposed by the momentary chance of having more money in his hands than he used to have. Already he had got into the habit of ordering what he wanted somewhat recklessly, without asking himself how the things he ordered were to be paid, and, as so often happened, followed up that first tampering with the

rules of right and wrong by a general recklessness of the most dangerous kind. He was not so much alone as he had been, his house, in which he was infinitely more amiable than of old, had become more pleasant to him, he liked his life better. His son was independent with an income of his own, and therefore he felt much more respect for him, and treated him as a companion. His daughter had developed, if not in the way of *entrées*, a talent for dinners which raised her very much in his eyes; and naturally the regard shown to her by the visitors reacted upon Mr. May, though it had not crossed his mind as yet that anyone could be in love with Ursula. All this made him happier in spite of himself. When you begin to esteem and be proud of your children your life is naturally happier than when you scoff and jeer at them, and treat them as creatures of inferior mould to yourself. Mr. May found out all at once that Reginald was a fine young fellow,

that Ursula was pretty and pleasant, and that droll Janey with her elf-locks and angles was amusing at least, if no more. As for the little ones, they were considerably thrust into a corner when the elder youth forced itself into the front. They learned their lessons in corners, and had their tea by themselves, and were much humbled and subdued from the moment in which their schoolbooks and toys had meandered over the whole house, and their looks and likings had been just as important as anything else. When there is no mother to protect them, the elder sister's first lover marks a terribly critical period for the children of the house. They were banished from the drawing-room, except on special occasions, when they came *en grande tenue*, in their best things, and were jeered at by Mr. Copperhead. He called them "the kids," both Amy and Robin were aware, and they resented it unspeakably. Thus the inward happiness of the Mays confined itself to the upper regions of the family.

Even Betsy regretted the days when, if she had more to do, she had at least "her kitchen to herself" and nobody to share the credit. There was more fuss and more worry, if a trifle less labour, and the increase in consequence which resulted from being called cook, instead of maid-of-all-work, was scarcely so sweet in possession as it had seemed in prospect.

"Them late dinners" were the object of her perpetual railings; "oh, how much more comfortable it was, if gentry would but think so, to have your dinner at two, and get done with your washing up before you was cleaned, or had any occasion to bother yourself about your cap!" When little Amy cried over the loneliness of "the children's tea," which they frequently had to pour out for themselves, Betty gave her a cake and a kiss, and felt disposed to cry too.

"And she don't know, poor child, not the half," said Betty, which was a kind of oracular sentence difficult for Betty

herself to understand. The children had nothing to do with the late dinner; they were sent to bed earlier than they used to be, and scolded if any distant sound of romps made itself audible at seven o'clock when their elders were dining; and then when the little ones went injured to bed, and Johnny indignant, worked at his lessons by himself in a corner of the old nursery, deeply aware that his schoolboy boots and jacket were quite unfit for the drawing-room, the grown up young people ran lightly up stairs, all smiles and pleasure, and those delightful evenings began.

The children sometimes could not get to sleep for the piano and the raspings of the fiddle, which sounds of mirth suggested nothing but the wildest enjoyment to them; and when the door opened now and then, bursts of laughter and mingling voices would come out like the sounds the Peri heard at the gates of Paradise. The elder ones were happy; their little atoms of individual life had all united for the

moment into one sunshiny and broad foundation, on which everything seemed to rest with that strange sense of stability and continuance, which such a moment of happiness, though it carries every element of change in it, almost invariably brings. It felt as if it might go on for ever, and yet the very sentiment that inspired it made separation and convulsion inevitable—one of those strange paradoxes which occur every day.

Thus the year crept round, and winter melted away with all its amusements, and spring began. Mr. Northcote's time at Salem Chapel was more than half over, a fact on which the congregation congratulated itself much.

"If so be as he had a settled charge of his own, I shouldn't be sorry to see him gone to-morrow," said one of the recent members.

"Settled charge! You take my word," said Mrs. Pigeon, who was getting old, but always continued a woman of spirit,

“ he’ll never have a settled charge in our connection. He carries on here, ’cause he can’t help hisself, but he ain’t cut out for a pastor, and he’s a deal too thick with them Church folks. A parson, too! I’d ’a thought he had more pride.”

“ Nay, now, but I don’t wish him no harm,” said the first speaker; “ he’s a civil spoken gentleman . if he ain’t so free and so pleasant as a body looks for.”

“ Civil spoken !” said the other; “ one of our own ministers in our own connection! Bless you! they’re our servants, that’s what they are. I’d like to see one on ’em as ’ud take upon him to be civil spoken to me.”

“ Well, I wouldn’t go as far as that,” cried Mrs. Brown; “ we pays ’em their salary, and we ’as a right to a civil word: but a minister’s a minister, and I’ll show him respect as long as he deserves it. I ain’t one for being too hard upon ministers, especially when they’re young men,

as has their temptations like, we all know."

"I don't know what you call temptations," said Mrs. Pigeon; "licking the dust under the feet of a Church parson! and after speaking up so bold against young May and them old cheats at the College. I wish he was gone from here, that's what I wish, and our old pastor (if we can't get none better) back again. He was one as knew his place, and wouldn't have set his foot inside one of them Parsonages. Parsonages, indeed! kept up with our money. If ever there was an iniquity on this earth it's a State Church, and all the argufying in the world won't put that out of me."

It happened that Northcote was in the poulterer's shop, talking to the poulterer himself at this moment, and he heard the conclusion of this speech delivered with much unction and force. Such sentiments would have charmed him three months ago, and probably he would have

thoughtt his uneducated but strenuous partisan an extremely intelligent woman. He hurried away now with an uncomfortable smile. If an opinion is the right opinion, why should it have an air of absurdity thrown upon it by being thus uttered in ungrammatical language by a poulterer's wife? Truth is the same by whomsoever stated; but yet, was not dogmatism on any subject the sign of an inexperienced and uncultivated, or a rude and untutored mind? What did this woman know of the Parsonage, which she supposed she helped to pay for? What had he himself known three months ago 'of Reginald May, whom he had assaulted so savagely? This Church family, which Mrs. Pigeon knew no better than to abuse with what divine charity it had received himself, notwithstanding his public sin against it. When he thought of that public sin, Northcote's countenance glowed with shame, and it continued to glow with a more agreeable warmth when he

escaped into thought of the goodness which the Mays had shown him. Had there ever been such goodness? Was there ever so sweet a home of the heart as that faded, homely drawing-room? His heart beat high, his steps quickened; they carried him down Grange Lane in a path so often trod that he felt there must be a special track of his own under the garden walls, going Parsonage way.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE-MAKING

MRS. SAM HURST had been a long time out of Carlingford; she had been paying visits among her friends, with whom, though the young Mays would never believe it, she was very popular, for she was not ill-natured in her gossip, and she was often amusing in the fullness of her interest in other people. It was April when she came back, and the early warmth and softness of the spring were beginning to be felt in Grange Lane; the doors of the houses began to be left open, and the girls at the Parsonage had taken to running out and in without their hats,

gleaming through the little shrubbery in front, and round to the back garden. One evening it was so mild that they all (which comprehensive term sometimes extended to "the whole party" began to be commonly used among them with that complacency in the exclusiveness of their little coterie, which every "set" more or less feels) came downstairs in a body, and wandered about among the laurel bushes in the spring moonlight. There was Ursula and Mr. Northcote, Phœbe and Reginald, and Clarence Copperhead, with Janey behind, who followed where they went, but did not enjoy the ceremony. It was bad enough in the drawing-room; but moonlight, who cared about moonlight, Janey said to herself indignantly? She was the only one who looked up to Mrs. Hurst's window where there was a faint light, and when the voices became audible Janey perceived some one come behind the curtain and look out. The girl was divided between her faithful family feud

against Mrs. Hurst, and a vague sense of satisfaction in her presence as a Marplot, who one way or other would infallibly interfere.

“She will say something to papa,” said Janey, her heart involuntarily rising at the thought, though at the same time she shivered to think of the treachery involved to all the tenets of the family. Janey sat on the steps and listened to the others talking. No one pointed out the stars to her, or followed her about as Reginald followed Phœbe. As for Mr. Copperhead, Janey thought he was almost as lonely as she was. He had lighted his cigar, and was strolling up and down interrupting both of the other pairs occasionally, breaking into the midst of Northcote’s astronomical lecture abruptly, and stopping Phœbe herself in the middle of a sentence. Janey, watching sharply from the steps, noticed, as a spectator has it in her power to do, that whereas Northcote was extremely impatient of the interruption, and

discovered immediately that the stars could be seen better from another spot, Phœbe took it quite sweetly, and addressed herself to him as she went on, which Reginald did not like, Janey was sure. Were they in love with each other, the girl asked herself—was this how it was managed? When the moon went under a cloud for a moment, Clarence Copperhead's vast shirt-front made a kind of substitute down below. Janey lost the other two among the bushes, but she always beheld that orb of white moving back and forward with two dark figures near. She felt sure Reginald did not want to have him in such close neighbourhood; but Phœbe's voice went on talking to both alike. Janey was half pleased, and half indignant. She had a jealous dislike, such as most girls have, to see her brother engrossed by anyone, but no more did she like to see another man preferred to Reginald; she was jealous both ways. As she sat and watched, a slight little creak came to her sharp ears,

and looking up she saw Mrs. Hurst's drawing-room window opened the very least little bit in the world. Ah! Janey said, with a long breath. There was nothing she would not have given to have talked it all over with Mrs. Hurst, and to hear what she would say, if she had not been the traditional adversary against whom all the family steeled their hearts.

That was a very pleasant evening; they all remembered it afterwards. It was the moment when Ursula discovered all in the darkness, when the moon was under that cloud, *what Mr. Northcote meant*. It flashed upon her like a sudden light, though they were standing in the shade of a great laurel. He did not make any declaration, nor say a word that she could remember. And yet all at once, by some magic which is not explainable, she found out that *that* was what he was meaning. This is not an admirable sentence; but it is difficult to know how to put it better. It was quite a strange discovery. It set

her heart beating, thumping against her breast. She herself meant nothing whatever, and she never thought of any response, or of the time when he might ask her to make a response. The sensation of the moment was quite enough for Ursula. She was greatly startled, surprised, yet not surprised, touched and full of a wondering respect and sympathy, awe and half amusement. Could it be possible, was *that* what it was? Though he was not conscious of betraying himself in any way, Northcote thought he had done something to offend her. Her shy silence and withdrawal from him went to his heart; never had her society been so sweet, never had he had her so completely to himself. What had he done to alarm or offend her? He went home with his head full of this, able to think of nothing else.

And Phœbe went home too, escorted by Reginald and Clarence together, to her grandfather's door, with her head buzzing with many thoughts. It was not her

heart that was in a commotion, like little Ursula's. She was more experienced, though she was not much older, and had gone through such discoveries before now. But a much more perplexing accident had befallen her. Reginald May had fallen in love with her, and Clarence Copperfield, after considerable resistance and hanging off, was making up his mind to propose. Yes. Phœbe felt with unerring instinct that this was the state of affairs. He was making up his mind to propose. So much of her and so little of her had at length made an end of all the prudent hesitations that lay under the crisp pie-crust of that starched and dazzling shirt front. That he should never be able to speak a word to her without that May ! that fellow ! " the son of my coach ! " poking himself in, was a thing which at length had fired his cool blood to fever heat. Nobody else could play his accompaniments like that, or pull him through the " Wedding March " like that ; and who would look better at the head of

a table, or show better at a ball, or get on better in society? No one he knew, certainly. It was true she was only a Minister's daughter, and without a penny; for the little fortune Mr. and Mrs. Beecham had carefully gathered together and preserved for their daughter, what was that to the Copperheads?—nothing, not a penny. But, on the other hand, Clarence felt that he himself, or rather his father, was rich enough to be able to afford a wife without money. There was no reason why he should marry money; and a wife like Phœbe, what a relief that would be, in the way of education! No need of any more coaching. She was clever, and fond of reading, and so forth. She would get everything up for him, if he went into parliament, or that sort of thing; why, she'd keep him posted up. "There ain't many girls that could do that," he said to himself. She would save him worlds of trouble; save his money even, for coaches and that sort of thing

cost money; and then that fellow May would be out of it; his nose would be put out of joint. These are not eloquent sentiments, but so it was that Clarence's natural feelings expressed themselves. He had intimated that he would see Miss Phoebe home, but May had stalked out side by side with him—had not left them for a moment; and Clarence determined that he would not stand it any longer. If there was no other way of shaking this fellow off, why, then he would make up his mind to it, and propose.

Phoebe somehow saw all this written in his fine countenance, and she saw at the same time that poor Reginald, who was (she thought) young and simple, and just the sort of poor boy to yield to such folly, was in love with her; and her head was buzzing with the double discovery. The first was (of course) the most important. She had no time to indulge her thoughts while she walked up between them, keeping them in play each

with a word, talking all the way to fill up the somewhat sulky silence between them ; but when she got safely within the garden door, and heard it shut behind her, and found herself in the quiet of the little green enclosure, with the budding trees and the lilac bushes for her only companions, the relief was very grateful to her. She could not go in all at once to make conversation for grandpapa and grandmamma, and give them the account they liked to hear, of how she had "enjoyed herself." She took off her hat to be cooler, and walked slowly down under the moonlight, her head all throbbing and rustling with thought. The paths were bordered with primroses, which made a pale glimmer in the moon, and shed a soft fragrance about. Phœbe had nothing to appeal to heaven about, or to seek counsel from nature upon, as sentimental people might do. She took counsel with herself, the person most interested. What was the thing she ought to do? Cla-

rence Copperhead was going to propose to her. She did not even take the trouble of saying to herself that he loved her; it was Reginald who did that, a totally different person, but yet the other was more urgent. What was Phœbe to do? She did not dislike Clarence Copperhead, and it was no horror to her to think of marrying him. She had felt for years that this might be on the cards, and there were a great many things in it which demanded consideration. He was not very wise, nor a man to be enthusiastic about, but he would be a career to Phœbe. She did not think of it humbly like this, but with a big capital—a Career. Yes; she could put him into parliament, and keep him there. She could thrust him forward (she believed) to the front of affairs. He would be as good as a profession, a position, a great work to Phœbe. He meant wealth (which she dismissed in its superficial aspect as something meaningless and vulgar, but accepted in its

higher aspect as an almost necessary condition of influence), and he meant all the possibilities of future power. Who can say that she was not as romantic as any girl of twenty could be? only her romance took an unusual form. It was her head that was full of throbbings and pulses, not her heart. No doubt there would be difficulties and disagreeables. His father would oppose it, and Phoebe felt with a slight shiver that his father's opposition was nothing to be laughed at, and that Mr. Copperfield had it in him to crush rebellion with a ferocious hand. And would Clarence have strength of mind or spirit to hold out? This was a very serious question, and one which included all the rest. If she accepted his proposal, would he have the heart to stand to it against his father? or would her consent simply involve her in a humiliating struggle which would end in defeat? That was the great question. If this should be the case, what use would there

be in any sacrifice that Phoebe might make? A struggle with Mr. Copperhead would affect her father's position as much or more than her own, and she knew that a great many of the congregation would infallibly side with Mr. Copperhead, feeling it a most dangerous precedent that a pastor's daughter should be encouraged to think herself eligible for promotion so great, and thus interfere with the more suitable matrimonial prospects of wealthy young men who might happen to attend her father's chapel. Such a thing the conscript fathers of the connection would feel ought to be put a stop to with a high hand. So it may be supposed that Phoebe had enough to think of, as she strolled about in the moonlight alone, between the two borders of primroses. Tozer thought she had gone upstairs to take off her "things," and it was natural that when a girl got before a looking-glass she should forget the progress of time; so that he merely wondered at her non-

appearance until the little chill of air stole in from the open door, and made Mrs. Tozer cough.

“If it ain’t our Phœbe a-walking about in the moonlight like a play-actor!” said Tozer, in consternation, drawing aside the curtain to look out. “I’ll tell you what, old woman, the girl’s in love; and that’s what it is.” He thought this was a capital joke, and followed his witticism with a laugh.

“Not much wonder, neither, with all them young fellows about,” said the old lady. “You may laugh; but, Tozer, I ain’t so easy in my mind as you. If it’s him as they call Northcote, that don’t matter; but if it’s that big gabby of a Copperhead, there’s troubles a-coming; though he’s as rich, they do say, as Creases, whoever Creases might be, and it would be a credit to have the girl make a match like that out of our house.”

Whereat Tozer again laughed loud and long.

“Well,” he said, “if Mister Creases himself was here, I wouldn’t say as he was a bit too good for our Phœbe. Don’t you trouble your head, old woman; Copperhead or t’other one, let her make her choice. Phœbe junior’s the girl as ’ll be their match, and you may take my word for that. Phœbe’s the one as will keep them in their right place, whoever they may be.”

Phœbe heard this laugh echo out into the quiet of the night. Of course, she did not know the cause of it, but it disturbed her in her thoughts. Poor, kind, excellent grandpapa, she said to herself, how would he get on with Mr. Copperhead? He would touch his forelock to so rich a man. He would go down metaphorically upon his knees before so much wealth; and what a fool Clarence would be thought on every side for wanting to marry her! Even his mother, who was a romantic woman, would not see any romance in it if it was she, Phœbe, who was the poor

girl whom he wanted to marry. Ursula might have been different, who was a clergyman's daughter, and consequently a lady by prescriptive right. But herself, Tozer's grand-daughter, Tom Tozer's niece, fresh from the butter-shop, as it were, and redolent of that petty trade which big trade ignores, as much as the greatest aristocrat does! Phœbe was too sensible by far to vex or distress herself on this point, but she recognised it without any hesitation, and the question remained—was it for her advantage to enter upon this struggle, about which there could be no mistake, or was it not? And this question was very difficult. She did not dislike Clarence, but then she was not in love with him. He would be a Career, but he was not a Passion, she said to herself with a smile; and if the struggle should not turn out successful on her part, it would involve a kind of ruin, not to herself only, but to all concerned. What, then, was she to do? The only thing Phœbe de-

cided upon was that, if she did enter upon that struggle, it *must* be successful. Of this alone there could be no manner of doubt.

CHAPTER III.

A DISCLOSURE.

“WELL, young ladies!” said Mrs. Sam Hurst, “I left you very quiet, but there seems to be plenty going on nowadays. What a beautiful moon there was last night! I put up my window to look at it, and all at once I found there was a party going on below. Quite a *fête champêtre*. I have newly come from abroad, you know, and it seemed quite congenial. I actually rubbed my eyes, and said to myself, ‘I can’t have come home. It’s Boulogne still, it isn’t Carlingford!’”

“There was no company,” said Ursula,

with dignity; "there was only our own party. A friend of Reginald's and a friend of mine join us often in the evening, and there is papa's pupil—if you call that a party. We are just as quiet as when you went away. We never invite strangers. We are as much by ourselves as ever."

"With a friend of Reginald's, and a friend of yours, and papa's pupil!" said Mrs. Hurst, laughing; "double your own number, Ursula! and I don't suppose Janey counts yet. Why, there is a young man too many. How dare you waste the gifts of Providence, you prodigal child? And now let me hear who they are."

"You may say Janey doesn't count," cried that young woman in person. "Oh, Mrs. Hurst, what a bore they are! If that's society, I don't care for society. One always following Ursula about whenever she moves, so that you can't say a word to her; and the others pulling poor Phœbe to pieces, who hates them, I am sure. Phœbe was so jolly at first. She

would talk to you, or she would play for you! Why, she taught Johnny and me a part-song to sing with her, and said he had a delightful voice; but she never has any time to look at us now," said Janey, stopping in this breathless enumeration of wrongs. "She is always taken up with those horrible men."

"I suppose you call Reginald a horrible man?" said Ursula, with rising colour. "If that was my opinion of my own brother, I should take care not to say it, at least."

"Oh, Reginald isn't the worst! There's your Mr. Northcote, and there's that Copperhead—Woodenhead, we call him in the nursery. Oh, how papa can put up with him, I can't tell! he never had any patience with us. You can't think how dull he is, Mrs. Hurst! I suppose girls don't mind when a man *goes on*, whether he's stupid or not. I never heard Mr. Northcote say much that was interesting

either; but he looks clever, and that is always something."

"So Mr. Northcote is Ursula's one," said Mrs. Hurst, laughing. "You are a perfect jewel, Janey, and I don't know how I should ever find out anything that's going on, but for you. Northcote! it is a new name in Carlingford. I wonder I have not heard of him already; or have you kept him entirely to yourself, and let nobody know that there was a new man in the place?"

There was a little pause here. The girls knew nothing about Northcote, except the one fact that he was a Dissenter; but as Mrs. Hurst was an excellent Churchwoman, much better than they were, who had, perhaps, been brought up too completely under the shadow of the Church to believe in it implicitly, they hesitated before pronouncing before her that unfortunate name.

"I don't know whether you are aware," Ursula said at last, with some slowness

and reluctance, "that papa's pupil is of a Dissenting family. He is related, through his mother, to our cousins, the Dorsets." (This fact Ursula put forth with a little triumph, as refuting triumphantly any ready conclusion as to the social standing of Dissenters). "I think Mr. Northcote came first to the house with Mr. Copperhead. He is a Dissenter too."

"Why, Ursula," cried Mrs. Hurst, "not the man who attacked Reginald in the Meeting? It was in all the papers. He made a frightful violent speech about the College and the sinecure, and what a disgraceful thing it was that your brother, a young man, could accept it. You don't mean him?"

Ursula was struck dumb. She looked up at her questioner with her lips falling apart a little, with a look of mingled consternation and fear.

"Of course it can't be," said the gossip, who was not ill-natured. "You never read the papers, but your papa does, and

so does Reginald. Oh, you may be sure it is some other Northcote, though I don't know the name."

"Ursula doesn't like to tell you," said Janey; "but he's the Dissenting Minister. I know he is. Well! I don't care! He is just as good as anybody else. I don't go in for your illiberal ways of thinking, as if no one was worth talking to except in the Church. Mr. Northcote is very nice. I don't mind what you say. Do you mean to tell me that all those curates and people who used to plague our lives out, were nicer? Mr. Saunders, for instance; he is a real good Churchman, I have always heard people say—"

"Hold your tongue, Janey; you don't know anything about it," said Mrs. Hurst, whom this wonderful disclosure elevated into authority. "A Dissenting Minister! Ah, me! what a thing it is for you poor girls to have no mother. I did not think your papa would have had so little consideration as to expose you to society

like that. But men are so thoughtless."

"I don't know what right you have to speak of exposing us to society like that," cried Ursula, quivering all over with sudden excitement.

She felt as if some one had dug a knife into her, and turned it round in the wound.

"Men have so little consideration," repeated Mrs. Hurst, "especially when a girl is concerned. Though how your papa could have received a man who made such an assault upon him—even if he had passed over the attack upon Reginald, he was attacked himself."

"It must be a mistake," said Ursula, growing pale. Her hands came together half unconsciously, and clasped in a mute gesture of appeal. "It is not possible; it cannot be true."

"Well, it is very odd that your papa should show such charity, I allow. I don't think it is in human nature. And Reginald, what does Reginald say? If it is that man, it will be the strangest thing

I ever heard of. But there could not be two Northcotes, Dissenting Ministers in Carlingford, could there? It is very strange. I can't think what your papa can have in his head. He is a man who would do a thing for a deep reason; whether he liked it or not. How did this Mr. Northcote come first here?"

"Oh, it was through Mr. Copperhead," said Janey. "It was the first dinner-party we had. You should have seen the fright Ursula was in! And papa would not let me come to dinner, which was a horrid shame. I am sure I am big enough, bigger than Ursula."

"If he came with the pupil, that makes it all quite plain. I suppose your papa did not want to quarrel with his pupil. What a predicament for him, if that was the case? Poor Mr. May! Of course, he did not want to be uncivil. Why, it was in the 'Gazette,' and the 'Express,' and all the papers; an account of the Meeting, and that speech, and then a leading article

upon it. I always file the 'Express,' so you can see it if you like. But what an embarrassment for your poor papa, Ursula, that you should have taken this man up! And Reginald, how could he put up with it, a touchy young man, always ready to take offence! You see now the drawback of not paying a little attention to what is going on round you. How uncomfortable you must have made them. It might be very well to look over an offence, not to be unpleasant to the stranger; but that you should have thoughtlessly led this man on into the position of an intimate—"

"I did nothing of the sort," cried Ursula, growing red and growing pale, starting up from her work with a sense of the intolerable which she could not restrain. "What have I done to be spoken of so? I never led him on, or anyone. What you say is cruel, very cruel! and it is not true."

"Isn't it true that he was here last night, following you about, as Janey says? Oh, I know how these sort of things go

on. But you ought to think of your papa's position, and you ought to think of Reginald. If it was to come to the Bishop's ears that St. Roque's Parsonage was a refuge for Dissenters! For I know who *your* friend is, Ursula! That Tozer girl, another of them! Indeed, I assure you, it makes me feel very uncomfortable. And Reginald, just at the very beginning of his career."

Ursula did not make any reply. She bent her head down over her work, so low that her flushed cheeks could scarcely be seen, and went on stitching with energy and passion such as needles and thread are seldom the instruments of; and yet how much passion is continually worked away through needles and thread! Mrs. Hurst sat still for some time, looking at her, very little satisfied to keep silence, but feeling that she had discharged an efficient missile, and biting her lips not to say more to weaken its effect. When some time had passed in this way, and it was apparent

that Ursula had no intention of breaking the silence, her visitor got up and shook out her skirts with a little flutter of indignation.

“You are offended,” she said, “though I must say it is very ill on your part to be offended. What motive can I have but your good, and regard for your poor dear papa? It is he that is always the victim, poor man, whether it is your vagaries he has to pay for, or Reginald’s high-flying. Oh, yes; you may be as angry as you like, Ursula; but you will find out the difference if your encouragement of this Dissenter interferes with something better—a living for Reginald, perhaps, or better preferment for your poor papa.”

“Oh!” cried Janey, awe-stricken; “but after all, it was not Ursula; it was papa himself. I think he must have done it to please Mr. Copperhead; for, Mrs. Hurst, you know Mr. Copperhead is very important. We have all to give in to him. He pays papa three hundred a-year.”

“Three thousand wouldn’t make up for it if it spoilt all your career,” cried the indignant woman, and she swept away without saying any more to Ursula, who kept quite still over her work without budging. Janey went downstairs meekly after her to open the door, whispering an entreaty that she would not be angry.

“No, no, I am not angry,” said Mrs. Hurst, “but I shall keep it up for a day or two. It is the best thing for her. I think she was struck with what I said.”

Janey stole upstairs again, feeling rather guilty; but Ursula took little notice of her. The dinner was ordered and everything settled for the day. She was busy with her week’s mending and darning, with the stockings and other things in a big basket beside her. When she came to some articles belonging to Janey, she threw them out with great impatience.

“You may surely mend your things yourself, you are big enough. You can talk for yourself and me too,” cried

Ursula with sudden impetuosity ; and then she sat and worked, her needle flying through the meshes of her darning, though it is hard to darn stockings in that impassioned way. They were socks of Johnny's, however, with holes in the heels that you could put your fist through, and the way in which the big spans filled themselves up under this influence was wonderful to see. Janey, who was not fond of mending, set to work quite humbly under the influence of this example, and made two or three attempts to begin a conversation, but without avail.

The girls were seated thus in a disturbed and restless silence, working as if for their lives, when the usual little jar of the gate and sound of the bell downstairs announced a visitor. On ordinary occasions, they were both in the habit of rushing to the window when the gate was opened to see who was coming, and Janey had thrown asside her work to do so, when a look from Ursula stopped her.

High-spirited as Janey was, she did not dare to disobey that look. By right of the passion that had got possession of her, Ursula took the absolute command of the situation in a way she had never done before, and some sudden intuition made her aware who it was who was coming. The girls both sat there still and breathless, waiting for his appearance. He never came in the day, never had been seen in the Parsonage at that hour before, and yet Ursula was as certain who it was, as if she had seen him a mile off. He came into the room, himself looking a little breathless and disturbed, and gave a quick impatient look at Janey as he went up to her sister. Ursula saw it and understood well enough. Janey was in his way; he had come this morning with a special purpose. Her heart sank down to her very shoes, and then rose again with a feverish and unreal leap. Was it not her duty to take the initiative, to cut away the very ground from beneath his feet? He took a

seat, not far from where she was sitting, and made an effort to begin a little ordinary conversation, throwing frequent glances at Janey. He said it was a fine day, which was self-evident; that he almost feared they would be out; that he had come to—to tell her something he had forgotten last night, about—yes, about—Cassiopeia's chair, to correct what he said about Orion—yes, that was it; and again he looked at Janey, who saw his looks, and wondered much what she ought to do—go away, as he evidently wished her, or stay and listen, which was the eager desire of her mind. When Ursula lifted her head from her darning, and looked at him with cheeks alternately white and crimson, Janey felt herself grow hot and breathless with kindred excitement, and knew that the moment had come.

“Mr. Northcote,” said Ursula, looking at him fixedly, so fixedly that a nervous trembling ran over him, “I have a question to ask you. You have been coming

to us very often, and perhaps papa may know, but I don't. Is it true that you made a speech about Reginald when you first came here?"

Janey, looking eagerly on, saw Northcote grow pale, nay, grey in the fresh daylight. The colour seemed to ebb out of him. He started very slightly, as if waking up, when she began to speak, and then sat looking at her, growing greyer and greyer. A moment elapsed before he made any reply.

"Yes, I did," he said, with a half groan of pain in his voice.

"You did! really you did! Oh!" cried Ursula, the hot tears falling suddenly out of her eyes, while she still looked at him, "I was hoping that it was all some horrible mistake, that you would have laughed. I hoped you would laugh and say no."

Northcote cleared his throat; they were waiting for him to defend himself. Janey, holding herself on the leash, as it were, keeping herself back from springing upon

him like a hound. Ursula gazed at him with great blazing reproachful eyes ; and all he could do was to give that sign of embarrassment, of guilt, and confusion. He could not utter a word. By the time he had got himself wound up to the point of speech, Ursula, impatient, had taken the words out of his mouth.

“Reginald is my brother,” she said. “Whatever is against him is against us all; we have never had any separate interests. Didn’t you think it strange, Mr. Northcote, to come to this house, among us all, when you had been so unkind to him?”

“Miss May—”

He made a broken sort of outcry and motion of his head, and then cleared his throat nervously once more.

“Did you think how your own brothers and sisters would have stood up for you? that it would have been an offence to them if anybody had come to the house who

was not a friend to you? that they would have had a right—”

“Miss May,” said the culprit; “all this I have felt to the bottom of my heart; that I was here on false pretences—that I had no right to be here. But this painful feeling was all quenched and extinguished, and turned into gratitude by the goodness of your father and brother. I did not even know that you had not been told. I thought you were aware from the beginning. You were colder than they were, and I thought it was natural, quite natural, for it is easier to forgive for one’s self than for those one loves; and then I thought you melted and grew kinder to me, that you saw how all my ideas were changed, all my feelings—my mind itself; changed by the great charity, the wonderful goodness I have found here!”

“Mr. Northcote!” Ursula had been struggling to break in all the time; but while he spoke her words dispersed, her feelings softened, and at the end she found

nothing but that startled repetition of his name with which to answer him. No doubt if he had given her time the eloquence would have come back; but he was too much in earnest to be guilty of such a mistake.

“What can I say about it?” cried the young man. “It has filled me with shame and with happiness. I have been taken in my own trap—those whom I attacked as you say—went out of my way to attack, and abused like a fool because I knew nothing about them—have shown me what the Bible means. Your father and brother knew what I had done, they met me separately, quite independent of each other, and both of them held out their hands to me; why, except that I had offended them, I cannot tell. A stranger, belonging to an obscure class, I had no claim upon them except that I had done what ought to have closed their house against me. And you know how they have in-

terpreted that. They have shown me what the Bible means."

The two girls sat listening, both with their heads bent towards him, and their eyes fixed upon his face. When he stopped, Janey got up with her work in her lap, and coming a little nearer to Ursula, addressed her in a wondering voice,

"Is it *papa* he is talking of like that?" she said, under her breath.

"Yes," he said, fervently, turning to her. "It is your father. He has made charity and kindness real things to me."

"Poor *papa*!" said Ursula, whose tears were arrested in her eyes by the same surprised sensation, half pleasure, half pain, which hushed even Janey's voice. They were "struck," as Mrs. Hurst had said, but by such a strange mingling of feelings that neither knew what to make of them. Northcote did not understand what they meant; their words conveyed a slight shock of surprise, but no distinct idea to him; and when Janey, too much

impressed to settle down again, went away after a while musingly, carrying her work in the upper skirt of her gown, held like a market-woman's apron by her elbow against her side; and he found himself to have attained in the very confusion of his intentions to what he wished, *i.e.*, an interview with Ursula by herself, he was almost too much agitated to take advantage of it. As for Ursula, she had floated a hundred miles away from that sensation of last night which, had no stronger feeling come in to bewilder her, would have made his errand very plain to her mind. She had ceased to think about him, she was thinking with a certain tenderness, and wondering half-awed, half-amused self-questioning, about her father. Was he so good as this? had he done this Christian action? were they all perhaps doing papa injustice? She was recalled to herself by Northcote's next proceeding. He went to the door and closed it after Janey, who had left it open of course, and then he came to the

back of the chair on which stood the great basket of darning. His voice was tremulous, his eyes liquid and shining with emotion.

“Will you forgive me, since they have forgiven me? and may I ask *you* something?” he said.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EXTRAVAGANCE.

MR. MAY did not take any particular notice of what was going on around him among the young people. Nobody could have been more startled than he, had he been told of the purpose with which Horace Northcote, the Dissenting minister, had paid his early morning visit; and though he had a half-scornful, half-amused glimmer of insight into the feelings of his son, and saw that Clarence Copperhead was heavily veering the same way, it did not occur to him that any crisis was approaching. He was enjoying himself in his way, and he had not done that for a

long time. He dearly liked the better way of living, the more liberal strain of house-keeping and expenditure, he liked the social meetings in the evening, the talk after dinner with the three young men, the half-fatherly flirtation with Phœbe, which she too enjoyed much, avowedly preferring him, with pretty coquetry, to the others. All this was very pleasant to him; and the additional money in his pocket was very pleasant, and when the post came in, one of these April mornings, and brought a letter from James, enclosing a draft for fifty pounds, his satisfaction was intense. The sight of the money brought an itching to his fingers, a restlessness about him generally. And yet it was not all that might have been desired, only fifty pounds! he had been buoying himself up by vain thoughts of how James this time, having been so long writing, would send a larger sum, which would at once tide him over the Tozer business, and on this account had been giving himself no

trouble about it. Never before had he been so *insouciant*, although never before had the risk been so great. He had suffered so much about it last time, probably, that was why he took it so easily now; or was it because his trust in the chapter of accidents had grown greater since he was more dependent on it? or because of the generally expanded sense of living in him which made anxiety uncongenial anyhow? Whatever the cause was, this was the effect. A momentary disappointment when he saw how little James's draft was—then a sense of that semi-intoxication which comes upon a poor man when a sum of money falls into his hands—gradually invaded his soul. He tried to settle down to his writing, but did not feel equal to the effort. It was too little for the purpose, he said to himself, for which he wanted it; but it was enough to do a great many pleasant things with otherwise. For the first time he had no urgent bills to swallow it up; the very

grocer, a long suffering tradesman who made less fuss than the others, and about whom Ursula made less fuss, had been pacified by a payment on account off the Copperhead money, and thus had his mouth stopped. Barring that bill, indeed, things were in a more comfortable state than they had been for a long time in the May household; and putting that out of account, James's money would have been the nearest approach to luxury—reckoning luxury in its most simple form as money to spend without any absolutely forestalling claim upon it—which Mr. May had known for years. It is so seldom that poor people have this delicious sense of a little, ever so little surplus! and it would be hard to say how he could entertain the feeling that it was an overplus. There was something of the fumes of desperation perhaps, and impending fate in the lightness of heart which seized upon him. He could not keep still over his writing. He got up at last, and put

James's draft into his pocket-book, and got his hat to go out. It was a fine morning, full of that exhilaration which belongs only to the spring. He went to the bank, and paid in the money, getting a small sum at the same time for his own immediate use; but somehow his restlessness was scarcely satisfied by that very legitimate piece of business, and he extended his walk into the town, and strayed, half by chance, half by intention, to the old furniture shop at the other end of the High Street, which was a favourite resort of the higher classes in Carlingford, and where periodically there was an auction, at which sometimes great bargains were to be had. Mr. May went into this dangerous place boldly. The sale was going on; he walked into the midst of temptation, forgetting the prayer against it, which no doubt he had said that morning. And as evil fate would have it, a carved book-case, the very thing he had been sighing for, for years, was at that moment

the object of the auctioneer's praises. It was standing against the wall, a noble piece of furniture, in which books would show to an advantage impossible otherwise, preserved from dust and damp by the fine old oak and glass door. Mr. May's heart gave a little jump. Almost everybody has wished for something unattainable, and this had been the object of his desires for years. He gave a little start when he saw it, and hurried forward. The bidding had actually begun, there was no time to think and consider, if he wished to have a chance, and it was going cheap, dead cheap. After a minute or two of competition the blood rose to his cheeks, he got thoroughly excited. The effect of this excitement was twofold—not only did it drive all thought of prudence out of his head, but it raised by several pounds the price of the book-case, which, had he gone about it coolly, he might have had at a much cheaper rate. When he suddenly woke up to find himself the

owner of it, a thrill of consternation ran over him—it was all so sudden; and it was perfectly innocent, if only he had any money; and to be sure he had James's money, which was not enough to do anything else—certainly not to do the thing he wanted it for. He tried to laugh at himself for the little thrill of alarm that ran through him; but it was too late to recede; and he gave his cheque for the money and his directions as to having it sent to the Parsonage, with a quake at his heart, yet a little flourish of satisfaction.

“Just what I have been wanting for years,” he said, as he examined his new acquisition, and the people about looked at him with additional respect he felt, not being used to see Mr. May so prompt in payment, and so ready with his money. This pleased him also. He walked home with his head a little turned still, although there was a quake and flutter underneath. Well! he said to himself, who could call

it an extravagance? a thing he had wanted for years—a thing which was a necessity, not for luxury, but every day use—a thing which was not dear, and which was very handsome and substantial, and *really good*; how could anyone say it was extravagant? Ursula might stare with her big eyes, but she was only a silly little girl, and women always were silly about expenses, alarmed by a big bold handsome purchase, though there was nobody better at the art of frittering away money in petty nothings. When he got home, he began at once nervously to clear the space where it should stand. What an improvement it would be! and his books were getting spoiled daily in those unsightly, open shelves, entirely spoiled. It was exciting to anticipate its arrival, and the admiration and commotion in the house. He called in Betsy and gave her orders about it, how, if it came when he was absent, it was to be put in that particular place, no other.

“And mind that great care is taken,

for it is valuable, and a beautiful piece of furniture;" he said.

"La, Sir!" said Betsy, who was thunderstruck, though she knew it was not "her place" to show any feeling. He did not think it was necessary to appeal to Ursula on the same subject, but was rather glad to get out again, feeling the restlessness which had not been dissipated, but rather the reverse. He went and saw one or two poor people, to whom he was much more tolerant and kind than his wont, for in general Mr. May was not attracted towards the poor; and he gave them a shilling or two of the money he had drawn at the bank that morning—though somehow it had acquired a certain value in his eyes, and it was with a grudge that he took it out of his pocket. I must not spend this, he said to himself; but gave the shillings as a kind of tithe or propitiatory offering to Providence, that things might go well with him. Why should not things go well with him? He was not a

bad man, he wronged nobody. He had done nothing to-day that a saint might not have done; he wanted the book-case, and he had the money, a sum not big enough for any more important purpose; but which was far better disposed of so, than frittered away in nothings, as no doubt it would have otherwise been. By the afternoon, when the book-case arrived, he had convinced himself that it was not only quite reasonable but a most lucky chance, a thing he could scarcely have hoped for, the opportunity and the money both coming in such exact accord with each other. When he returned from his walk the girls were looking at it, Ursula somewhat scared, Janey in open raptures.

“It is very nice indeed, papa,” said the elder girl; “but it must have cost a great deal of money.”

“Be thankful that you haven’t got to pay for it,” he said, brusquely. He was not disposed to stand criticism. How it filled up his bare room, and made it, Mr.

May thought, all at once into a library, though the old writing-table and shabby chairs looked rather worse perhaps than before, and suggested renewal in the most urgent way. To make it all of a piece, to put a soft Turkey carpet instead of the drugget, how pleasant it would be! not extravagant, only a natural inclination towards the seemly, and a desire to have things around him becoming his position. No doubt such things were things which he ought to have in his position; a gentleman and a scholar, how humiliating it was that nothing but the barest elements of comfort should be within his reach. This was not how life ought to be; a poor creature like Clarence Copperhead, without birth or breeding, or brains, or anything but money, was able to gratify every wish, while he—his senior, his superior! Instead of blaming himself, therefore, for his self-indulgence, Mr. May sympathized with himself, which is a much less safe thing to do; and accordingly it soon be-

gan to appear to him that his self-denial all this time in not giving himself what he wanted had been extreme, and that what he had now done, in conceding himself so harmless a gratification, was what he ought to have done years ago. It was his own money sent to him by his dutiful son without conditions, and who had any right to interfere?

When he was at dinner, Betsy came behind his chair under pretence of serving him, Betsy, whose place was in the kitchen, who had no right to show in the dining-room at all, and whose confused toilette had caught Ursula's eye and filled her with horror.

"Please, Sir," she said, breathing hot on Mr. May's ear, till he shrank with sensitive horror. "Cotsdean's in the kitchen. He says as how he must see you; and I can't get him away."

"Ah, Cotsdean? tell him if he has anything to say to me, to write it down."

"Which he's done, Sir," said Betsy,

producing a little bit of paper rolled tightly together, "but I wasn't to give it till I'd asked you to see him. Oh, please see him, Sir, like a dear good gentleman. He looks like a man as is going off his head."

"He is a fool," said Mr. May, taking the paper, but setting his teeth as he did so. Evidently he must get rid of this fellow—already beginning to trouble him, as if he was not the best person to know when and how far he could go.

"Tell him I'll attend to it, he need not trouble himself," he said, and put the paper into his pocket, and went on with his dinner. Cotsdean, indeed! surely there had been enough of him. What were his trumpery losses in comparison with what his principal would lose, and how dare that fellow turn up thus and press him continually for his own poor selfish safety. This was not how Mr. May had felt three months before; but everything changes, and he felt that he had a right to be angry at this selfish solicitude. Surely it was of

as much consequence to him at least as to Cotsdean. The man was a fussy disagreeable fool, and nothing more.

And as it happened they sat late that night at dinner, without any particular reason, because of some discussion into which Clarence and Reginald fell, so that it was late before Mr. May got back to his room, where his books were lying in a heap waiting their transportation. They seemed to appeal to him also, and ask him reproachfully how they had got there, and he went to work arranging them with all the enthusiasm natural to a lover of books. He was a book lover, a man full of fine tastes and cultured elegant ways of thinking. If he had been extravagant (which he was not) it would have been in the most innocent, nay delightful and laudable way. To attach any notion of criminality, any suspicion of wrong-doing to such a virtuous indulgence, how unjust it would be! There was no company up-

stairs that evening. Copperhead had strolled out with Reginald to smoke his cigar much against the will of the latter, and was boring him all the way to the college with accounts of his own lavish expenditure, and how much he had given for this and that, his cameos, his diamond studs, the magnificent dressing-case which was the wonder of the Parsonage. "Hang it all, what is the good of having money if you don't spend it?" said Clarence, and Reginald, who had not much money to spend, felt as near hating him as it was in his nature to do. Thus Mr. May was released from duty in the drawing-room, where Ursula, palpitating with many thoughts which were altogether new to her, sat doing her darning, and eluding as well as she could Janey's questions. Janey was determinedly conversational that night. She drove Ursula nearly out of her senses, and kept Johnny—who had crept into the drawing-room in

high delight finding it for once free to him—
—from learning his lessons.

“Oh, how nice it is to be by ourselves,”
said Janey, “instead of all those new
people. I don’t mind Phœbe; but strange
men in the house, what a nuisance they
are, always getting in one’s way—don’t
you think so, Ursula?”

Ursula made no reply, and after awhile
even Janey sank into silence, and the
drawing-room, usually so gay, got a cold
and deserted look. The new life which
had come in had left its mark, and to go
back to what had once been so pleasant in
the past was no longer possible. Johnny
and Janey might like it, having regained
their former places, but to Ursula the
solitude was horrible. She asked herself,
with a great blush and quiver, what she
would do if that temporary filling up of
new interests and relationships was to
fall away as was likely, and leave her to
the old life unbroken, to Janey’s childish
society and questions, and papa’s im-

perious and unmodified sway. She grew pale and chill at the very thought.

But Mr. May, as we have said, was off duty. He forgot all about Cotsdean and the note in his pocket, and set to work with the most boyish simplicity of delight to arrange his books in his new shelves. How well they looked! never before had their setting done them justice. There were books in gorgeous bindings, college prizes which had never shown at all, and which now gleamed out in crimson and gold from behind the glass, and made their owner's heart beat with pleasure. Alas! to think how much innocent pleasure is denied us by the want of that small sum of money! and worse still how an innocent pleasure becomes the reverse of innocent when it is purchased by the appropriation of something which should have been employed elsewhere. Perhaps, however, the sense of guilt which he kept under, added zest in Mr. May's mind to the pleasure of his ac-

quisition; he was snatching a fearful joy, heaven knows how soon the penalty might overwhelm him. In the meantime he was determined to take the good of it, and enjoy what he had gained.

When the books were all in he sat down at his table and surveyed it, rubbing his dusty hands. How much that is childish, how much that is fresh, and youthful, and innocent must be in the mind of a man (you would say) who could be thus excited about a bookcase! and yet this was not the kind of man whom you would call unsophisticated and youthful. It was probably the state of suppressed excitement in which he was, the unreality of his position that helped him to that sense of elation as much as anything else; for emotion is a Proteus ready to take any form, and pain itself sometimes finds vent in the quick blazing up of fictitious delight, as much as in the moanings that seem more accordant with its own nature. He put his hand into his pocket for his pencil

to make a note of the contents of the new shelves, and then he found Cotsdean's note, which he had not forgotten, but which he had felt no desire to remember. When he felt it between his fingers his countenance fell a little; but he took it out and read it with the smile still upon his face. It was a dirty little roll of paper, scribbled in pencil.

“ Rev. Sir,

“ I hope as you are not forgetting the 15th. Pleas excuse anxiety and bad writing, i am a poor nervous man i no, a word of answer just to say as it is all right will much oblidge.

“ Rev. Sir,

“ Your humble servant,

“ T. COTSDEAN.”

Betsy knocked at the door as he read this, with a request for an answer to Mr. Cotsdean's note. “ Little Bobby, Sir, is waiting for it in the kitchen.”

“Give Bobby some supper,” said Mr. May, “tell him to tell his father it’s all right, and I shan’t forget. You understand? He is a troublesome little fool; but it’s all right, and I shan’t forget, and give the child some supper, Betsy. He ought not to be out so late.”

“He is a delicate little thing, Sir, thankye, Sir,” said Betsy, half frightened by her master’s amiability; and he smiled and repeated,

“Tell him it’s all right.”

Was it all right, the 15th? Cotsdean must have made a mistake. Mr. May’s countenance paled, and the laugh went off; he opened a drawer in his writing table and took out a book, and anxiously consulted an entry in it. It was the 18th certainly, as clear as possible. Something had been written on the opposite page, and had blotted slightly the one on which these entries were written; but there it stood, the 18th April. Mr. May prided himself on making no mistakes in business.

He closed the book again with a look of relief, the smile coming back once more to his face. The 18th, it was three days additional, and in the time there was no doubt that he would find out what was the right thing to do.

CHAPTER V.

THE MILLIONAIRE.

WHEN Mr. May woke next morning, it was not the bookcase he thought of, but that date which had been the last thing in his mind on the previous night. Not the 15th, the 18th. Certainly he was right, and Cotsdean was wrong. Cotsdean was a puzzle-headed being, making his calculations by the rule of thumb; but he had put down the date, and there could be no possible mistake about it. He got up disposed to smile at the poor man's ignorance and fussy restlessness of mind. "I have never left him in the lurch, he may trust to me surely in the future," Mr.

May said to himself, and smiled with a kind of condescending pity for his poor agent's timidity; after all, perhaps, as Cotsdean had so little profit by it, it was not wonderful that he should be uneasy. After this, it might be well if they did anything further of the sort, to divide the money, so that Cotsdean too might feel that he had got something for the risk he ran; but then, to be sure, if he had not the money he had no trouble, except by his own foolish anxiety, for the payment, and always a five pound note or two for his pains. But Mr. May said to himself that he would do no more in this way after the present bill was disposed of; no, he would make a stand, he would insist upon living within his income. He would not allow himself to be subject to these perpetual agitations any more. It would require an effort, but after the effort was made all would be easy. So he said to himself; and it was the 18th, not the 15th, three days more to make his ar-

rangements in. It had come to be the 12th now, and up to this moment he had done nothing, having that vague faith in the Indian mail which had been realized, and yet had not been realized. But still he had nearly a week before him, which was enough certainly. Anything that he could do in six months, he said to himself, he could easily do in six days—the mere time was nothing; and he smiled as he dressed himself leisurely, thinking it all over. Somehow everything looked perfectly easy to him this time; last time he had been plunged into tragic despair; now, and he did not know why, he took it quite easily, he seemed to fear nothing. There were various ways of getting the money as natural as the daylight, and in the meantime why should he make himself unhappy. As soon as he was ready he went to his room and had another look at the bookcase which, with his best books in it, all in order and ranged in unbroken lines, looked everything a bookcase ought to

look. It made him feel more of a man somehow, more like the gentleman and scholar he had meant to be when he started in life; he had not intended then to be a poor district incumbent all his life, with a family of eight children. His bookcase somehow transported him back to the days when he had thought of better things for himself, and when life had held an ideal for him. Perhaps at the best of times it had never been a very high ideal; but when a man is over fifty and has given up doing anything but struggle through each day as it comes, and get out of his work as best he may, doing what he must, leaving undone what he can, any ideal almost seems something higher than himself; but the recollection of what he had meant to be, came back to him strongly when he looked at his carved oak. It had not been carried out; but still he felt rehabilitated and better in his own opinion as he stood beside this costly purchase he had made,

and felt that it changed his room and all his surroundings. It might have been almost wicked to run into such an extravagance, but yet it did him good.

“My people came down to the Hall last night,” Clarence Copperhead said to him at breakfast, “and the Governor is coming over along with Sir Robert. He’d like to see you, I am sure, and I suppose they’ll be going in for sight seeing, and that sort of thing. He is a dab at sight seeing, is the Governor. I can’t think how he can stand it for my part.”

“Then you must remember that I put myself at his orders for the day,” said Mr. May graciously. “Sir Robert is not a bad guide, but I am a better, though it sounds modest to say it; and, Ursula, of course Mr. Copperhead will take luncheon with us.”

“Don’t think of that,” said Clarence, “he’s queer and likes his own way. Just as likely as not he’ll think he ought to support the hotels of the place where he is

—sort of local production you know. I think it's nonsense, but that is how it is—that's the man."

"We shall look for him all the same," said Mr. May, with a nod at Ursula; and a sudden project sprang up in his mind, wild as projects so often are. This father whom his fancy, working upon what Clarence said, immediately invested with all the prodigal liberality of a typical rich man, this stranger to whom a hundred pounds was less than a penny was to himself, would give him the money he wanted. What so easy? He drew a long breath, and though he had not been aware that he was anxious, he was suddenly conscious of a sense of relief. Yes, to be sure, what so simple, what so likely; he would explain his monetary necessities lightly and with grace, and Mr. Copperhead would supply them. He was in the mildest state of desperation, the painless stage, as may be seen, when this strange idea entered into his head. He hugged it, though

he was a man of the world and might have known better, and it produced a kind of elation which would have been a very strange spectacle to any looker on who knew what it meant. The thing seemed done when he next thought of it ten minutes later, settled as if it had been so for years. Mr. Copperhead would make it all right for him, and after that he would undertake such risks no more.

Mr. Copperhead, however, did not come for two days, though Ursula spent all the morning and a great deal of trouble in arranging a luncheon for him; but on the second morning he came, driven by Sir Robert, who had changed horses on the road, and who was in a somewhat irritated and excited condition, very glad to get rid of his visitor.

“I hope you don't mind having your toes trodden on, May,” he said, privately; “that fellow is never happy but when he's insulting some one.” And indeed Mr. Copperhead began this favourite

pastime at once by making very big eyes at the sight of Ursula. "A—ah!" he said, rubbing his hands, and elevating his eyebrows; and he gave a meaning laugh as he shook hands with her, and declared that he did not expect to find young ladies here. "I haven't a great deal of education myself, and I never knew it could be carried on so pleasantly," he said. "You're a lucky young dog, Clar, that's what you are;" and the son laughed with the father at this excellent joke, though the rest of the company looked on with great gravity. Ursula, for her part, turned with wondering eyes from the newcomer to her old friend, Sir Robert.

"What does he mean?" she asked, with an appealing look.

"He is the greatest brute I know," said poor Sir Robert, under his breath; and he went off suddenly on the plea of business, leaving his unpleasant visitor in Mr. May's hands, who undertook the charge not unwillingly, being possessed

by his own plan. Mr. Copperhead went all over Carlingford. He inspected the town-hall, the infirmary, and the church, with the business-like air of a man who was doing his duty.

“Poor little place, but well enough for the country,” he said. “A country-town’s a mistake in my opinion. If I had it in my power I’d raze them all to the ground, and have one London and the rest green fields. That’s your sort, Mr. May. Now you don’t produce anything here, what’s the good of you? All unproductive communities, Sir, ought to be swept off the face of the earth. I’d let Manchester and those sort of places go on till they burst; but a bit of a little piggery like this, where there’s nothing doing, no trade, no productions of any kind.”

“We like it all the same,” said Mr. May; “we small sort of people who have no enterprise like you—”

“I daresay you like it! To be sure,

you can moon about here as much as you please, and make believe to do something, and there's nobody to contradict you. In a great centre of industry you couldn't live like that; you must work or you'll get pushed aside altogether; unless, of course, you're a millionaire to start with," Mr. Copperhead added, with a noisy laugh.

"Which I am not certainly—very much the reverse—in short, a poor man with a large family, which I suppose is a thing about as objectionable in a centre of industry as anything can be."

"The large family aint objectionable if you make 'em work," said Mr. Copperhead; "it all depends on that. There's always objections, you know," he said, with a jocular grin, "to pretty girls like that daughter of yours put straight in a young fellow's way. You won't mind my saying it? They neither work themselves nor let others work—that sort. I think we could get on with a deal fewer women, I must allow. There's where Providence

is in a mistake. We don't want 'em in England; it's a waste of raw material. They're bad for the men, and they ain't much good for themselves, that I can see."

"You are a little hard upon the ladies, Mr. Copperhead."

"Not I—we can't do without 'em of course, and the surplus we ought to export as we export other surpluses; but I object to them in a young man's way, not meaning anything unpleasant to you. And perhaps if I had been put up to it sooner—but let's hope there's no mischief done. What is this now? some of your antiquities, I suppose. Oh yes, let's have a look at it; but I confess it's the present age I like best."

"This is the College," cried Mr. May, swallowing certain sensations which impaired his sense of friendliness; "but not an educational college, a foundation for old men—decayed citizens, as they are called—founded in the fifteenth century.

My son is the chaplain, and will be very glad to show it you. There are twelve old men here at present, very comfortably looked after, thanks to the liberal arrangements of the founder. They attend chapel twice a day, where Reginald officiates. It is very agreeable to me to have him settled so near me."

"Cunning I call it," said Mr. Copperhead, with his hoarse laugh; "does you credit; a capital snug nest—nothing to do—and pay—pay good now? those old fellows generally managed that; as it was priests that had the doing of it, of course they did well for their own kind. Good Lord, what a waste of good money all this is!" he continued, as they went into the quadrangle, and saw the little park beyond with its few fine trees; "half-a-dozen nice villas might be built on this site, and it's just the sort of place I should fancy where villas would pay. Why don't the Corporation lay hands on it? And your son lives here? Too dull for me; I like a little

movement going on, but I daresay he likes it; and with how much a year?"

"Two hundred and fifty; and some advantages beside—"

"Bravo!" said Mr. Copperhead, "now how many curates could you get for that two and a-half? I've got a great respect for you, Mr. May; you know what's what. That shows sense, that does. How do you do, Sir? fine old place you've got here—capital snug appointment. I've just been saying to your father I admire his sense, looking out for you a nice fat easy appointment like this."

Reginald turned from red to white and then to portentous blackness. The subject was of all others the one least likely to please him.

"It is not very fat," he said, with a look of offence, quite undeserved by the chief sufferer, towards his father, "nor very easy. But come in. It is rather an interesting old place. I suppose you would like to see the Chapel, and the old captain's

rooms ; they are very fine in their way."

"Thank you ; we've been seeing a deal already, and I feel tired. I think I'll let you off the chapel. Hallo ! here's another old friend—Northcote, by George ! and what are *you* doing here I should like to know, a blazing young screamer of the Liberation Society, in a high and dry parson's rooms ? This is as good as a play."

"I suppose one is not required to stay at exactly the same point of opinion all one's life," said Northcote, with a half smile.

"By George ! but you are though, when you're a public man ; especially when you're on a crusade. Have'nt I heard you call it a crusade ? I can tell you that changing your opinion is just the very last thing the public will permit you to do. But I shan't tell for my part—make yourself easy. Clarence, don't you let it out ; your mother, fortunately, is out of the way. The world shall never know

through me that young Northcote, the anti-state Churchman, was discovered hob-nobbing with a snug chaplain in a sinecure appointment. Ha, ha! had you there.”

“To do Northcote justice,” said Mr. May; “he began life in Carlingford by pointing out this fact to the neighbourhood; that it was a sinecure, and that my son and I—”

“Would it not be more to the point to inspect the chapel?” said Reginald, who had been standing by impatiently playing with a big key; upon which Mr. Copperhead laughed more loudly than before.

“We’ll not trouble the chapel,” he said, “railway stations are more in my way; you are all a great deal finer than I am, and know a deal more I suppose; but my roughness has served its purpose on the whole, better perhaps for some things—yes, for some things, Clar, and you may thank your stars, old boy. If you had been a parson’s son, by George! there

would have been no fat appointment waiting for you."

"After all, my son's appointment is not so very fat," said Mr. May, forcing a laugh. "It is not so much as many a boy at school gets from his father."

"Ah, you mean my boy at school! he's an extravagant dog. His mother and he, Sir, are made of different clay from me; they are porcelain and I am delft. They want fine velvet cupboards to stand themselves in, while I'm for the kitchen dresser. That's the difference. But I can afford it, thank heaven. I tell Clarence that he may thank his stars that I can afford it, and that he isn't born a poor man's son. He has been plucked at Oxford, you know," he said, with a big laugh, thrusting forth his chest, as Clarence thrust forth his shirt-front, with an apparent complacency over the very plucking. My son can afford to be plucked he seemed to say. He got up as he spoke, and approaching the fireplace turned his back to it, and

gathered up his coat-tails under his arm. He was no taller than Mr. May, and very little taller than Reginald; but they both shrank into insignificance beside the big self-assertive figure. He looked about the room as if he was thinking of "buying up" the whole contents of it, and thought very little of them. A glance of contempt, a shrug more implied than actual, testified his low opinion of everything around. When he withdrew his eyes from the furniture he shook out his leg, as Clarence had done his, and gave a pull to his trousers that they might sit properly. He had the word "Rich" painted in big letters all over him, and he seemed to feel it his vocation to show this sense of superiority. Clarence by his side, the living copy of the great man's appearance and manners, strutted and put himself forward like his father, as a big calf might place itself beside the parent cow. Mr. Copperhead did not look upon his offspring, however, with the cow's motherly com-

placency. He laughed at him openly, with cynical amusement. He was clever in his way and Clarence was stupid, and beside he was the proprietor, and Clarence, for all he was porcelain, was his goods and chattels. When he looked at him, a wicked leer of derision awoke in his eye.

“Yes, my boy,” he said, “thank your stars; you would not make much of it, if you were a poor man. You’re an ornament that costs dear; but I can afford you. So, Northcote, you’re changing your opinions, going over to the Church, eh? Extremes meet they say; I shouldn’t have thought it—”

“I am doing nothing of the kind,” said Northcote stoutly. He was not in a mood to be taken to task by this Mammon of unrighteousness, and indeed had at all times been a great deal too independent and unwilling to submit to leading members of the connection. Mr. Copperhead, however, showed no resentment. North-

cote too, like Clarence, had a father before him, and stood on quite a different footing from the ordinary young pastor, whose business it was to be humble and accept all that his betters might portion out.

“Well,” he said, “you can afford to please yourself and that’s always something. By the way, isn’t it time to have something to eat. If there is a good hotel near—”

“Luncheon will be waiting at my house,” said Mr. May, who was still doing his best to please the man upon whom he had built such wild hopes, “and Ursula will be waiting.”

“Ah, ah, the young lady! so she will. I wouldn’t miss that for something; but I don’t like putting you to so much expense. My son here has an excellent appetite as you must have found out by this time, and for my part so have I. I think it a thousand pities to put you to this trouble—and expense.”

“Pray don’t think of that,” said Mr. May with courtesy, which belied his feelings, for he would have liked nothing so well as to have knocked down his complacent patron. He led the way out, almost with eagerness, feeling Mr. Copperhead to be less offensive out of doors than within four walls. Was this the sort of man to be appealed to for help as he had thought? Probably his very arrogance would make him more disposed towards liberality. Probably it would flatter his sense of consequence, to have such a request made to him. Mr. May was very much at sea, letting I dare not wait upon I would, afraid to speak lest he should shut this door of help by so doing, and afraid to lose the chance of any succour by not speaking. He tried hard, in spite of all difficulties, to be smooth and agreeable to a man who had so much in his power; but it was harder work than he could have thought.

CHAPTER VI.

FATHER AND SON.

URSULA had prepared a very careful luncheon for the stranger. She thought him disagreeable, but she had not looked at him much, for, indeed, Ursula's mind was much unsettled. Horace Northcote had spoken to her that morning, after Mrs. Hurst's visit and her retaliation upon him, as no man yet had ever spoken to her before. He had told her a long story, though it was briefly done, and could have been expressed in three words. He was not of her species of humanity; his ways of thinking, his prejudices, his traditions, were all different to hers, and

yet that had happened to him which happens all over the world in every kind of circumstances—without knowing how it was, he had got to love her. Yes, he knew very well how it was, or rather, he knew when it was, which is all that is to be expected from a lover. It was on the evening of the entrées, the first dinner-party, and he had gone on ever since, deeper and deeper, hearing her say many things which he did not agree in, and tracing her life through a score of little habits which were not congenial to his, yet loving her more and more for all that was new to him, and even for the things which were uncongenial. He had told her all this, and Ursula had listened with a kind of awe, wondering at the ardour in the young man's eyes, and the warmth with which he spoke; wondering and trembling a little. She had guessed what he meant the night before, as has been said, and this had touched her with a little thrill of awakened feeling; but the inno-

cent girl knew no more about passion than a child, and when she saw it, glowing and ardent, appealing to her, she was half alarmed, half overawed by the strange sight. What answer could she make to him? She did not know what to say. To reject him altogether was not in Ursula's heart; but she could not respond to that strange, new, overwhelming sentiment, which put a light in his eyes which she dared not meet, which dazzled her when she ventured a glance at him. "Was he to go away?" he asked, his voice, too, sounding musical and full of touching chords. Ursula could not tell him to go away either. What she did say to him, she never quite knew; but at least, whatever it was, it left him hopeful, if unsatisfied.

And since that time her mind had been in a strange confusion, a confusion strange but sweet. Gratified vanity is not a pretty title to give to any feeling, and yet that mixture of gratification and gratitude, and penetrating pleasure in the fact of being

elevated from an often-scolded and imperfect child to an admired and worshipped woman is, perhaps, of all the sensations that feminine youth is conscious of, the most poignant in its sweetness. It went through her whole life; sometimes it made her laugh when she was all alone, and there was nothing of a laughter-producing nature in her way; and sometimes it made her cry, both the crying and the laughter being one. It was strange, very strange, and yet sweet. Under the influence of this, and of the secret homage which Northcote paid her whenever they met, and which she now understood as she had never understood it before, the girl's whole nature expanded, though she did not know. She was becoming sweet to the children, to puzzled Janey, to everyone around her. Her little petulances were all subdued. She was more sympathetic than she had ever been before. And yet she was not in love with her lover. It was only that the sunshine of young life had caught her,

that the highest gratification of youth had fallen to her share unawares. All this might have been, and yet some one else come in to secure Ursula's real love; but in the meantime she was all the happier, all the better for the love which she did not return.

This is a digression from our immediate subject, which was the luncheon prepared for Mr. Copperhead. Ursula sent up an urgent message for Phœbe, who came to her in her prettiest morning dress, very carefully arranged, but with a line of care upon her brow.

"I will come if you wish it, dear," she said; "but I don't want to meet Mr. Copperhead. I don't like him."

"Neither do I like him," cried Ursula. "He said something disagreeable the little moment he was here. Oh, I don't remember what it was, but something. Please stay. What am I to do with them all by myself? If you will help me, I may get through."

Phœbe kissed her with a tremulous kiss; perhaps she was not unwilling to see with her own eyes what the father of Clarence meant, and what brought him here. She sat down at the window, and was the first to see them coming along the street.

“What a gentleman your father looks beside them,” cried Phœbe; “both of them, father and son; though Clarence, after all, is a great deal better than his father, less like a British snob.”

Ursula came and stood by her, looking out.

“I don’t think he is much better than his father,” she said.

Phœbe took her hand suddenly and wrung it, then dropped it as if it had hurt her. What did it all mean? Ursula, though rays of enlightenment had come to her, was still perplexed, and did not understand.

Mr. Copperhead did not see her till he went to luncheon, when Phœbe appeared

with little Amy May looking like a visitor, newly arrived. She had run upstairs after that first sight of him from the window, declaring herself unable to be civil to him except at table. The great man's face almost grew pale at the sight of her. He looked at Ursula, and then at Clarence, and laughed.

“ ‘Wheresoever the carcass is the eagles are gathered together,’ ” he said. “That's Scripture, ain't it, Miss Ursula? I am not good at giving chapter and verse.”

“What does it mean?” asked Ursula.

She was quite indifferent to Mr. Copperhead, and perfectly unconscious of his observation. As for Phœbe, on the contrary, she was slightly agitated, her placid surface ruffled a little, and looking her best in her agitation. Mr. Copperhead looked straight at her across the table, and laughed in his insolent way.

“So you are here, too, Miss Phœbe!” he said. “I might think myself in the Crescent if I didn't know better. I met

young Northcote just now, and now you. What may you be doing here, might one ask? It is what you call a curious coincidence, ain't it, Clarence and you both here?"

"I said so when Mr. Clarence came," said Phœbe. "I came to take care of my grandmother, who is ill; and it was a very lucky thing for me that I had met Miss May at your ball, Mr. Copperhead."

"By Jove, wasn't it!" said Clarence, roused to some dull sense of what was going on. "We owe all the fun we have had here to that, so we do. Odd, when one thinks of it; and thought so little of it then, didn't we? It's a very queer world."

"So you've been having fun here?" said his father. "I thought you came here to work; that's how we old fellows get taken in. Work! with young ladies dangling about, and putting things into your head! I ought to have known better, don't you

think so, Miss Ursula? *You* could have taught me a thing or two."

"I?" said Ursula, startled. "I don't know what I could teach anyone. I think Mr. Clarence Copperhead has kept to his hours very steadily. Papa is rather severe; he never would take any excuse from any of us when we were working with him."

"He is not so severe now, I'll be bound," said Mr. Copperhead. "Let's you have your fun a little, as Clarence tells me, don't you, May? Girls will be girls, and boys, boys, whatever we do; and I am sure, Miss Phœbe, you have been very entertaining, as you always were."

"I have done my best," said Phœbe, looking him in the face. "I should have had a dull life but for the Parsonage, and I have tried to be grateful. I have accompanied your son on the violin a great many evenings, and I hope our friends have liked it. Mr. Clarence is a promising

player, though I should like him to trust less to his ear; but we always pulled through."

"Thanks to you," said Clarence, in the middle of his cutlet.

He did not quite see why she should flourish this music in his father's face; but still he was loyal in a dull fashion, and he was obstinate, and did not mean to be "sat upon," to use his own words. As for Phœbe, her quick mind caught at once the best line of policy. She determined to deliver Ursula, and she determined at the same time to let her future father-in-law (if he was to be her father-in-law) see what sort of person he had to deal with. As soon as she made up her mind, her agitation disappeared. It was only the uncertainty that had cowed her; now she saw what to do.

"So!" said Mr. Copperhead, "musical evenings! I hope you have not turned poor Clar's head among you, young ladies. It's not a very strong head; and two is

more than a match for one. I daresay he has had no chance between you."

"Make yourself quite easy," said Phœbe, with her sweetest smile; "he was only one of a party. Mr. Reginald May and Mr. Northcote are both very pleasant companions. Your son is bored sometimes, but the rest of us are never bored. You see, he has been accustomed to more brilliant society; but as for us, we have no particular pretensions. We have been very happy. And if there has been two to one, it has been the other way."

"I think I must let your people know of your gaieties, Miss Phœbe. If your mother sent you here, I don't doubt it was for a purpose, eh? She knows what she's about, and she won't like it if she knows you are fritting away your chances and your attentions. She has an eye for business, has Mrs. Beecham," said the leading member, with a laugh.

"You cannot tell mamma more about

me than she knows already," said Phœbe, with rising colour.

And by this time everyone else at table was uncomfortable. Even Clarence, who had a dull appreciation of his father's jokes when they were not levelled at himself, and who was by no means indisposed to believe that "girls," generally, were "after him," and that even in this particular case Phœbe herself might have come to Carlingford on purpose to complete his conquest, even Clarence was moved.

"I don't know what you mean by brilliant society," he said. "I know I'm the dull one among you clever people. I don't say much, but I know it all the same; and it's awfully good of you to pull me through all that music. I don't begrudge you your laugh after. Is my mother coming over, Sir, to see the place?"

"To see what? There is not much in the place," said Mr. Copperhead. "You're coming back with me, my boy. I hope it won't inconvenience you, May. I've other

views for him. Circumstances alter cases, you know. I've been turning it over in my head, and I think I can see my way to another arrangement."

"That, of course, is entirely in your own hands," said Mr. May, with a cheerfulness he did not feel. His heart sank, but every rule of good society made it incumbent upon him to show no failure at such a moment. "Copperhead, see that your father has some wine. Well, I suppose our poor little Carlingford is not much of a place; no trade, no movement, no manufactures—"

"The sort of place that should be cleared off the face of the earth," said the millionaire; "meaning no offence, of course. That's my opinion in respect to country towns. What's the good of them? Nests of gossip, places where people waste their time, and don't even amuse themselves. Give me green fields and London, that is my sort. I don't care if there was not another blessed brick in the country.

There is always something that will grow in a field, corn or fat beasts—not that we couldn't get all that cheaper from over the water if it was managed as it ought to be. But a place like this, what's the good of it? Almshouses and chaplains, and that kind of rubbish, and old women; there's old women by the score."

"They must be somewhere, I suppose," said Mr. May. "We cannot kill them off, if they are inoffensive, and keep the laws. So that, after all, a country town is of use."

"Kill 'em off—no; it's against what you benevolent humbugs call the spirit of the time, and Christianity, and all that; but there's such a thing as carrying Christianity too far; that's my opinion. There's your almshouses now. What's the principle of them? I call it encouraging those old beggars to live," said Mr. Copperhead; "giving them permission to burden the community as long as they can manage it; a dead mistake, depend upon

it, the greatest mistake in the world.”

“I think there is a great deal to be said in favour of Euthanasia,” said Phœbe, quietly stepping in to the conversation; “but then it would have to be with the consent of the victims. When anyone found himself useless, unnecessary to the world, or unhappy in it—”

“Humbug and nonsense,” said Mr. Copperhead. “A likely thing for anybody to do. No, it is not a question for law-making. Let ’em die out naturally, that’s my opinion. Don’t do anything to hurry ’em—that is, I don’t see my way to it; but let ’em go quiet, and don’t bring ’em cordials and feather-beds, and all that middyeval nonsense, to keep ’em going as long as possible. It’s wicked, that’s what it is.”

“At all events,” said Mr. May who, poor man, was bent on pleasing, “it is refreshing to hear opinions so bold and original. Something new is always a

blessing. I cannot say I agree with you—”

“No parson would be bold enough for that. Christianity’s been a capital thing for the world,” said Mr. Copperhead, “I don’t say a word against it; but in these go-ahead days, Sir, we’ve had enough of it, that’s to say when it’s carried too far. All this fuss about the poor, all the row about dragging up a lot of poor little beggars to live that had far better die, and your alms-houses to keep the old ones going, past all nature! Shovel the mould over them, that’s the thing for the world; let ’em die when they ought to die; and let them live who can live—that’s my way of thinking—and what’s more I’m right.”

“What a fine thing for you, Mr. Clarence,” cried Phœbe, “who are going into Parliament! to take up your father’s idea and work it out. What a speech you could make on the subject! I saw a hospital once in Paris that would

make such a wonderful illustration. I'll tell you about it if you like. Poor old wretched people whose life was nothing but wretchedness kept going, kept living for years and years—why, no one could tell; for I am sure it would have been better, far better for them to die and be done with it. What a speech you might make when you bring a bill into Parliament to abolish alms-houses and all sorts of charities!" she added with a laugh, turning from Clarence, at whom she had been looking, to his father, who was puzzled and did not know how to understand the young woman's eyes.

"I'll never make much of a speech in Parliament," said Clarence; "unless you make it for me," he added in an undertone. But no one else was speaking, and the undertone was quite audible. Meanwhile Phoebe had not ceased to look at his father, and held him with a pair of eyes not like the Ancient Mariner's. Mr. Copperhead was confused, his power even of

insolence was cowed for the moment. He obeyed quite docilely the movement made to leave the table. Was it possible that she defied him, this Minister's daughter, and measured her strength against his? Mr. Copperhead felt as if he could have shaken the impertinent girl, but dared not, being where he was.

And lunch being over, Mr. May led his pupil's father into his study. "I want to show you what your boy has been doing," he said, pointing to a line of books which made the millionaire's soul shrink within him. "I have not bothered him with classics; what was the use as he is not going back to Oxford? but I have done my best for him in a practical way. He has read history, largely as you see, and as much as I could give him of political and constitutional—"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Copperhead, reading the titles of some of the books under his breath. They impressed him deeply, and took away for a moment

his self-confidence. It was his habit to boast that he knew nothing about books; but in their presence he shrank, feeling that they were greater than he, which was, there is little doubt, a sign of grace.

“If you wish to remove Clarence,” said Mr. May, “perhaps I had better make out a scheme of reading for him.”

“Look here,” cried the rich man, “I didn’t want to remove him; but there he is, the first I see of him, cheek for jowl with a good-looking girl. I don’t mean to say a word against Miss May, I’ve no doubt she’s charming; but anyhow there she is side by side with Clar, who is no more able to resist that sort of thing—”

Mr. May laughed, and this time with unmitigated amusement. “Do you mean Ursula? I think I can answer for it that she made no attempts upon him for which resistance would be necessary.”

“That’s all very well to say; but bless you they do it, every one,” said Mr.

Copperhead, "without exception, when a young fellow's well off and well-looking; and as if one wasn't bad enough, you've got Phœbe Beecham. You won't tell me she doesn't mean anything?—up to any mischief, a real minister's daughter. I don't mean anything uncivil to you or yours. I suppose a parson's different; but we know what a minister's daughter is in our connection. Like the men themselves, in short, who are always pouncing on some girl with a fortune if her relations don't take care. And Clarence is as weak as a baby, he takes after his mother—a poor bit of a feeble creature, though he's like me in exterior. That's how it is, you perceive; I don't quite see my way to letting him go on."

"That is of course precisely as you please," said Mr. May, somewhat sharply. He would preserve his dignity even though his heart was sinking; but he could not keep that tone of sharpness out of his voice.

“Of course it is as I please. I’ll pay up of course for the second three months, if you choose, fair and square. I meant him to stay, and I’ll pay. But that’s all. You’ve no further claim upon me that I know of; and I must say that for a tutor, a regular coach, to keep girls in his house, daughters or whatever you choose to call them, is something monstrous. It’s a thing no fellow’s friends would put up with. It’s what I call dishonourable.”

“Perhaps,” said Mr. May, with all the self-possession he was master of, “you will let your son know at once that he must pack and go. I dare say, Sir Robert can take him, and we will send the portmanteaux. In such a case, it is better there should not be a moment’s delay.”

“Clarence!” cried Mr. Copperhead, walking to the door and opening it. “Come along, look sharp, you’re to go. I’ll take you with me, do you hear? And May will see to sending you your boxes. Quick, come along, there’s no time to lose.”

“Go!” said Clarence, coming in startled, with his eyebrows rising almost into his hair. “Go? What do you mean? Out of the Parsonage? The Governor’s been having too much sherry,” he said, coming close to Mr. May’s arm; he had himself been taking too much of the sherry, for the good reason that nobody had taken any notice of what he did, and that he had foreseen the excitement that was coming. “You don’t mean it, I know,” he added aloud, “I’ll go over for the night if Sir Robert will have me, and see my mother—”

“Ask May,” said Mr. Copperhead, “you’ll believe him I suppose, he’s as glad to get rid of you as I am to take you away.”

“Is this true?” cried Clarence, roused and wondering, “and if so, what’s happened? I ain’t a baby, you know, to be bundled about from one to another. The Governor forgets that.”

“Your father,” said Mr. May, “chooses

to remove you, and that is all I choose to say."

"But, by George, I can say a deal more," said Mr. Copperhead. "You simpleton, do you think I am going to leave you here where there's man-traps about? None of such nonsense for me. Put your things together, I tell you. Phœbe Beecham's bad enough at home; but if she thinks she's to have you here to pluck at her leisure, she and her friends—"

"W—hew!" said Clarence, with a long whistle. "So that's it. I am very sorry, father, if these are your sentiments; but I may as well tell you at once I shan't go."

"You—must go."

"No," he said, squaring his shoulders and putting out his shirt front; he had never been roused into rebellion before, and perhaps without these extra glasses of sherry he would not have had the courage now. But what with sherry, and what with *amour propre*, and what with the thing he called love, Clarence Copper-

head mounted all at once upon a pedestal. He had a certain dogged obstinacy in him, suspected by nobody but his mother, who had little enough to say in the guidance of her boy. He set himself square like a pugilist, which was his notion of resistance. Mr. May looked on with a curious mixture of feelings. His own sudden and foolish hope was over, and what did it matter to him whether the detestable father or the coarse son should win? He turned away from them with contempt, which was made sharp by their utter uselessness to himself. Had it been possible that he might have what he wanted from Mr. Copperhead, his patience would have held out against any trial; but the moment that hope was over, what further interest had he in the question? He went to his writing-table and sat down there, leaving them to fight it out as they would, by themselves. It was no affair of his.

CHAPTER VII.

A PLEASANT EVENING.

THE result, however, was a compromise. Clarence Copperhead went off with his father and Sir Robert to the Hall for the night, but was to return next day, and Phœbe was left in a condition of some excitement behind them, not quite knowing what to think. She was as sure as ever that he had made up his mind to propose; but he had not done it, and what effect his father's visit, and perhaps his mother's entreaties, might have upon him, Phœbe could not tell. The crisis excited her beyond any excitement which she would have thought possible in respect to Cla-

rence Copperhead. She was more like an applicant for office kept uncertain whether she was to have a desirable post or not, than a girl on the eve of a lover's declaration. This was her own conception of the circumstances. She did not dislike Clarence; quite the reverse. She had no sympathy with Ursula's impatience of his heavy vanity. Phœbe had been used to him all her life, and had never thought badly of the heavy boy whom she had been invited to amuse when she was six years old, and whom she had no particular objection to amuse still, let the others wonder at her as they might. Poor Reginald, contemplating bitterly her many little complacencies to his rival, set them down hastily to an appreciation of that rival's worldly advantages, which was not quite a just sentence. It was true, and yet it was not true; other feelings mingled in Phœbe's worldliness. She did, indeed, perceive and esteem highly the advantages which Clarence could give her; but she had not the

objections to Clarence himself that the others had. She was willing, quite willing, to undertake the charge of him, to manage, and guide, and make a man of him. And yet while it was not pure worldliness, much less was it actual love which moved her. It was a kind of habitual affection, as for the "poor thing, but mine own, Sir," of the jester. He was but a poor creature, but Phœbe knew she could make something of him, and she had no distaste to the task. When she began to perceive that Reginald, in so many ways Clarence's superior, was at her disposal, a sense of gratification went through Phœbe's mind, and it certainly occurred to her that the feeling he might inspire would be a warmer and a more delightful one than that which would fall to Clarence Copperhead; but she was not tempted thereby to throw Clarence off for the other. No, she was pleased, and not unwilling to expend a little tender regret and gratitude upon poor Reginald. She was ready to be

“kind” to him, though every woman knows that is the last thing she ought to be to a rejected lover ; and she was full of sympathy for the disappointment which, nevertheless, she fully intended was to be his lot. This seems paradoxical, but it is no more paradoxical than human creatures generally are. On this particular evening her heart beat very high on account of Clarence, to know if he would have strength of mind to hold his own against his father, and if he would come back to her and ask her, as she felt certain he meant to do, that one momentous question. Her heart would not have been broken had he not done so, but still she would have been disappointed. Notwithstanding, when the evening came, the absence of Clarence was a relief to Phoebe as well as to the rest of the party, and she gave herself up to the pleasure of a few hours of half tender intercourse with Reginald, with a sense of enjoyment such as she seldom felt. This was very wrong,

there is no denying it, but still so it was. She was anxious that Clarence should come back to her, and ask her to be his wife; and yet she was pleased to be rid of Clarence, and to give her whole attention and sympathy to Reginald, trying her best to please him. It was very wrong; and yet such things have happened before, and will again; and are as natural, perhaps, as the more absolute and unwavering passion which has no doubt of its object, passion like Northcote's, who had neither eyes nor ears for anything but Ursula. The four were alone together that evening, and enjoyed it thoroughly. Clarence was away, who, to all but Phoebe, was an interruption of their intercourse; and Mr. May was away in his study, too much absorbed to think of any duties that ought to have devolved upon him as chaperon; and even Janey was out of the way, taking tea with Mrs. Hurst. So the two young pairs sat round the table and talked; the girls, with a mutual panic, which neither breathed

to the other, keeping together, avoiding separation into pairs. Ursula out of very shyness and fright alone, lest another chapter of the strange, novel, too moving love-tale might be poured into her ears; but Phœbe with more settled purpose, to prevent any disclosure on the part of Reginald. The evening was mixed up of pleasure and pain to the two young men, each eager to find himself alone with the girl whom he loved; but it is to be feared the girls themselves had a furtive guilty enjoyment of it, which they ought not to have had. Open and outrageous love-making is not half so delicate a pastime as that in which nothing distinct dare be said, but all is implication, conveyed and understood without words. I know it is a dangerous thing to confess, but veracity requires the confession; you may say it was the playing of the cat with the mouse, if you wish to give a disagreeable version of it; but, however you choose to explain it, this was how it was.

It was with fear and trembling at last that Phœbe went to the piano, which was at the other end of the room, after making all the resistance which was possible.

“Thank Heaven, that idiot and his fiddle isn’t here to-night to interfere!” cried Reginald.

Phœbe shook her head at him, but ventured on no words; and how she did exert herself on the piano, playing things which were a great deal too classical for Reginald, who would have preferred the simplest stock piece, under cover of which he might have talked to her hanging over her chair, and making belief to turn over the music! This was what he wanted, poor fellow. He had no heart nor ears for Beethoven, which Phœbe played to him with a tremor in her heart, and yet, the wicked little witch, with some enjoyment too.

“This is not the sort of thing you play when Copperhead is here,” he said at last, driven to resistance.

“Oh, we play Mendelssohn,” said Phœbe, with much show of innocence; and then she added, “you ought to feel the compliment if I play Beethoven to you.”

“So I ought, I suppose,” said Reginald. “The truth is, I don’t care for music. Don’t take your hands off the keys.”

“Why, you have done nothing but worry me to play!”

“Not for the music,” said Reginald, quite satisfied to have got his will. “Why will you not talk to me, and play to me, as I wish?”

“Perhaps, if I knew what you wish—” Phœbe said, in spite of herself.

“Oh, how I should like to tell you! No, not Beethoven; a little, just a little music. Heavens!” cried Reginald, as she crashed into a fortissimo, “another sonata! Listen, I am not equal to sonatas. Nay, Miss Beecham, play me a little nothing—talk to me.”

She shook her head at him with a laugh, and went on playing the hardest piece of

music she could think of, complicating herself in difficult chords and sudden accidentals. If there had been anybody there to hear who could have understood, Phœbe's performance would, no doubt, have appeared a masterpiece of brilliant execution, as it was; but the two others were paying not the slightest attention, and as for Reginald, he was in a state of tantalized vexation, which half amused himself, and filled the performer with an exhilarating sense of successful mischief. Northcote was trying to say—what was he not trying to say?—to Ursula, under cover of the music, which was the best shield he could have had; and perhaps in reality, though Reginald was tantalized to the utmost degree of tantalization, even he had a certain enjoyment in the saucy self-defence which was more mischievous than cruel. He stood behind Phœbe's chair, now and then meeting her laughing glance with one of tender appeal and reproach, pleased to feel himself thus isolated with

her, and held at arm's-length in so genial a way. He would have his opportunity after a while, when there would be no piano to give her a momentary refuge, and then he would say out all that was in his heart, with no possible shadow of a rival to interfere with him. Angry? no; as he stood behind her, watching her fingers fly over the keys, a delightful calm stole over Reginald. Now and then she would throw a half-mocking glance at him upward over her shoulder, as she swept over the resounding board. When the sonata was concluded, Phœbe sprang up from the piano, and went back to the table. She proposed that they should play a game at cards, to which Ursula agreed. The young men shrugged their shoulders and protested; but after all, what did it matter, so long as they were together? They fell into their places quite naturally, the very cards assisting; and so the moments flew by. There was not so much sound as usual in the old faded drawing-room,

which had come to look so bright and homelike; not so much sound of voices, perhaps less laughter—yet of all the evenings they had spent there together, that was the one they looked back upon, all four, with most tender recollection. They had been so happy, or, if not happy, so near (apparently) to happiness, which is better sometimes than happiness itself.

“Don’t let Reginald come with me,” Phœbe whispered, as she kissed her friend, and said good night, “or ask Mr. Northcote to come too.”

“Why?” said Ursula, with dreamy eyes; her own young tide of life was rising, invading, for the moment, her perceptions, and dulling her sense of what was going on round her. There was no time, however, for anything more to be said, for Reginald was close behind with his hat in his hand. Phœbe had to resign herself, and she knew what was coming. The only thing was, if possible, to stop the declaration on the way.

“This is the first chance I have had of seeing you home without that perpetual shadow of Copperhead—”

“Ah, poor Clarence!” said Phœbe. “I wonder how he is getting on away from us all to-night.”

“Poor Clarence!” echoed Reginald aghast. “You don’t mean to say that you—miss him, Miss Beecham? I never heard you speak of him in that tone before.”

“Miss him! no, perhaps not exactly,” said Phœbe, with a soft little sigh; “but still—I have known him all my life, Mr. May; when we were quite little I used to be sent for to his grand nursery, full of lovely toys and things—a great deal grander than mine.”

“And for that reason—” said Reginald, becoming bitter, with a laugh.

“Nothing for that reason,” said Phœbe; “but I noticed it at six as I should at twenty. I must have been a horrid little worldly-minded thing, don’t you think? So you see there are the associations of a

great many years to make me say Poor Clarence, when anything is the matter with him."

"He is lucky to rouse your sympathies so warmly," cried Reginald, thoroughly wretched; "but I did not know there was anything the matter."

"I think there will be if he has to leave our little society, where we have all been so happy," said Phœbe, softly. "How little one thought, coming here a stranger, how pleasant it was to be! I especially, to whom coming to Carlingford was rather—perhaps I might say a humiliation. I am very fond of grandpapa and grand-mamma now, but the first introduction was something of a shock—I have never denied it; and if it had not been for sweet kind Ursula and you—all."

The little breathless fragmentary pause which Phœbe made between the *you* and the "all," giving just a ghost of emphasis to the pronoun, sounded to poor Reginald in his foolishness almost like a caress.

How cleverly it was managed, with just so much natural feeling in it as gave it reality ! They were approaching No. 6, and Martha, the maid, already was visible at the open door.

“ Then you do give me some share—some little share,” he cried, with a broken voice. “ Ah, if you would only let me tell you what your coming has been to me. It has opened up my life ; I feel everything different, the old earth itself ; there is a new light upon the whole world—”

“ Hush, here is Martha !” cried Phœbe, “ she will not understand about new lights. Yes, it has been pleasant, very pleasant ; when one begins to sigh and realize how pleasant a thing has been, I always fear it is going to be broken up.”

“ *Absit omen !*” cried Reginald, fervently, taking the hand she had put out to bid him good night, and holding it fast to detain her ; and was there moisture in the eyes which she lifted to him, and

which glistened he thought, though there was only the distant light of a lamp to see them by ?

“You must not keep me now,” cried Phœbe, “here is grandpapa coming. Good night, Mr. May, good night.”

Was Phœbe a mere coquette *pure et simple* ? As soon as she had got safe within these walls, she stooped down over the primroses to get rid of Martha, and then in the darkness had a cry, all by herself, on one side of the wall, while the young lover, with his head full of her, checked, but not altogether discouraged, went slowly away on the other. She cried, and her heart contracted with a real pang. He was very tender in his reverential homage, very romantic, a true lover, not the kind of man who wants a wife or wants a clever companion to amuse him, and save him the expense of a coach, and be his to refer to in everything. That was an altogether different kind of thing. Phœbe went in with a sense in her mind

that perhaps she had never touched so close upon a higher kind of existence, and perhaps never again might have the opportunity ; but before she had crossed the garden, she had begun once more to question whether Clarence would have the fortitude to hold his own against everything that father or mother could do to change his mind. Would he have the fortitude ? Would he come back to her, safe and determined, or would he yield to arguments in favour of some richer bride, and come back either estranged or at the least doubtful ? This gave her a pang of profound anxiety at the bottom of her heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EXPEDITION.

MR. MAY did not come upstairs that evening. It was not that he was paralysed as he had been on the previous occasion, when he sat as now and heard Phœbe go away after her first visit, and when the wind blowing in from the open door playfully carried to his feet the scribbled note with Tozer's name. He was not stupefied as then, nor was he miserable. The threatened withdrawal of Clarence Copperhead was more to him than the impending ruin meant by that bill which was so nearly due. He was occupied by that to the exclusion of the

other. It would be a most serious change to him in every way. He had calculated on the continuance of this additional income for at least a year, and short of the year it would have done him no good, but had simply plunged him into additional expense. It was this he was thinking of, and which kept him in his study after the young people had assembled. Cotsdean had come again while Mr. May was at dinner, which by some curious unconscious aggravation on his part was the time he specially chose as most convenient for him; and he had again sent a dirty note by Bobby, imploring his principal to think of the impending fate, and not to desert him. Mr. May was angry at this perpetual appeal. "Why should I desert him, the idiot?" he said to himself, and moved by the man's persistence, he took out his pocketbook again, and made out beyond all chance of mistake, that it was the 18th. Why should the fool insist upon its

being the 15th with such perpetual iteration? There were the figures as plain as possible, 18th April. Mr. May wrote a peremptory note announcing this fact to Cotsdean, and then returned to his own thoughts. Sir Robert had asked him to go over that morning and spend the day at the Hall with the Copperheads, not knowing of any breach between them. He thought he had better do this. If Clarence determined to stay, that would be a great thing in his favour, and he had seen that the young man's dull spirit was roused; and if that hope failed, there might still be advantage even in this sudden breaking of the bond. Part of the second quarter was gone, and the father had offered three months additional pay. These two payments would make up the hundred and fifty pounds at once, and settle the business. Thus, in either way, he should be safe, for if Clarence went away the money would be paid; and if he stayed, Mr. May himself had made up his

mind to risk the bold step of going to the bank and asking an advance on this inalienable security. All these deliberations made his mind easy about the bill. It must come right one way or another; he might have chosen perhaps not to run it quite so close; but after all the 15th was only to-morrow, and there were still three days. While his mind was full of these things he did not care to go upstairs. He heard the voices of the young people, but he was too much engrossed with his own calculations to care to join them. It was a close thing, he said to himself, a very close thing; but still he felt that he could do it—surely he could do it. If Mr. Copperhead settled with him—and he was the sort of man, a man to whom money was nothing, to do so on the spot if he took it into his head—then all was right. And if Mr. Copperhead did not do so, the bank, though his past transactions with it had not been encouraging, would certainly make all right on account of these

Copperhead payments, which were as certain as any payments could be. He went to bed early, being engrossed by these thoughts, not even saying good night to Ursula, as was his wont; and he made up his mind to take an early breakfast, and start the first thing in the morning for the Hall. There was an early train which would suit admirably. He could not afford to drive, as Sir Robert had done, changing horses half way. He went upstairs to bed, somewhat heavily, but not discontented, seeing his way. After all the great thing in life is to see your way. It does not matter so much whether that way is great or small, so long as you can see it plain before you. Mr. May breathed a sigh of anxiety as he ended the day. He had a great many things on his mind; but still he was not altogether heavy-hearted or discouraged beyond measure; things, he felt, would shape themselves better than he had hoped. He was not perhaps going to be so much better off

than of old, as he thought possible when Clarence Copperhead came. Such delusive prospects do glimmer across a poor man's path when any apparent expansion of means occurs to him; but in the majority of cases he has to consent to see the fine fictitious glow die away. Mr. May was not ignorant of this experience already. A man who is over fifty is generally more or less prepared for anything that can happen to him in this kind; but he thought he could "get on;" and after all that is the sum of life to three parts of mankind.

He was silent at breakfast, but not disagreeable, and Ursula was too much taken up with her own concerns to pay much attention to him. Ursula's concerns were developing with a rapidity altogether extraordinary. In the mind of a girl of twenty, unforestalled by any previous experience, the process that goes on between the moment when the surprising, overwhelming discovery rushes upon her that

some one loves her in the old way of romance, until the corresponding moment when she finds out that her own heart too has been invaded by this wonderful sentiment, which is like nothing that was ever known before, is of a very rapid description. It is like the bursting of a flower, which a day's sunshine brings to the blooming point like a miracle, though it is in reality the simplest result of nature. Already there began to glow a haze of brightness about those three months past in which everything had begun. When or how it began she could not now tell. The glow of it was in her eyes and dazzled her. She heard the voices of the others sounding vaguely through this bright mist in which she herself was isolated; when she was obliged to reply, she called herself back with an effort, and did so—but of her own will she seldom spoke. How Janey chattered, how the children maundered on about their little concerns which were of consequence to nobody! Papa was the

person whom Ursula really respected this morning, for he had more sense than to talk. How could people talk, as if there was pleasure in that? But papa had more sense, he had things to think of—too. So the girl approved her father, and thought more highly of him, and never inquired what it might be that occupied his mind, and kept him from noticing even when the children were unruly. And it would be giving the reader an unfair idea of the children, if we attempted to conceal that they did take advantage of their opportunities, and were as unruly as well-conditioned children in the circumstances were likely to be. Mr. May took no notice; he took his coffee hurriedly and went off to the station.

“If I don’t return this evening you need not be alarmed. I shall come back at the latest to-morrow morning,” he said.

The children all rushed to the window to see him go away; even Ursula looking out dreamily remarked him too, as she seldom

did ; and Mrs. Sam Hurst at her window, wondering where her neighbour could be going, heaved a deep sigh of admiration, which though she was not “in love,” as the girls thought, with Mr. May, was a passing tribute to his good looks and training. He looked a gentleman every inch of him—an English gentleman, spotless in linen, speckless in broadcloth, though his dress was far from new ; the freshness of sound health and a clear conscience on his handsome face, though he was no longer young. His abundant hair, steel-grey, slightly crisped under his hat, not curling exactly, but with a becoming twist in it—clerical, yet not too clerical, a man given to no extremes, decorously churchmanlike, yet liberal and tolerant of the world. Though she was too wise to compromise her own comfort by marrying him, Mrs. Hurst felt that there was a great pleasure in making his daughters anxious about her “intentions,” and that even to be said to

be in love with such a man was no shame, but rather the reverse.

He went away accordingly, taking a short cut to the railway, and thus missing Cotsdean, who came breathless ten minutes after he was gone, and followed him to the train ; but too late.

“ Well, well,” Cotsdean said to himself, wiping his forehead, “ Old Tozer has plenty, it ain’t nothing to him to pay. They can settle it between ’em.”

Cotsdean himself was easier in his mind than he had ever been before on such an occasion. His clergyman, though personally an awful and respect-inspiring personage, was so far as money went a man of straw, as he well knew, and his name on a bill was very little worth ; but Tozer was a man who could pay his way. A hundred and fifty pounds, or even ten times that, would not ruin the old shop-keeper. Cotsdean’s sense of commercial honour was not so very keen that the dishonouring of his bill in the circum-

stances should give him a very serious pang. He would not be sold up, or have an execution put into his shop when the other party to the bill was so substantial a person. Of course Tozer, when he signed it, must have been told all about it, and Cotsdean did not see how with two such allies against ruin, anything very serious could befall him. He was uneasy indeed, but his uneasiness had no such force in it as before. He went back to his shop and his business prepared to take the matter as calmly as possible. He was but passive in it. It could not harm him much in the eyes of his banker, who knew his affairs too well to be much astonished at any such incident, and Tozer and Mr. May must settle it between them. It was their affair.

Meanwhile Mr. May rattled along in the railway towards the Hall. He got a dog-cart at the little inn at the station to take him over, though generally when he went to see the Dorsets it was his custom to

walk. "But what were a few shillings?" he said to himself, the prodigality of desperation having seized upon him. In any case he could pay that, and if he was to be ruined, what did a few shillings more or less matter? but the discomfort of walking over those muddy roads, and arriving with dirty boots and a worn-out aspect, mattered a great deal. He reached the Hall at a propitious moment, when Mr. Copperhead was in the highest good-humour. He had been taken over the place, from one end to another, over the stables, the farm buildings, the farm itself from end to end, the preserves, the shrubberies, the green-houses, everything; all of which details he examined with an un-failing curiosity which would have been highly flattering to the possessors if it had not been neutralized by a strain of comment which was much less satisfactory. When Mr. May went in, he found him in the dining-room, with Sir Robert and his daughters standing by, clapping his wings

and crowing loudly over a picture which the Dorsets prized much. It represented a bit of vague Italian scenery, mellow and tranquil, and was a true "Wilson," bought by an uncle of Sir Robert's, who had been a connoisseur, from the Master himself, in the very country where it was painted; and all these details pleased the imagination of the family, who, though probably they would have been but mildly delighted had they possessed the acquaintance of the best of contemporary painters, were proud that Uncle Charles had known Italian Wilson, and had bought a picture out of his studio. A Hobbema or a Poussin would scarcely have pleased them so much, for the worst of an old Master is that your friends look suspiciously upon it as a copy; whereas Wilson is scarcely old enough or precious enough to be copied. They were showing their picture and telling the story to the millionaire, with an agreeable sense that, though they were not so rich, they

must, at least, have the advantage of him in this way.

“ Ha !” said Mr. Copperhead, “ you should see my Turner. Didn’t I show you my Turner ? I don’t venture to tell you, Sir Robert, what that picture cost me. It’s a sin, it is, to keep that amount of capital hanging useless upon a bit of wall. The Wilson may be all very well. I ain’t a judge of art, and I can’t give my opinion on that point, though it’s a common sort of a name, and there don’t seem to be much in it ; but everybody knows what a Turner means. Here’s May ; he’ll be able to tell you as well as another. It means a few cool thousands, take my word for it. It means, I believe, that heaps of people would give you your own price. I don’t call it a profitable investment, for it brings in no interest ; but they tell me it’s a thing that grows in value every year. And there it is, Sir, hanging up useless on my wall in Portland Place, costing a fortune, and bringing in not a penny. But I like

it; I like it, for I can afford it, by George! Here's May; he knows what that sort of thing is; he'll tell you that a Turner is worth its weight in gold."

"Thank you, I don't think I need any information on that subject," said Sir Robert. "Besides, I saw your Turner. It is a pretty picture—if it is authentic; but Wilson, you know—"

"Wasn't a big enough swell not to be authentic, eh?" said Mr. Copperhead. "Common name enough, and I don't know that I ever heard of him in the way of painting; but I don't pretend to be a judge. Here's May; now, I daresay he knows all about it. Buying's one thing, knowing's another. Your knowing ones, when they've got any money, they have the advantage over us, Sir Robert; they can pick up a thing that's good, when it happens to come their way, dirt cheap; but fortunately for us, it isn't often they've got any money," he added, with a laugh, slapping Mr. May on the shoulder in a

way which made him totter. But the clergyman's good humour was equal even to this assault. It is wonderful how patient and tolerant we can all be when the motive is strong enough.

"That is true," he said; "but I fear I have not even the compensation of knowledge. I know enough, however, to feel that the possessor of a Turner is a public personage, and may be a public benefactor if he pleases."

"How that? If you think I am one to go lending my pictures about, or leaving them to the nation when I'm done for, that's not my sort. No, I keep them to myself. If I consent to have all that money useless, it is for myself, you may depend, and not for other people. And I'll leave it to my boy Clarence, if he behaves himself. He's a curiosity, too, and has a deal of money laid out on him that brings no interest, him and his mother. I'll leave it to Clar, if he doesn't make a low marriage, or any folly of that kind."

“You should make it an heir-loom,” said Sir Robert, with sarcasm too fine for his antagonist; “leave it from father to son of your descendants, like our family diamonds and plate.”

Anne and Sophy looked at each other and smiled, the one sadly, the other satirically. The Dorset family jewels were rose-diamonds of small value, and the plate was but moderate in quantity, and not very great in quality. Poor Sir Robert liked to blow his little trumpet too, but it was not so blatant as that of his visitor, whose rude senses did not even see the intended malice.

“By George! I think I will,” he said. “I’m told it’s as safe as the bank, and worth more and more every year, and if it don’t bring in anything, it don’t eat anything, eh, May? Look here; perhaps I was hasty the other day,” he said, pushing the clergyman a little apart from the group with a large hand on his shoulder. “Clarence tells me you’re the best coach he

ever saw, and that he's getting on like a house on fire."

"He does make progress, I think," answered the tutor, thus gracefully complimented.

"But all the same, you know, I had a right to be annoyed. Now a man of your sense—for you seem a man of sense, though you're a parson, and know what side your bread's buttered on—ought to see that it's an aggravating thing when a young fellow has been sent to a coach for his instruction, and to keep him out of harm's way, to find him cheek by jowl with a nice-looking young woman. That's not what a father has a right to expect."

"You couldn't expect me to do away with my daughter because I happened to take a pupil?" said Mr. May, half-amused; "but I can assure you that she has no designs upon your son."

"So I hear, so I hear," said the other, with a mixture of pique and satisfaction. "Won't look at him, Clar tells me; got

her eye on some one else, little fool! She'll never have such a chance again. As for having no designs, that's bosh, you know; all women have designs. I'm a deal easier in my mind when I'm told she's got other fish to fry."

"Other fish to fry?" said Mr. May; this time he was wholly amused, and laughed. "This is news to me. However, we don't want to discuss my little Ursula; about your son it will be well that I should know, for I might be forming other engagements. This moment is a time of pecuniary pressure with me," he added, with the ingratiating smile and half-pathetic frankness of the would-be borrower. "I have not taken pupils before, but I want money for the time. My son's settlement in life, you see, and—but the father of a large family can always find good reasons for wanting money."

"That's it," said Mr. Copperhead, seriously. "Why are you the father of a large family? That's what I ask our

ministers. It's against all political economy, that is. According as you've no money to give 'em, you go and have children—when it should be just the other way."

"That may be very true; but there they are, and can't be done away with; and I do want money, as it happens, more now than I shall want it a year hence, or, perhaps, even six months hence."

"Most people do," said Mr. Copperhead, withdrawing his hand from his pocket, and placing his elbow tightly against the orifice of that very important part of him. "It's the commonest thing in the world. I want money myself, for that matter. I've always got a large amount to make up by a certain date, and a bill to pay. But about Clar, that's the important matter. As he seems to have set his mind on it, and as you assure me there's no danger—man-traps, or that sort of thing, eh?"

The colour came to Mr. May's cheek;

but it was only for a moment. To have his own daughter spoken of as a man-trap gave him a momentary thrill of anger; but, as he would have applied the word quite composedly to any other man's daughter, the resentment was evanescent. He did not trust himself to answer, however, but nodded somewhat impatiently, which made the millionaire laugh the more.

“Don't like the man-trap?” he said. “Bless you they're all alike, not yours more than the rest. But as I was saying, if it's warranted safe I suppose he'll have to stay. But I don't stand any nonsense, May; and look here, your music and all that ain't in the agreement. He can have a master for his music, he's well enough able to pay for it; but I won't have a mistress, by George, to put folly into his head.”

“I am to forbid him the drawing-room, I suppose, and take his fiddle from him! I have no objections. Between ourselves,

as I am not musical, it would be very agreeable to me; but perhaps he is rather over the age, don't you think, for treatment of that kind."

Clarence had come in, and stood watching the conversation, with a look Mr. Copperhead was not prepared for. Those mild brown eyes which were his mother's share in him, were full a-stare with sullen resolution, and his heavy mouth shut like that of a bull-dog. He lingered at the door, looking at the conversation which was going on between his father and his tutor, and they both noticed him at the same moment, and drew the same conclusion. Mr. May was in possession of the *parole* as the French say, and he added instinctively in an under-tone.

"Take care; if I were you I would not try him too far."

Mr. Copperhead said nothing; but he stared too, rather aghast at this new revelation. What! his porcelain, his Dresden figure of a son, his crowning curiosity,

was *he* going to show a will of his own? The despot felt a thrill go over him. What kind of a sentiment love was in his mind it would be hard to tell; but his pride was all set on this heavy boy. To see him a man of note, in Parliament, his name in the papers, his speeches printed in the "Times," was the very heaven of his expectations. "Son of the famous Copperhead, the great contractor." He did not care about such distinction in his own person; but this had been his dream ever since Clarence came into being. And now there he stood gloomy, obdurate. If he had made up his mind to make a low marriage, could his father hinder him—could anything hinder him? Mr. Copperhead looked at his son and quailed for the first time in his life.

"May," he said, hurriedly, "do the best you can; he's got all his mother's d——d obstinacy, you can see, can't you? but I've set my heart on making a man of him—do the best you can."

Mr. May thought to himself afterwards if he had only had the vigour to say, "Pay me six months in advance," the thing would have been done. But the lingering prejudices of breeding clung about him, and he could not do it. Mr. Copperhead, however, was very friendly all the rest of the day, and gave him private looks and words aside, to the great admiration of the Dorsets, to whom the alliance between them appeared remarkable enough.

CHAPTER IX.

A CATASTROPHE.

MR MAY left the Hall before dinner, notwithstanding the warm invitation which was given to him to stay. He was rather restless, and though it was hard to go out into the dark just as grateful odours began to steal through the house, it suited him better to do so than to spend the night away from home. Besides he comforted himself that Sir Robert's cook was not first rate, not good enough to make it a great temptation. It was a long walk to the station, for they had no horses at liberty to drive him, a fact at which he was slightly offended,

though he was aware that Sir Robert's stable was but a poor one. He set out just as the dressing bell began to ring, fortified with a glass of sherry and a biscuit. The night was mild and soft, the hedgerows all rustling with the new life of the spring, and the stars beginning to come out as he went on; and on the whole the walk was pleasant, though the roads were somewhat muddy. As he went along, he felt himself fall into a curious dreamy state of mind which was partly fatigue perhaps, but was not at all unpleasant. Sometimes he almost seemed to himself to be asleep as he trudged on, and woke up with a start, thinking that he saw indistinct figures, the skirt of a dress or the tail of a long coat, disappearing past him, just gone before he was fully awake to what it was. He knew there was no one on the lonely road, and that this was a dream or illusion, but still he kept seeing these vanishings of indistinct wayfarers, which did not frighten

him in the least, but half amused him in the curious state of his brain. He had got rid of his anxiety. It was all quite plain before him what to do, to go to the Bank, to tell them what he had coming in, and to settle everything as easily as possible. The consciousness of having this to do, acted upon him like a gentle opiate or dream-charm. When he got to the railway station, and got into a carriage, he seemed to be floating somehow in a prolonged vision of light and streaks of darkness, not quite aware how far he was going, or where he was going, across the country; and even when he arrived at Carlingford roused himself with difficulty, not quite certain that he had to get out, then smiling at himself, seeing the gas-lights in a sort of vague glimmer about him, not uncomfortable, but misty and half asleep. "If Sir Robert's sherry had been better, I should have blamed that," he said to himself; and in fact it was a kind of drowsy, amiable mental intoxica-

tion which affected him, he scarcely could tell how. When he got within sight of his own house, he paused a moment and looked up at the lights in the windows, There was music going on, Phœbe, no doubt, for Ursula could not play so well as that, and the house looked full and cheerful. He had a cheerful home, there was no doubt of that. Young Copperhead, though he was a dunce, felt it, and showed an appreciation of better things in his determination not to leave the house where he had been so happy. Mr. May felt an amiable friendliness stealing over him for Clarence too.

Upstairs in the drawing-room another idyllic evening had begun. Phœbe "had not intended to come," but was there notwithstanding, persuaded by Ursula, who, glad for once to escape from the anxieties of dinner, had celebrated tea with the children, to their great delight, though she was still too dreamy and pre-occupied to respond much to them. And Northcote

had "not intended to come." Indeed, he had gone further than this, he had intended to keep away. But when he had eaten his solitary dinner, he, too, had strayed towards the centre of attraction, and walking up and down in forlorn contemplation of the lighted windows, had been spied by Reginald, and brought in after a faint resistance. So the four were together again, with only Janey to interpose an edge of general criticism and remark into the too personal strain of the conversation. Janey did not quite realize the importance of the place she was occupying, but she was keenly interested in all that was going on, very eager to understand the relationships in which the others stood, and to see for herself what progress had been made last night while she was absent. Her sharp girlish face, in which the eyes seemed too big for the features, expressed a totally different phase of existence from that which softened and subdued the others. She was all eyes and

ears, and watchful scrutiny. It was she who prevented the utterance of the half-dozen words trembling on Northcote's lips, to which Ursula had a soft response fluttering somewhere in her pretty throat, but which was not destined to be spoken to-night; and it was she who made Phœbe's music quite a simple performance, attended with little excitement and no danger. Phœbe was the only one who was grateful to her, and perhaps even Phœbe could have enjoyed the agitations of the evening better had Janey been away. As it was, these agitations were all suppressed and incipient; they could not come to anything; there were no hairbreadth escapes, no breathless moments, when the one pursued had to exercise her best skill, and only eluded the pursuer by a step or two. Janey, with all her senses about her, hearing everything, seeing everything, neutralized all effort on the part of the lovers, and reduced the condition of Ursula and Phœbe to one of absolute safety.

They were all kept on the curb, in the leash, by the presence of this youthful observer; and the evening, though full of a certain excitement and mixture of happiness and misery, glided on but slowly, each of the young men outdoing the other in a savage eagerness for Janey's bedtime.

"Do you let her sit up till midnight every night?" said Reginald, with indignation.

"Let me sit up!" cried Janey, "as if I was obliged to do what she tells me!"

Ursula gave a little shrug to her pretty shoulders, and looked at the clock.

"It is not midnight yet; it is not nine o'clock," she said, with a sigh. "I should have thought papa would have come home before now. Can he be staying at the Hall all night?"

Just then, however, there was the well-known ring at the bell, and Ursula ran downstairs to see after her father's supper. Why couldn't Janey make herself useful

and do that, the little company thought indignantly and with one accord, instead of staying here with her sharp eyes, putting everybody out? Mr. May's little dinner, or supper, served on a tray, was very comfortable, and he ate it with great satisfaction, telling Ursula that he had, on the whole, spent a pleasant day.

“The Dorsets were kind, as they always are, and Mr. Copperhead was a little less disagreeable than he always is; and you may look for Clarence back again in a day or two. He is not going to leave us. You must take care that he does not fall in love with you, Ursula. That is the chief thing they seem to be afraid of.”

“Fall in love with *me!*” cried Ursula. “Oh, papa, where are your eyes? He has fallen in love, but not with me. Can't you see it? It is Phœbe he cares for.”

Mr. May was startled. He raised his head with a curious smile in his eyes, which made Ursula wonder painfully

whether her father had taken much wine at the Hall.

“ Ah, ha! is that what they are frightened for?” he said, and then he shrugged his shoulders. “ She will show bad taste, Ursula; she might do better; but I suppose a girl of her class has not the delicacy—So that is what they are frightened for! And what are the other fish *you* have to fry?”

“ Papa!”

“ Yes. He told me he was not alarmed about you, that you had other fish to fry, eh? Well, it's too late for explanations to-night. What's that? Very odd, I thought I saw some one going out at the door—just a whiff of the coat-tails. I think my digestion must be out of order. I'll go into the study and get my pills, and then I think I'll go to bed.”

“ Won't you come upstairs to the drawing-room?” said Ursula, faltering, for she was appalled by the idea of explanations. What had she to explain, as yet? Mr.

May shook his head, with that smile still upon his face.

“No, you’ll get on excellently well without me. I’ve had a long walk, and I think I’ll go to bed.”

“You don’t look very well, papa.”

“Oh, yes, I’m well enough; only confused in the head a little with fatigue and the things I’ve had to think about. Good night. Don’t keep those young fellows late, though one of them is your brother. You can say I’m tired. Good night, my dear.”

It was very seldom that he called her “my dear,” or, indeed, said anything affectionate to his grown up children. If Ursula had not been so eager to return to the drawing-room, and so sure that “they” would miss her, she would have been anxious about her father; but as it was, she ran upstairs lightly when he stopped speaking, and left him going into the study, where already his lamp was burning. Betsy passed her,

as she ran up the stairs, coming from the kitchen with a letter held between two folds of her apron. Poor papa! no doubt it was some tiresome parish business to bother him, when he was tired already. But Ursula did not stop for that. How she wanted to be there again, among "them all," even though Janey still made one! She went in breathless, and gave her father's message only half articulately. He was tired. "We are never to mind; he says so." They all took the intimation very easily. Mr. May being tired, what did that matter? He would, no doubt, be better to-morrow; and in the meantime those sweet hours, though so hampered by Janey, were very sweet.

Betsy went in, and put down the note before Mr. May on his table. He was just taking out his medicine from the drawer, and he made a wry face at the note and at the pills together.

"Parish?" he said, curtly.

"No, Sir; it's from Mr. Cotsdean. He

came this morning, after you'd gone, and he sent over little Bobby."

"That will do."

A presentiment of pain stole over him. He gave Betsy a nod of dismissal, and went on with what he was doing. After he had finished, he took up the little note from the table with a look of disgust. It was badly scrawled, badly folded, and dirty. Thank Heaven, Cotsdean's communications would soon be over now.

Janey had proposed a round game upstairs. They were all humble in their desire to conciliate that young despot. Reginald got the cards, and Northcote put chairs round the table. He placed Ursula next to himself, which was a consolation, and sat down by her, close to her, though not a word, except of the most commonplace kind, could be said.

Just then—what was it? an indescribable thrill through the house, the sound of a heavy fall. They all started up from their seats to hear what it was. Then

Ursula, with a cry of apprehension, rushed downstairs, and the others after her. Betsy, alarmed, had come out of the kitchen, followed by her assistant, and was standing frightened, but irresolute; for Mr. May was not a man to be disturbed with impunity. And this might be nothing—the falling of a chair or a table, and nothing more.

“What is it?” cried Ursula, in an anxious whisper.

She was the leader in the emergency, for even Reginald held back. Then, after a moment's pause, she opened the door, and with a little cry rushed in. It was, as they feared, Mr. May who had fallen; but he had so far recovered himself as to be able to make efforts to rise. His face was towards them. It was very pale, of a livid colour, and covered with moisture, great beads standing on his forehead. He smiled vaguely when he saw the circle of faces.

“Nothing—nothing—a faintness,” he faltered, making again an effort to rise.

“What is it, papa? Oh, what’s the matter?” cried Janey, rushing at him and seizing him by the arm. “Get up! get up! what will people think? Oh, Ursula, how queer he looks, and he feels so heavy. Oh, please get up, papa!”

“Go away,” said Mr. May, “go away. It is—a faintness. I am very well where I am—”

But he did not resist when Reginald and Northcote lifted him from the floor. He had a piece of paper tightly clasped in his hand. He gave them a strange suspicious look all round, and shrank when his eyes fell upon Phœbe. “Don’t let her know,” he said. “Take me away, take me away.”

“Reginald will take you upstairs, papa—to your room—to bed; you ought to go to bed. It is the long walk that has worn you out. Oh, Reginald, don’t contradict him, let him go where he pleases. Oh, papa, where *are* you going?” cried Ursula, “the other way, you want to go to bed.”

“This way, take me—somewhere,” said the sufferer; though he could not stand he made a step, staggering between them, and an effort to push towards the hall door, and when they directed him in the other direction to the staircase which led to his room, he struggled feebly yet violently with them. “No, no, no, not there!” he cried. The sudden confusion, dismay, and alarm into which the family was plunged, the strange sense of a catastrophe that came upon them, cannot be told. Ursula, calling out all the time that they were not to contradict him, insisted imperiously with words and gestures that he should be taken upstairs. Janey, altogether overcome, sat down on the lower steps of the staircase and cried. Reginald almost as pale as his father, and not saying a word, urged him towards the stairs. To get him up to his room, resisting as well as he could, and moaning inarticulate remonstrances all the way, was no easy business. As the procession

toiled along Phœbe was left below, the only one in possession of her faculties. She sent the housemaid hurriedly off for the doctor, and despatched Betsy to the kitchen.

“Hot water is always wanted,” said Phœbe, “see that you have enough in case he should require a bath.”

Then with her usual decision she stepped back into the study. It was not vulgar curiosity which was in Phœbe’s mind, nor did it occur to her that she had no right to investigate Mr. May’s private affairs. If she could find what had done it, would not that be a great matter, something to tell the doctor, to throw light on so mysterious a seizure? Several bits of torn paper were lying on the floor; but only one of these was big enough to contain any information. It was torn in a kind of triangular shape, and contained a corner of a letter, a section of three lines,

“ must have mistaken the date
presented to-day,
paid by Tozer,”

was what she read. She could not believe her eyes. What transactions could there be between her grandfather and Mr. May? She secured the scrap of paper, furtively putting it in her pocket. It was better to say nothing either to the doctor, or any one else of anything so utterly incomprehensible. It oppressed Phœbe with a sense of mystery and of personal connection with the mystery, which even her self-possession could scarcely bear up against. She went into the kitchen after Betsy, avowedly in anxious concern for the boiling of the kettle.

“ Hot water is good for everything,” said Phœbe, “ mamma says a hot bath is the best of remedies. Did Mr. May have anything—to worry him, Betsy? I suppose it is only fatigue, and that he has taken too long a walk.”

“I don’t believe in the long walk, Miss,” said Betsy, “it’s that Cotsdean as is always a-tormenting with his dirty letters. When that man comes bothering here, master is always put out.”

“Cotsdean? I don’t know the name.”

“Don’t say nothing, Miss,” said Betsy sinking her voice, “but you take my word it’s money. Money’s at the bottom of everything. It’s something, as sure as you’re alive, as master has got to pay. I’ve been a deal with gentlefolks,” added Betsy, “and ne’er a one of them can abide that.”

CHAPTER X.

THE SINNED AGAINST.

PHŒBE'S mind was full of many and somewhat agitating thoughts. She went upstairs with a restless haste, which she would have been the first to condemn, to the room where the others were congregated, when they had laid Mr. May on his bed with no small difficulty, and were now consulting what to do. Ursula had fallen a little from the position of command she had taken up. To get him to bed, to send for the doctor, these were evident practical steps to take; but after having done these she was bewildered and fell back upon her advisers.

“We can’t do anything, we can only wait and watch him,” Reginald was saying as Phœbe, herself unseen, looked in at the anxious party; and without asking any question she turned and went downstairs again, and hastily putting on her shawl and hat, went out shutting the door softly, and ran home on the shady side of Grange Lane, where nobody could see her. It was a very quiet road, and she was not disturbed by any unreasonable alarms. It was still early when she got home, earlier than usual, and her intention was not to stay there at all, but to go back again and offer her assistance to Ursula, for whom she had left a message to this effect. Phœbe was full of genuine regard and friendliness towards the Mays.

She felt that she had obligations to all of them, to the parson-father for submitting to her presence, nay, encouraging it, and to Ursula for receiving her with that affectionate fervour of friendship which had completely changed the tenor of

Phœbe's life at Carlingford. She was obliged to them, and she knew that she was obliged to them. How different these three months would have been but for the Parsonage; what a heavy leaden-coloured existence without variety and without interest she must have lived; whereas it had gone by like a summer day, full of real life, of multiplied interests, of everything that it was most desirable to have. Not at home and in London could she have had the advantages she had enjoyed here. Phœbe was sensible enough—or perhaps we might use a less complimentary word—worldly enough, to count within those manifest benefits the advantage of seeing more of Clarence Copperhead, and of drawing him within the charmed circle of her influence, and she was grateful to the Mays, for this was their doing. And then on the other hand, quite a different thing, her heart was touched and softened with gratitude to Reginald for loving her; of all her gratuities, perhaps this indeed was

the most truly felt. They had given her unbounded kindness, friendliness, everything that is most sweet to the solitary; and over and above, as if these were not enough, they had made her the exquisite present of a heart, the best thing that can be given or received by man. Phœbe felt herself penetrated with gratitude for all this, and she resolved that, if anything she could do could benefit the Mays, the effort on her part should not be wanting. "paid by Tozer," what had been paid by Tozer? What had her grandfather to do with it. Could it be he who had lent money to Mr. May? Then Phœbe resolved with a glow on her face, he should forgive his debtor. She went in with her mind fully made up, whatever might happen, to be the champion of the sufferer, the saviour of the family. This would show them that their kindness had been appreciated. This would prove even to Reginald that though she would not sacrifice her own prospects by marrying him,

yet that she was grateful to him, to the bottom of her heart. Her mind was full of generous ardour as she went in. She knew her power; her grandfather had never yet refused her anything, never resisted her, and it did not seem likely that he should begin now.

Mrs. Tozer was by herself in the parlour, dozing over the fire. She woke up with a little start when Phoebe came in, and smiled at the sight of her.

“I didn’t expect as you’d have come so soon,” she said, “you’ve broke up early to-night, darling. Couldn’t you have no music? I didn’t look for you for an hour or more.”

“You know, grandmamma, it is Mr. Copperhead who teases me most for music, and he is not here.”

“Yes, yes, *I* know,” said the old lady, nodding her head with many smiles. “I know a deal more about it than you think for, Phœbe, and don’t you think as I disapprove, for it’s quite the other way.

But you won't tell me as there ain't others as cares for music as well as young Copperhead. I've seen one as couldn't take his eyes off of you while you were playing."

"Hush, grandmamma; the others like music for music's sake, or perhaps for my sake; but Mr. Copperhead likes it for his own sake, and therefore he is the one who insists upon it. But this is not the reason why I have come home so soon. Mr. May has been taken suddenly ill."

"Lord bless us!" cried Mrs. Tozer, "deary, deary me? I'm very sorry, poor gentleman, I hope it ain't anything serious. Though he's a church parson, he's a very civil-spoken man, and I see his children drag him into his own house one day as me and Tozer was passing. I said to Tozer at the time, you take my word, whatever folks say, a man as lets his children pull him about like that ain't a bad one. And so he's ill, poor man! Is there anything as we can do to help, my dear?"

They ain't rich, and they've been as kind to you as if you'd been one of their own."

"I thought that would be the first thing you would ask me," said Phoebe gratefully, giving her a kiss, "dear grandmamma, it is like your kind heart? and I ran off to see that you were quite well and comfortable, thinking perhaps if you did not want me I might go back to poor Ursula for the night."

To hear her grand-daughter call Miss May by her Christian name was in itself a pleasure to Mrs. Tozer. She gave Phoebe a hug. "So you shall, my darling, and as for a bottle of good wine or that, anything as is in the house, you know you're welcome to it. You go and talk to your grandfather; I'm as comfortable as I can be, and if you'd like to run back to that poor child—"

"Not before you are in bed," said Phoebe, "but if you please I'll go and talk to grandpapa as you said. There are things in which a man may be of use."

“To be sure,” said Mrs. Tozer, doubtfully; “your grandfather ain’t a man as is much good in sickness; but I won’t say as there ain’t some things—”

“Yes, grandmamma, I’ll take your advice and run and talk to him; and by the time I come back you will be ready for bed.”

“Do, my dear,” said Mrs. Tozer. She was very comfortable, and did not care to move just then, and, as Phœbe went away, looked after her with dreamy satisfaction. “Bless her! there ain’t her match in Carlingford, and the gentlefolks sees it,” said Mrs. Tozer, to herself. But she had no idea how Phœbe’s heart was beating as she went along the dimly lighted passage, which led to a small room fitted up by Tozer for himself. She heard voices in earnest talk as she approached, but this made her only the more eager to go in, and see for herself what was going on. There could be no doubt, she felt sure of it, that the discussion

here had some connection with the calamity *there*. What it was she had not the slightest idea; but that somehow the two were connected she felt certain. The voices were loud as she approached the door.

“I’ll find out who done it, and I’ll punish him—as sure as that’s my name, though I never put it on that there paper,” Tozer was saying. Phœbe opened the door boldly, and went in. She had never seen her grandfather look so unlike himself. The knot of the big white neckerchief round his neck was pushed away, his eyes were red, giving out strange lights of passion. He was standing in front of the fireplace gesticulating wildly. Though it was now April and the weather very mild and genial, there were still fires in the Tozer sitting-rooms, and as the windows were carefully shut, Phœbe felt the atmosphere stifling. The other person in the room was a serious large man, whom she had already seen more than once, one

of the chief clerks in the bank where Tozer kept his account, who had an old acquaintance with the buttermilk man, and who was in the habit of coming when the bank had anything to say to so sure a customer about rates of investment or the value of money. He was seated at one side of the fire, looking very grave and shaking his head as the other spoke.

“That is very true, and I don’t say anything against it. But, Mr. Tozer, I can’t help thinking there’s some one else in it than Cotsdean.”

“What one else? what is the good of coming here to me with a pack of nonsense? He’s a poor needy creature as hasn’t a penny to bless himself with, a lot of children, and a wife as drinks. Don’t talk to me of some one else. That’s the sort of man as does all the mischief. What, Phœbe! run away to your grandmother, I don’t want you here.”

“I am very sorry to interrupt you,

grandpapa. Mayn't I stay? I have something to say to you—"

Tozer turned round and looked at her eagerly. Partly his own fancy, and partly his wife's more enlightened observations, had made him aware that it was possible that Phæbe might one day have something very interesting to reveal. So her words roused him even in the midst of his pre-occupation. He looked at her for a second, then he waved his hand and said,

"I'm busy, go away, my dear, go away; I can't talk to you now."

Phœbe gave the visitor a look which perplexed him; but which meant, if he could but have read it, an earnest entreaty to him to go away. She said to herself, impatiently, that he would have understood had he been a woman; but as it was he only stared with lack-lustre eyes. What was she to do?

"Grandpapa," she said, decisively, "it is too late for business to-night. However urgent it may be, you can't do anything

to-night. Why, it is nearly ten o'clock, and most people are going to bed. See Mr. ——, I mean this gentleman—to-morrow morning the first thing; for you know, however anxious you may be, you can't do anything to-night."

"That is true enough," he said, looking with staring eyes from her to his visitor, "and more's the pity. What had to be done should ha' been done to-day. It should have been done to-day, Sir, on the spot, not left over night like this, to give the villain time to get away. It's a crime, Phœbe, that's what it is—that's the fact. It's a crime."

"Well, grandpapa, I am very sorry; but it will not mend matters, will it? if sitting up like this and agitating yourself like this, makes you ill. That will not do away with the crime. It is bed-time, and poor grandmamma is dozing, and wondering what has become of you. Grandpapa—"

"Phœbe, go away, it ain't none of

your business ; you're only a bit of a girl, and how can you understand. If you think I'm going to sit down with it like an old fool, lose my money, and what is worse nor my money, let my very name be forged before my eyes—”

Phoebe gave so perceptible a start that Tozer stopped short, and even the banking clerk looked at her with aroused curiosity.

“Forged !” she cried, with a gasp of dismay, “is it so bad as that ?” She had never been more near betraying herself, showing a personal interest more close than was natural. When she saw the risk she was running, she stopped short and summoned all her energies. “I thought some one had pilfered something,” she said, with an attempt at a laugh. “I beg your pardon, grandpapa ; but anyhow what can you do to-night ? You are keeping—this gentleman—and yourself out of bed. Please put it off till to-morrow.”

“I think so too,” said the banker’s

clerk. "I'll come to you in the morning as I go to the Bank. Perhaps I may have been wrong; but I think there's more in it than meets the eye. To-morrow we can have the man Cotsdean up and question him."

"After he's had time to take himself off," said Tozer, vehemently. "You take my word he ain't in Carlingford, not now, let alone to-morrow."

"Then that shows," said Phœbe, quietly, "that it is of no use making yourself ill to-night. Grandpapa, let this gentleman go—he wants to go; and I have something to say to you. You can do anything that is necessary to-morrow."

"I think so indeed," said Mr. Simpson, of the Bank, getting up at last, "the young lady is quite right. We can't act hastily in a thing like this. Cotsdean's a man of good character, Mr. Tozer; all that has to be taken into account—and he is not a beggar. If he has done it, we can recover something at least; but if he has

been taken advantage of—I think the young lady is a good counsellor, and that it's much the best to wait till to-morrow."

Phœbe seized upon her grandfather's arm to restrain him, and held him back. "Good night," she said, "grandpapa, stay with me, I have something to say to you. Listen, you don't think me very silly, do you, grandpapa dear?"

"Silly!" he said, listening to the steps of the departing visitor as they receded along the passage. "What has a chit like you to do with business. I tell you it'll kill me. Me a-signing of accommodation bills for a bit of a small shopkeeper like that Cotsdean! I tell you it'll make an end of me, that will, unless I gets my money and clears myself afore the world. And here you've been and sent away Simpson, and who's to manage for me? I ain't a lawyer to know what to do. Get away, get away, and leave me to myself. I can't be disturbed with women folks when I've got real business in hand."

“I’ll manage for you,” said Phœbe, “you need not stare at me like that, grandpapa—”

“Go out o’ the room this moment, Miss!” he cried furious, “you! here’s a sort of thing for me to put up with. Sam Tozer wasn’t born yesterday that a bit of an impudent girl should take upon her to do for him. Manage for me! go out o’ my sight; I’m a fool, am I, and in my dotage to have a pack of women meddling in my affairs?”

Phœbe had never met with such an outburst of coarse anger in her life before, and it gave her a shock, as such assaults naturally do to people brought up softly, and used to nothing but kindness. For a moment she wavered, doubtful whether she should not proudly abandon him and his affairs altogether; but this was to abandon her friends too. She mastered herself accordingly and the resentment which she could not help feeling—and stood pale but quiet opposite to the in-

furiated old man. His grey eyes seemed to give out sparks of fire. His hair bristled up on his head like the coat of a wild animal enraged. He went up and down on the hearth-rug like the same animal in a cage, shaking his fist at some imaginary culprit.

“Once I get him, see if I let him go,” he cried, his voice thick with fast-coming words and the foam of fury. “Let the bank do as it likes; I’ll have him, I will. I’ll see justice on the man as has dared to make free with my name. It ain’t nothing to you my name; but I’ve kep it honest, and out of folks’ mouths, and see if I’ll stand disgrace thrown on it now. A bill on me as never had such a thing, not when I was struggling to get on! Dash him! damn him!” cried the old man, transported with rage. When he had come to this unusual and terrible length, Tozer paused dismayed. He had lost his temper before in his life; but very seldom had he been betrayed into anything so

desperate as this. He stopped aghast, and cast a half-frightened look at Phœbe, who stood there so quiet, subdued out of her usual force, pale, and disapproving—his own grandchild, a pastor's daughter! and he had forgotten himself thus before her. He blushed hotly, though he was not used to blushing, and stopped all at once. After such frightful language, language so unbecoming a deacon of Salem, so unlike a consistent member of the connection, what could he say?

“Grandpapa,” said Phœbe softly, “it is not good to be so angry; you are made to say things you are sorry for. Will you listen to me now? Though you don't think it, and perhaps won't believe it, I have found out something quite by chance—”

He went up to her and clutched her by the arm. “Then what are you a-standing there for, like a figure in stone? Can't you out with it, and ease my mind?”

Out with it, I tell you! Do you want to drive me out of my senses?"

He was so much excited that he shook her in the hot paroxysm of returning rage. Phœbe was not frightened, but indignation made her pale. She stood without flinching, and looked at him, till poor old Tozer let go his hold, and dropping into a chair, covered his face with his hands. She was too generous to take advantage of him, but went on quietly, as if nothing had occurred.

"Grandpapa, as I tell you, I have found out something by chance that has to do with the thing that troubles you; but I don't know quite what it is. Tell me first, and then—is this the thing?" said Phœbe, curiously, taking up a slip of paper from the table, a stamped piece of paper, in a handwriting which seemed horribly familiar to her, and yet strange. Tozer nodded at her gloomily, holding his head between his hands, and Phœbe read over the first few words before her with an aching heart,

and eyes that seemed to ache in sympathy. Only a few words, but what evidence of guilt, what pitiful misery in them! She did not even think so much of the name on the back, which was and was not her grandfather's name. The rest of the bill was written in a hand disguised and changed; but she had seen a great deal of similar writing lately, and she recognised it with a sickening at her heart. In the kind of fatherly flirtation which had been innocently carried on between Phœbe and her friend's father, various productions of his in manuscript had been given to her to read. She was said, in the pleasant social jokes of the party, to be more skilled in interpreting Mr. May's handwriting than any of his family. She stood and gazed at the paper, and her eyes filled with tears of pain and pity. The openness of this self-betrayal, veiled as it was with a shadow of disguise which could deceive no one who knew him, went to Phœbe's heart. What could he have done

it for? Mere money, the foolish expenses of every day, or, what would be more respectable, some vague mysterious claim upon him, which might make desperate expedients necessary? She stood, temporarily stupefied, with her eyes full, looking at that pitiful, terrible, guilty bit of paper, stupefied by the sudden realization of her sudden guess at the truth—though, indeed, the truth was so much more guilty and appalling than any guess of hers.

“Well,” said Tozer, “you’ve seen it, and now what do you think of it? That’s my name, mind you, my name! I hope the Almighty will grant me patience. Stuck on to what they calls a kite, an accommodation bill. What do you think of that, Miss Phœbe? A-a-ah! if I had hold of him—if I had him under my fists—if I had him by the scruff of the neck!”

“Grandpapa, doesn’t it say in the Bible we are to forgive when harm is done to us?”

Phœbe had begun to tremble all over;

for the first time she doubted her own power.

He got up again, and began to prowl about the table, round and round, with the same wild look in his eyes.

“I am not one as would go again Scripture,” he said, gloomily; “but that’s a spiritual meaning as you’re too young to enter into. You don’t suppose as Scripture would approve of crime, or let them escape as had wronged their fellow-creatures? There wouldn’t be no business, no justice, no trade, on such a rule as that.”

“But, grandpapa—”

“Don’t you but me. You’ve seen me in good spirits and good temper, Phœbe, my girl; but you don’t know old Sam Tozer when his spirit’s up. D—— him!” cried the old man, striking his hand violently on the table; “and you may tell your father, as is a Minister, that I said so. The Bible’s spiritual, but there’s trade, and there’s justice. A man ain’t

clear of what he's done because you forgive him. What's the law for else? Forgive! You may forgive him as fast as you like, but he's got to be punished all the same."

"But not by you."

"By the law!" cried Tozer. His inflamed eyes seemed to glare upon her, his rough grey hair bristled on his head, a hot redness spread across his face beneath his fiery eyes, which seemed to scorch the cheek with angry flames. "The law, that ain't a individual. That's for our protection, whether we like it or not. What's that got to do with forgiving? Now, looking at it in a public way, I ain't got no right to forgive."

"Grandpapa, you have always been so kind, always so good to everybody. I have heard of so many things you have done—"

"That is all very well," said Tozer, not without a certain gloomy complacence, "so long as you don't touch *me*. But the

moment as you touches me, I'm another man. That's what I can't bear, nor I won't. Them as tries their tricks upon me shan't be let off, neither for wife nor child; and don't you think, my girl, though you're Phoebe junior, that you are a-going for to come over me."

Phoebe could not but shiver in her fright and agitation; but distressed and excited as she was, she found means to take a step which was important indeed, though at the moment she did not fully realize its importance, and did it by instinct only. She had a handkerchief in her hand, and almost without consciousness of what she was doing, she crushed up the miserable bit of paper, which was the cause of so much evil and misery in its folds. He was far too impassioned and excited to observe such a simple proceeding. It was the suggestion of a moment, carried out in another moment like a flash of lightning. And as soon as she had done this, and perceived what she had

done, fortitude and comfort came back to Phœbe's soul.

"You will not hear what I have found out, and now I do not choose to tell you, grandpapa," she said, with an air of offence. "Unless you wish to be ill, you will do much better to go to bed. It is your usual hour, and I am going to grand-mamma. Say good night, please. I am going out again to stay all night. Mr. May is ill, and I ought to help poor Ursula."

"You go a deal after them Mays," said Tozer, with a cloud over his face.

"Yes. I wonder whom else I should go after? Who has been kind to me in Carlingford except the Mays? Nobody. Who has asked me to go to their house, and share everything that is pleasant in it? None of your Salem people, grandpapa. I hope I am not ungrateful, and whatever happens, or whatever trouble they are in," cried Phœbe, fervently, "I

shall stand up for them through thick and thin, wherever I go."

The old man looked at her with a startled look.

"You speak up bold," he said; "you won't get put upon for want of spirit; and I don't know as what you're saying ain't the right thing—though I don't hold with the Church nor parsons' ways. I'd do a deal myself, though you think me so hard and cross, for folks as has been kind to you."

"I know you will, grandpapa," said Phoebe, with a slight emphasis which startled him, though he did not know why; and she kissed him before she went to her grandmother, which she did with a perfectly composed and tranquil mind. It was astonishing how the crackle of that bit of paper in her handkerchief calmed and soothed her. She recovered her breath, her colour, and her spirits. She ran up to her room and changed her dress, which was silk, for a soft merino one, which

made no rustling ; and then she folded the bill carefully, and put it into the safe keeping of the little purse which she always carried in her pocket. No one would think of searching for it there, and she would always have it at hand whatever happened. 'When she had made these needful arrangements, she went to old Mrs. Tozer, and took her comfortably upstairs. Never was there a more devoted nurse. The old lady chatted cheerfully, yet sympathetically, of the poor gentleman and his illness, with the half satisfaction of an invalid in hearing of some one else who is ill.

“ And be sure you take him some of the port wine as the doctor ordered, and Tozer paid that dear for. I don't care for it, not a bit, Phoebe. I'd sooner have it from the grocer's, at two shillings a bottle. That's what I've always been used to, when I did take a glass of wine now and again. But I daresay as Mr. May would like it, poor gentleman.”

When Mrs. Tozer had laid her head, all nodding with white muslin frills, edged with cotton lace, upon her pillow, Phœbe, noiseless in her soft merino gown, went back, accompanied by Martha, to the Parsonage, where Ursula's careworn face lighted a little at sight of her. Ursula had left her father for the moment in Betsy's care, to get something that was wanted, and she stole into the dining-room on hearing of her friend's arrival, and talked a little in a whisper, though the sick man was on the upper floor, and could not possibly have heard anything. Northcote was still there, sitting with Reginald, too anxious and excited to go away; and they all conversed in whispers, the three of them talking together for the benefit of the new-comer.

“Not paralysis; at least, he does not think so; a great mental shock—but we can't tell a bit what it was—coming when he was dreadfully tired and not able to bear it.”

They all spoke together, each of them saying a few words, and kept close together in the centre of the room, a curious little half-frightened group, overawed and subdued by the sudden change and strange calamity dropt into their midst. Phœbe seemed to bring them new life and hope.

“If it is going to be an illness,” she said, “you gentlemen had better go home and go to bed, to be able to help us when we want help. Anyhow, what good can they do, Ursula? They had much better go to bed.”

Ursula looked at them with a certain regret; though they could not do much good, it was a relief to come and whisper a few words to them now and then, giving them news of the patient. But Phœbe was right, and there was nothing to be said against her decision. The two young women and the faithful Betsy were enough, and, indeed, more than enough to watch over Mr. May.

CHAPTER XI.

A MORNING'S WORK.

“GO and lie down for an hour,” whispered Phœbe. “I am not sleepy at all. I have sat up before, and never felt it. You never did, I can see it in your poor little white face; and besides I am steadier, because I am not so anxious. Now go, Ursula, if you are really fond of me, as you say—”

“Oh, Phœbe! if you think he is a little better. Oh, how horrible it is to be sleepy, as if you were all body, and had no heart at all!”

“You have plenty of heart, but you have never been used to this nursing. Leave

your door open, so that I may call you in a moment. I have sat up often. Now go, to please me," said Phœbe. She had another object than mere rest to her friend, who at last, very much ashamed and crying softly, yet so weary that nothing on this earth seemed so desirable to her as sleep, crept to her room, and lay down there as the pale morning began to dawn. Betsy slept heavily in an easy-chair outside the door of the sick-room. She was there at hand in case anything was wanted, but she was happily unconscious where she was, sleeping the sleep of hard work and a mind undisturbed. Phœbe had seen that the patient was stirring out of the dull doze in which his faculties had been entirely stilled and stupefied. He was rousing to uneasiness, if not to full consciousness. Two or three times he made a convulsive movement, as if to raise himself; once his eyes, which were half open, seemed to turn upon her with a vague glimmer of meaning. How

strangely she felt towards him, as she sat there in the grey of the morning, sole guardian, sole confidant of this erring and miserable man! The thought ran through her with a strange thrill. He was nothing to her, and yet he was absolutely in her power, and in all heaven and earth there seemed no one who was capable of protecting him, or cared to do so, except herself only. She sat looking at him with a great pity in her mind, determined to be his true protector, to deliver him from what he himself had done. She had not realized at first what it was he had done, and indeed it was only now that its full enormity, or rather its full consequences (which were the things that affected her most urgently), made themselves apparent to her. Generalizations are unsafe things, and whether it was because she was a woman that Phoebe, passing over the crime, fixed her thoughts upon the punishment, I do not venture to say; but she did so. After all

a few lines of writing on a bit of paper is not a crime which affects the imagination of the inexperienced. Had it been a malicious slander Phœbe would have realized the sin of it much more clearly; but the copy of her grandfather's signature did not wound her moral sense in the same way, though it was a much more serious offence. That Mr. May could have intended to rob him of the money appeared impossible to her; and no doubt the borrowing of the signature was wrong—very wrong. Yes, of course it was horribly, fatally wrong; but still it did not set her imagination aglow with indignant horror, as smaller affairs might have done. But the consequences—disgrace, ruin, the loss of his position, the shame of his profession, moral death indeed, almost as frightful as if he had been hanged for murder. She shivered as she sat by him, veiled by the curtain, and thought of her grandfather's vindictive fierceness; only she stood between him and destruction, and

Phœbe felt that it was by no legitimate means that she was doing so, not by her influence over her grandfather as she had hoped, but only by an unjustifiable expedient which in itself was a kind of crime. This, however, brought a slight smile on her face. She took out her little purse from her pocket, and looked at the bit of paper carefully folded in it. The faint perfume of the Russia leather had already communicated itself to the document, which had not been so pleasant in Tozer's hands. As she looked at it lying peacefully on her lap, her attention was suddenly called by the patient, who sat upright and looked furtively about him, with his hand upon the coverings ready to throw them off. His ghastly white face peered at her from behind the curtain with wild eagerness—then relaxed, when he met her eye, into a kind of idiot smile, a pitiful attempt to divert suspicion, and he fell back again with a groan. The trance that had stupefied him was over ; he had recovered

some kind of consciousness, how much or how little she could not tell. His mind now seemed to be set upon hiding himself, drawing his coverings over him, and concealing himself with the curtain, at which he grasped with an excess of force which neutralized itself.

“Mr. May,” said Phœbe, softly. “Mr. May! do you know me?”

She could not tell what answer he made, or if he made any answer. He crouched down under the bed-clothes, pulling them over his face, trying to hide himself from her; from which she divined that he did recognise her, confused though his faculties were. Then a hoarse murmuring sound seemed to come out of the pillow. It was some time before she could make out what it was.

“Where am I?” he said.

With the lightning speed of sympathy and pity, Phœbe divined what his terror was. She said, almost whispering,

“At home, in your own bed—at home!

and safe. Oh, don't you know me—I am Phoebe." Then after a pause, "Tozer's grand-daughter; do you know me now?"

The strange scared white-faced spectre shrank under his covering, till she could see no more of him except two wild eyes full of terror which was almost madness.

"Listen!" she said, eagerly, "try to understand. Oh, Mr. May, try to understand! I know about it—I know everything, and you are safe—quite safe; you need not have any fear!"

He did not follow what she said, Phoebe perceived with pain and terror. Even the impression made by the first sight of her seemed to fade from his mind. His grasp relaxed upon the curtains and coverlet; and then the hoarse murmuring was resumed. Straining all her ears, she made out that he was not speaking to her or anyone, but moaned to himself, saying the same words over and over again. It took her a long time to make out even what these words were. When at last she did

make them out, they filled the girl with an alarm beyond words.

“It used to be hanging,” he said. “Hard labour; can I bear hard labour? And the children—the children! Hard labour—for life. Hanging—was soon over. The children! I cannot bear it. I never was put to—hard labour—in all my life.”

Phoebe was too sick at heart to listen to more. She drew a little apart, but near enough to be seen by him. If he chose to spring up, to fling himself from the window, as she had heard of men doing in delirium, who could restrain him? Not she, a slight girl, nor Betsy, even if Betsy could be roused to the danger. She did not know how long the vigil lasted which followed, but it seemed like years to her; and when at last she was relieved by the joyful sound of Reginald's voice and foot-step coming up the stairs, she felt disposed to run to the glass at once, and look if her hair had grown white, or her counten-

ance permanently changed with the terror. Reginald, for his part, thought of his father in the second place only, as children are apt to do; he came up to her first, and with a thrill in his voice of surprise and emotion, addressed her hastily by her name.

“Phœbe! is it *you* who are watching—you, darling?”

“Hush! I sent Ursula to bed; she was so tired. Don’t leave him. I am frightened,” cried Phœbe. “He is wandering in his mind. Oh, don’t leave him, Mr. May!”

“I will do exactly as you tell me,” said Reginald, in a confused transport of feeling, the very anxiety in his mind helping to destroy his self-control. He stooped down and kissed her hands before she could divine what he was about to do. “Only you or an angel would have done it,” he cried, with a tremulous voice.

Was it not natural that he should think that some thought of him had made Phœbe

so careful of his father? His heart was swelling, too full to hold, with a sudden joy, which expanded the pain, and made that greater too.

“Oh, what does it matter about me? Mr. May, think what I am saying. Don't leave him for a moment. He might throw himself out of the window, he might do some harm to himself. Ah! again!” said Phœbe, trembling.

But this time it was only a convulsive start, nothing more. The patient dropped down again softly upon his pillows, and relapsed into his doze, if doze it could be called, in which his faculties were but half dormant, and his open eyes contradicted all the appearances of natural sleep.

When she was relieved from the sick room—and now she had a double motive in getting away—Phœbe stole softly into the faded little place where Ursula lay, still fast asleep, though fully dressed, and bathed her face and strained eyes. “I wonder if my hair is grey underneath,”

she said to herself. "I wonder nothing has happened to me." But a great deal had happened to her. Such a night is rarely encountered by so young a creature, or such an alarming charge undertaken. And sudden hot kisses upon little, cold, agitated hands, worn by fatigue to nervous perception of every touch, are very exciting and strange to a girl. They had given her a kind of electric shock. She was not in love with Reginald, and therefore she felt it all the more, and her heart was still throbbing with the suddenness and excitement of the incident. And after she had made an effort to get over this, there remained upon her mind the disturbing burden of a knowledge which no one shared, and a responsibility which was very heavy and terrible, and too tremendous for her slight shoulders. After she had made that hasty toilette, she sat down for a moment at the foot of the bed on which Ursula lay sleeping, unconscious of all those mysteries, and tried to think. It

is not an easy process at any time, but after a long night's watching, terror, and agitation, it seemed more impossible to Phœbe than it had ever done before. And she had so much occasion for thought, so much need of the power of judging clearly. What was she to do?—not to-morrow, or next week, but now. She had taken the responsibility of the whole upon herself by the sudden step she had taken last night; but, bold as she had been, Phœbe was ignorant. She did not know whether her theft of the bill would really stop the whole proceedings, as had seemed so certain last night; and what if she was found out, and compelled to return it, and all her labour lost! A panic took possession of her as she sat there at the foot of Ursula's bed, and tried to think. But what is the use of trying to think? The more you have need of them, the more all mental processes fail you. Phœbe could no more think than she could fly. She sat down very seriously, and she rose up

in despair, and, thought being no longer among her possibilities, resolved to do something at once, without further delay, which would be a consolation to herself at least. How wonderful it was to go out in the fresh early morning, and see the people moving about their work, going up and down with indifferent faces, quite unconcerned about the day and all it might bring forth! She went up Grange Lane with a curious uncertainty as to what she should do next, feeling her own extraordinary independence more than anything else. Phœbe felt like a man who has been out all night, who has his own future all in his hands, nobody having any right to explanation or information about what he may choose to do, or to expect from him anything beyond what he himself may please to give. Very few people are in this absolutely free position, but this was how Phœbe represented it to herself, having, like all other girls, unbounded belief in the independence and freedom pos-

sessed by men. Many times in her life she had regarded with envy this independence, which, with a sigh, she had felt to be impossible. But now that she had it, Phœbe did not like it. What she would have given to have gone to some one, almost anyone, and told her dilemma, and put the burden a little off her shoulders! But she durst not say a word to anyone. Very anxious and preoccupied, she went up Grange Lane. Home? She did not know; perhaps she would have thought of something before she reached the gate of No. 6. And accordingly, when she had lifted her hand to ring the bell, and made a step aside to enter, an inspiration came to Phœbe. She turned away from the door and went on up into the town, cautiously drawing her veil over her face, for already the apprentices were taking down the shutters from her uncle's shop, and she might be seen. Cotsdean's shop was late of opening that morning, and its master was very

restless and unhappy. He had heard nothing more about the bill, but a conviction of something wrong had crept into his mind. It was an altogether different sensation from the anxiety he had hitherto felt. This was no anxiety to speak of, but a dull pain and aching conviction that all was not right. When he saw the young lady entering the shop, Cotsdean's spirits rose a little, for a new customer was pleasant, and though he thought he had seen her, he did not know who she was. She was pleasant to look upon, and it was not often that anyone came so early. He came forward with anxious politeness; the boy (who was always late, and a useless creature, more expense than he was worth) had not appeared, and therefore Cotsdean was alone.

“I wanted to speak to you, please,” said Phœbe. “Will you mind if I speak very plainly, without any ceremony? Mr. Cotsdean, I am Mr. Tozer's grand-daughter, and live with him at No. 6 in the Lane. I

daresay you have often seen me with Miss May."

"Yes—yes, Miss, certainly," he said, with a thrill of alarm and excitement running through him. He felt his knees knock together under cover of the counter, and yet he did not know what he feared.

"Will you please tell me frankly, in confidence, about—the bill which was brought to my grandfather yesterday?" said Phœbe, bringing out the question with a rush.

Whether she was doing wrong, whether she might bring insult upon herself, whether it was an interference unwarrantable and unjustifiable, she could not tell. She was in as great a fright as Cotsdean, and more anxious still than he was; but fortunately her agitation did not show.

"What am I to tell you about it, Miss?" said the man, terrified. "Is it Mr. Tozer as has sent you? Lord help me! I know as he can sell me up if he has a mind; but he knows it ain't me."

“Don’t speak so loud,” said Phœbe, trembling too. “Nobody must hear; and remember, you are never, never to talk of this to anyone else; but tell me plainly, that there may be no mistake. Is it—Mr. May?”

“Miss Tozer,” said Cotsdean, who was shaking from head to foot, “if that’s your name—I don’t want to say a word against my clergyman. He’s stood by me many a day as I wanted him, and wanted him bad; but as I’m a living man, that money was never for me; and now he’s a-gone and left me in the lurch, and if your grandfather likes he can sell me up, and that’s the truth. I’ve got seven children,” said the poor man, with a sob breaking his voice, “and a missus; and nothing as isn’t in the business, not a penny, except a pound or two in a savings’ bank, as would never count. And I don’t deny as he could sell me up; but oh! Miss, he knows very well it ain’t for me.”

“Mr. Cotsdean,” said Phœbe, impress-

ively, "you don't know, I suppose, that Mr. May had a fit when he received your note last night?"

"Lord help us! Oh! God forgive me, I've done him wrong, poor gentleman, if that's true."

"It is quite true; he is very, very ill; he can't give you any advice, or assist you in any way, should grandpapa be unkind. He could not even understand if you told him what has happened."

Once more Cotsdean's knees knocked against each other in the shadow of the counter. His very lips trembled as he stood regarding his strange visitor with scared and wondering eyes.

"Now listen, please," said Phœbe, earnestly; "if anyone comes to you about the bill to-day, don't say anything about *him*. Say you got it—in the way of business—say anything you please, but don't mention *him*. If you will promise me this, I will see that you don't come to any harm. Yes, I will; you may say I am

not the sort of person to know about business, and it is quite true. But whoever comes to you remember this—if you don't mention Mr. May, I will see you safely through it; do you understand?"

Phœbe leant across the counter in her earnestness. She was not the kind of person to talk about bills, or to be a satisfactory security for a man in business; but Cotsdean was a poor man, and he was ready to catch at a straw in the turbid ocean of debt and poverty which seemed closing round him. He gave the required promise with his heart in his mouth.

Then Phœbe returned down the street. Her fatigue began to tell upon her, but she knew that she dared not give in, or allow that she was fatigued. However heavy with sleep her eyes might be, she must keep awake and watchful. Nothing, if she could help it, must so much as turn the attention of the world in Mr. May's direction. By this time she was much too deeply interested to ask herself why

she should do so much for Mr. May. He was her charge, her burden, as helpless in her hands as a child, and nobody but herself knew anything about it. It was characteristic of Phœbe's nature that she had no doubt as to being perfectly right in the matter, no qualm lest she should be making a mistake. She felt the weight upon her of the great thing she had undertaken to do, with a certain half-pleasing sense of the solemnity of the position and of its difficulties; but she was not afraid that she was going wrong or suffering her fancy to stray further than the facts justified; neither was she troubled by any idea of going beyond her sphere by interfering thus energetically in her friend's affairs. Phœbe did not easily take any such idea into her head. It seemed natural to her to do whatever might be wanted, and to act upon her own responsibility. Her self-confidence reached the heroic point. She knew that she was right, and she knew moreover that in this whole matter

she alone was right. Therefore the necessity of keeping up, of keeping alert and vigilant, of holding in her hand the threads of all these varied complications was not disagreeable to her, though she fully felt its importance—nay, almost exaggerated it in her own mind if that could be. She felt the dangerous character of the circumstances around her, and her heart was sore with pity for the culprit, or as she called him to herself the chief sufferer; and yet all the same Phœbe felt a certain sense of satisfaction in the great *rôle* she herself was playing. She felt equal to it, though she scarcely knew what was the next step she ought to take. She was walking slowly, full of thought, to Tozer's door, pondering upon this, when the sound of rapid wheels behind roused her attention, and looking up, surprised, she suddenly saw leaping out of a dog-cart the imposing figure of Clarence Copperhead, of whom she had not been thinking at all. He came down with a heavy leap, leaving the

light carriage swinging and quivering behind him with the shock of his withdrawal.

“Miss Phœbe!” he said, breathless; “here’s luck! I came over to see you, and you are the first person I set eyes on—”

He was rather heavy to make such a jump, and it took away his breath.

“To see me?” she said, laughing, though her heart began to stir. “That is very odd. I thought you must have come to see poor Mr. May, who is so ill. You know—”

“May be hanged!” said the young man; “I mean—never mind—I don’t mean him any harm, though, by Jove, if you make such a pet of him, I don’t know what I shall think. Miss Phœbe, I’ve come over post-haste, as you may see, chiefly to see you; and to try a horse as well,” he added, “which the governor has just bought. He’s a very good ’un to go; and pleased the governor would be if he knew the use I had put him to,” he concluded, with a half laugh.

Phoebe knew as well as he did what that use was. He had brought his father's horse out for the first time, to carry him here to propose to her, in spite of his father. This was the delicate meaning which it amused him to think of. She understood it all, and it brought a glow of colour to her face; but it did not steel her heart against him. She knew her Clarence, and that his standard of fine feeling and mental elevation was not high.

“Look here,” he said, “I wish I could speak to you, Miss Phœbe, somewhere better than in the street. Yes, in the garden—that will do. It ain't much of a place either to make a proposal in, for that's what I've come to do; but you don't want me to go down on my knees, or make a fuss, eh? I got up in the middle of the night to be here first thing and see you. I never had a great deal to say for myself,” said Clarence, “you won't expect me to make you fine speeches; but I *am* fond of you—awfully fond of

you, Phœbe, that's the truth. You suit me down to the ground, music and everything. There's no girl I ever met that has taken such a hold upon me as you."

Phœbè heard him very quietly, but her heart beat loud. She stood on the gravel between the flower-borders, where the primroses were beginning to wither, and glanced over her life of the past and that of the future, which were divided by this moment like the two beds of flowers; one homely, not very distinguished, simple enough—the other exalted by wealth to something quite above mediocrity. Her heart swelled, full as it was with so many emotions of a totally different kind. She had gained a great prize, though it might not be very much to look at; more or less, she was conscious this golden apple had been hanging before her for years, and now it had dropped into her hand. A gentle glow of contentment diffused itself all over her, not transport, indeed, but satisfaction, which was better.

“Mr. Copperhead—” she said, softly.

“No, hang it all, call me Clarence, Phœbe, if you’re going to have me!” he cried, putting out his big hands.

“Grandmamma is looking at us from the window,” she said, hurriedly, withdrawing a little from him.

“Well, and what does that matter? The old lady won’t say a word, depend upon it, when she knows. Look here, Phœbe, I’ll have an answer. Yes or no?”

“Have you got your father’s consent—Clarence?”

“Ah, it is yes then! I thought it would be yes;” he cried, seizing her in his arms. “As for the governor,” added Clarence, after an interval, snapping his fingers. “I don’t care *that* for the governor. When I’ve set my mind on a thing, it ain’t the governor, or twenty governors, that will stop me.”

CHAPTER XII.

A GREAT MENTAL SHOCK.

“**H**AVE you any notion what was the cause?”

“None,” said Reginald. “Oh, no, none at all,” said Ursula. They were all three standing at the door of the sick-room, in which already a great transformation had taken place. The doctor had sent a nurse to attend upon the patient. He had told them that their father was attacked by some mysterious affection of the brain, and that none of them were equal to the the responsibility of nursing him. His children thus banished had set the door ajar, and were congregated round it watch-

ing what went on within. They did not know what to do. It was Northcote who was asking these questions ; it was he who was most active among them. The others stood half-stunned, wholly ignorant, not knowing what to do.

“I don’t think papa is ill at all,” said Janey. “Look how he glares about him, just as I’ve seen him do when he was writing a sermon, ready to pounce upon anyone that made a noise. He is watching that woman. Why should he lie in bed like that, and be taken care of when he is just as well as I am ? You have made a mistake all the rest of you. I would go and speak to him, and tell him to get up and not make all this fuss, if it was me.”

“Oh, Janey ! hold your tongue,” said Ursula ; but she, too, looked half scared at the bed, and then turned wistful inquiring eyes to Northcote. As for Reginald, he stood uncertain, bewildered, all the colour gone out of his face, and all the energy out of his heart. He knew nothing

of his father's affairs, or of anything that might disturb his mind. His mind; all that his son knew of this was, that whatsoever things disturbed other minds his father had always contemptuously scouted all such nonsense. "Take some medicine," Mr. May had been in the habit of saying. "Mind! you mean digestion," was it nothing more than some complicated indigestion that affected him now?

"Is it anything about—money?" said Northcote.

They all turned and looked at him. The idea entered their minds for the first time. Yes, very likely it was money.

"We have always been poor," said Ursula, wistfully. Northcote took her hand into his; none of them except Ursula herself paid any attention to this involuntary, almost unconscious caress, and even to her it seemed a thing of course, and quite natural that he should be one of them, taking his share in all that was going on.

"I—am not poor," he said, faltering.

“You must not think me presumptuous, May. But the first thing to be done is to get him out of his difficulties, if he is in difficulties—and you must let me help to do it. I think you and I should go out and see about it at once.”

“Go—where?” Reginald, like most young people, had taken little notice of his father’s proceedings. So long as things went smoothly, what had he to do with it? When there was a pressure for money, he knew he would hear of it, at least in the shape of reproaches and sneers from his father at his useless life, and the expenses of the family. But even these reproaches had died away of late, since Reginald had possessed an income of his own, and since the revenues of the Parsonage had been increased by Clarence Copperhead. Reginald was more helpless than a stranger. He did not know where to turn. “Do you think we could ask him. I am almost of Janey’s opinion. I don’t think he is so ill as he seems.”

And then they all paused and looked again into the room. The nurse was moving softly about, putting everything in order, and Mr. May watched her from the bed with the keenest attention. His face was still livid and ghastly in colour; but his eyes had never been so full of eager fire in all the experience of his children. He watched the woman with a close attention which was appalling; sometimes he would put his covering half aside as if with the intention of making a spring. He was like some imprisoned animal seeing a possibility of escape. They looked at him, and then at each other, with a miserable helplessness. What could they do? He was their father, but they knew nothing about him, and just because he was their father they were more slow to understand, more dull in divining his secrets than if he had been a stranger. When there came at last a suggestion out of the silence, it was Northcote who spoke.

“I don’t see how you can leave him, May. It is plain he wants watching. I will go if you will let me—if Ursula will say I may,” said the young man with a little break in his voice. This roused them all to another question, quite different from the first one. Her brother and sister looked at Ursula, one with a keen pang of involuntary envy, the other with a sharp thrill of pleasurable excitement. Oddly enough they could all of them pass by their father and leave him out of the question, more easily, with less strain of mind, than strangers could. Ursula for her part did not say anything; but she looked at her lover with eyes in which two big tears were standing. She could scarcely see him through those oceans of moisture, bitter and salt, yet softened by the sense of trust in him, and rest upon him. When he stooped and kissed her on the forehead before them all, the girl did not blush. It was a solemn betrothal, sealed by pain, not by kisses.

“Yes, go,” she said to him in words which were half sobs, and which he understood, but no one else.

“You perceive,” he said, “it is not a stranger interfering in your affairs, May, but Ursula doing her natural work for her father through me—her representative. God bless her! I am Ursula now,” he said with a broken laugh of joy; then grew suddenly grave again. “You trust me, May?”

Poor Reginald’s heart swelled; this little scene so calmly transacted under his eyes, would it ever happen for him, or anything like it? No, his reason told him—and yet; still he was thinking but little of his father. He had his duty too, and this happened to be his duty; but no warmer impulse was in the poor young fellow’s heart.

And thus the day went on. It was afternoon already, and soon the sky began to darken. When his children went into the room, Mr. May took no notice of

them—not that he did not know them; but because his whole faculties were fixed upon that woman who was his nurse, and who had all her wits about her, and meant to keep him there, and to carry out the doctor's instructions should heaven and earth melt away around her. She too perceived well enough how he was watching her, and being familiar with all the ways, as she thought, of the “mentally afflicted,” concluded in her mind that her new patient was further gone than the doctor thought.

“I hope as you'll stay within call, Sir,” she said significantly to Reginald; “when they're like that, as soon as they breaks out they're as strong as giants; but I hope he won't break out, not to-day.”

Reginald withdrew, shivering, from the idea thus presented to him. He stole down to his father's study, notwithstanding the warning she had given him, and there with a sick heart set to work to endeavour to understand his father—nay,

more than that, to try to find him out. The young man felt a thrill of nervous trembling come over him when he sat down in his father's chair and timidly opened some of the drawers. Mr. May was in many respects as young a man as his son, and Reginald and he had never been on those confidential terms which bring some fathers and sons so very close together. He felt that he had no business there spying upon his father's privacy. He could not look at the papers which lay before him. It seemed a wrong of the first magnitude, wrought treacherously, because of the helplessness of the creature most concerned. He could not do it. He thrust the papers back again into the drawer. In point of fact there were no secrets in the papers, nor much to be found out in Mr. May's private life. All its dark side might be inferred from, without being revealed in, the little book which lay innocently on the desk, and which Reginald looked over, thinking no harm. In

it there were two or three entries which at length roused his curiosity. Cotsdean, October 10th. Cotsdean, January 12th. C. & T. April 18th. What did this mean? Reginald remembered to have seen Cotsdean paying furtive visits in the study. He recollected him as one of the few poor people for whom his father had a liking. But what could there be between them? He was puzzled, and as Betsy was passing the open door at the time, called her in. The evening was falling quickly, the day had changed from a beautiful bright morning to a rainy gusty afternoon, tearing the leaves and blossoms from the trees, and whirling now and then a shower of snowy petals, beautiful but ill-omened snow, across the dark window. Beyond that the firmament was dull; the clouds hung low, and the day was gone before it ought. When Betsy came in she closed the door, not fastening it, but still, Reginald felt, shutting him out too much from the sick-bed, to which he

might be called at any moment. But he was not alarmed by this, though he remarked it. He questioned Betsy closely as to his father's possible connection with this man. In such a moment, confidential, half-whispered interviews are the rule of a house. Everyone has so much to ask; so much to say in reply; so many particulars to comment upon which the rest may have forgotten. She would have liked to enter upon the whole story, to tell how the master was took, and how she herself had thought him looking bad when he came in; but even to talk about Cotsdean was pleasant.

“I told Miss Beecham,” said Betsy, “and I told the other gentleman, Mr. Northcote, as was asking me all about it. It's months and months since that Cotsdean got coming here—years I may say; and whenever he came master looked bad. If you'll believe me, Mr. Reginald, it's money as is at the bottom of it all.”

“Money? hush, what was that? I

thought I heard something upstairs.”

“Only the nurse, Sir, as is having her tea. I’m ready to take my oath as it’s money. I’ve been in service since I was nine year old,” said Betsy, “I’ve had a deal of experience of gentlefolks, and it’s always money as is the thing as sets them off their head. That’s what it is. If that Cotsdean didn’t come here something about money, never you believe me no more.”

“Cotsdean! a poor shopkeeper, what could he have to do with my father’s affairs?” Reginald was not speaking to the woman, but drearily to himself. If this was the only clue to the mystery, what a poor clue it was!

“I dunno, Sir,” said Betsy, “it ain’t for me to tell; but one thing I’m sure of—Lord bless us, what’s that?”

Reginald rushed to the door, nearly knocking her down as he pushed her aside with his hand. When they got outside, it was only the hat-stand in the hall that

had fallen, something having been torn off from it apparently in mad haste, and the door had opened and shut. Reginald rushed upstairs, where the nurse was sitting quietly at her tea, the bed curtains being drawn.

“All right, Sir, he’s in a nice sleep,” said that functionary, “I didn’t light no candles, not to disturb him, poor gentleman.”

Reginald tore the curtains aside, then turned and dashed downstairs, and out into the windy twilight. In that moment of stillness and darkness the patient had escaped. He could see a strange figure walking rapidly, already half way up Grange Lane, and rushed on in pursuit without taking thought of anything. The sick man had seized upon a long coat which had been hanging in the hall, and which reached to his heels. Reginald flew on, going as softly as he could, not to alarm him. Where could he be going, utterly unclothed except in this big coat?

Was it simply madness that had seized him, nothing more or less? He followed, with his heart beating loudly. There seemed nobody about, no one to whom he could make an appeal to help him, even if he could overtake the rapidly progressing fugitive. But even while this thought crossed his mind, Reginald saw another figure, broad and tall, developing in the distance, coming towards them, which stopped short, and put out an arm to stop the flight. Even that moment gave him the advantage, and brought him near enough to make out that it was Mr. Copperhead.

“The very man I want,” he heard him say with his loud voice, putting his arm within that of Mr. May, who resisted, but not enough to attract the attention of the new comer, as Reginald came up breathless and placed himself on his father’s other side. The darkness prevented any revelation of the strange appearance of the fugitive, and Mr. Copperhead was not

lively of perception in respect to people unconnected with himself.

“You too,” he cried, nodding at Reginald, “come along. I’ve come to save that boy of mine from a little artful— Come, both of you. The sight of a young fellow like himself will shame him more than anything; and you, May, you’re the very man I want—”

“Not there, not there, for God’s sake!” said Mr. May with a hoarse cry, “not there, my God! Reginald! it used to be hanging. Do you mean to give me up?”

“Hold him fast,” Reginald whispered in desperation, “hold him fast! It is madness.”

“Lord bless us!” said Mr. Copperhead, but he was a man who was proud of his strength, and not given to timidity. He held his captive fast by the arm, while Reginald secured him on the other side. “Why, what’s this, May? rouse yourself up, don’t give in, man. No, you ain’t

mad, not a bit of you. Come along, wait here at Tozer's for me, while I do my business; and then I'll look after *you*. Come on."

There was a violent but momentary struggle; then all at once the struggling man yielded and allowed himself to be dragged within the garden door. Was it because an ordinary policeman, one of the most respectful servants of the law, who would have saluted Mr. May with the utmost reverence, was just then coming up? He yielded; but he looked at his son with a wild despair which made Reginald almost as desperate as himself in maddening ignorance and terror.

"Ruin! ruin!" he murmured hoarsely, "worse than death."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONFLICT.

THE day which had intervened between Phœbe's morning walk, and this darkling flight along the same road, had been full of agitation at the house of the Tozers. Phœbe, who would willingly have spared her lover anything more than the brief intercourse which was inevitable with her relations, could find no means of sending him away without breakfast. She had escaped from him accordingly, weary as she was, to make arrangements for such a meal as she knew him, even in his most sentimental mood, to love—a thing which

required some time and supervision, though the house was always plentifully provided. When she had hastily bathed her face and changed her dress, she came back to the room where she had left him, to find him in careless conversation with Tozer, who only half recovered from the excitement of last night, but much overawed by a visit from so great a personage, had managed to put aside the matter which occupied his own thoughts, in order to carry on a kind of worship of Clarence, who was the son of the richest man he had ever heard of, and consequently appeared to the retired butterman a very demigod. Clarence was yawning loudly, his arms raised over his head in total indifference to Tozer, when Phœbe came into the room; and the old man seized upon the occasion of her entrance to perform another act of worship.

“Ah, here’s Phœbe at last. Mr. Copperhead’s come in from the country, my dear, and he’s going to make us proud,

he is, by accepting of a bit of breakfast. I tell him it's a wretched poor place for him as has palaces at his command ; but what we can give him is the best quality, that I answers for—and you're one as knows how things should be, even if we ain't grand ourselves."

"Have you palaces at your command, Clarence?" she said, with a smile. Notwithstanding the fatigue of the night, the fresh air and her ablutions, and the agitation and commotion in her mind, made Phoebe almost more animated and brilliant than usual. Her eyes shone with the anxiety and excitement of the crisis, and a little, too, with the glory and delight of success ; for though Clarence Copperhead was not very much to brag of in his own person, he still had been the object before her for some time back, and she had got him. And yet Phoebe was not mercenary, though she was not "in love" with her heavy lover in the ordinary sense of the word. She went towards him now, and stood near him,

looking at him with a smile. He was a big, strong fellow, which is a thing most women esteem, and he was not without good looks; and he would be rich, and might be thrust into a position which would produce both honour and advantage; and lastly, he was her own, which gives even the most indifferent article a certain value in some people's eyes.

“Palaces? I don't know, but nice enough houses; and you know you like a nice house, Miss Phœbe. Here, I haven't said a word to the old gentleman. Tell him; I ain't come all this way for nothing. You've always got the right words at your fingers' end. Tell him and let's get it over. I think I could eat some breakfast, I can tell you, after that drive.”

“Grandpapa,” said Phœbe, slightly tremulous. “Mr. Copperhead wishes me to tell you that—Mr. Copperhead wishes you to know why——”

“Bless us!” cried Clarence with a laugh. “Here is a beating about the

bush ! She has got her master, old gentleman, and that is what she never had before. Look here, I'm going to marry Phœbe. That's plain English without any phrases, and I don't know what you could say to better it. Is breakfast ready ? I've earned it for my part."

"Going to marry Phœbe!" Tozer gasped. He had heard from his wife that such a glory was possible ; but now, when it burst upon him, the dazzling delight seemed too good to be true. It thrust the forgery and everything out of his head, and took even the power of speech from him. He got up and gazed at the young people, one after the other, rubbing his hands, with a broad grin upon his face ; then he burst forth all at once in congratulation.

"God bless you, Sir ! God bless you both ! It's an honour as I never looked for. Rising in the world was never no thought of mine ; doing your duty and trusting to the Lord is what I've always

stood by; and it's been rewarded. But she's a good girl, Mr. Copperhead; you'll never regret it, Sir. She's that good and that sensible, as I don't know how to do without her. She'll do you credit, however grand you may make her; and if it's any comfort to you, as she's connected with them as knows how to appreciate a gentleman—" said Tozer, breaking down in his enthusiasm, his voice sinking into a whisper in the fulness of his heart.

"Grandpapa!" said Phœbe, feeling sharply pricked in her pride, with a momentary humiliation, "there are other things to be thought of," and she gave him a look of reproach which Tozer did not understand, but which Clarence did vaguely. Clarence, for his part, liked the homage, and was by no means unwilling that everybody should perceive his condescension and what great luck it was for Phœbe to have secured him. He laughed, pleased to wave his banner of triumph over her, notwithstanding that he loved

her. He *was* very fond of her that was true; but still her good fortune in catching him was, for the moment, the thing most in his thoughts.

“Well, old gentleman,” he said, “you ain’t far wrong there. She *is* a clever one. We shall have a bad time of it with the governor at first; for, of course, when there’s no money and no connections a man like the governor, that has made himself, ain’t likely to be too well pleased.”

“As for money, Mr. Copperhead, Sir,” said Tozer with modest pride, “I don’t see as there’s anything to be said against Phœbe on that point. Her mother before her had a pretty bit of money, though I say it, as shouldn’t—”

“Ah, yes—yes,” said Clarence. “To be sure; but a little bit of coin like that don’t count with us. The governor deals in hundreds of thousands; he don’t think much of your little bits of fortunes. But I don’t mind. She suits me down to the ground, does Phœbe; and I

don't give that for the governor!" cried the young man valiantly. As for Phœbe herself, it is impossible to imagine any one more entirely put out of her place and out of all the comfort and satisfaction in her own initiative which she generally possessed, than this young woman was, while these two men talked over her so calmly. It is doubtful whether she had ever been so set aside out of her proper position in her life, and her nerves were overstrained and her bodily strength worn out, which added to the sense of downfall. With almost a touch of anger in her tone she who was never out of temper, interrupted this talk.

"I think breakfast is ready, grandpapa. Mr. Clarence Copperhead wants some refreshment after his exertions, and in preparation for the exertions to come. For I suppose your papa is very likely to follow you to Carlingford," she added, with a low laugh, turning to her lover. "I know Mr. Copperhead very well, and I should not

like my first meeting with him after I had thwarted all his views."

"Phœbe! you don't mean to desert me? By Jove! I'll face him and twenty like him if you'll only stand by me," he cried; which was a speech that made amends.

She suffered him to lead her into breakfast less formally than is the ordinary fashion, and his hand on her trim waist did not displease the girl. No; she understood him, knew that he was no great things; but yet he was hers, and she had always meant him to be hers, and Phœbe was ready to maintain his cause in the face of all the world.

The breakfast was to Clarence's taste, and so was the company—even old Tozer, who sat with his mouth agape in admiration of the young potentate, while he recounted his many grandeurs. Clarence gave a great deal of information as to prices he had paid for various things, and the expenses of his living at Oxford and elsewhere, as he ate the kidneys, eggs, and

sausages with which Phœbe's care had heaped the table. They had no *pâté de foie gras*, it is true, but the simple fare was of the best quality, as Tozer had boasted. Mrs. Tozer did not come downstairs to breakfast, and thus Phœbe was alone with the two men, who suited each other so much better than she could have hoped. The girl sat by them languidly, though with a beating heart, wondering, as girls will wonder sometimes, if all men were like these, braggards and believers in brag, worshippers of money and price. No doubt, young men too marvel when they hear the women about them talking across them of *chiffons*, or of little quarrels and little vanities. Phœbe had more brains than both of her interlocutors put together, and half-a-dozen more added on; but she was put down and silenced by the talk. Her lover for the moment had escaped from her. She could generally keep him from exposing himself in this way, and turn the better side of him to the light; but the

presence of a believer in him turned the head of Clarence. She could not control him any more.

“A good horse is a deuced expensive thing,” he said; “the Governor gave a cool hundred and fifty for that mare that brought me over this morning. He bought her from Sir Robert; but he didn’t know, Phœbe, the use I was going to put her to. If he’d known, he’d have put that hundred and fifty in the sea rather than have his beast rattled over the country on such an errand.” Here he stopped in the midst of his breakfast, and looked at her admiringly. “But I don’t repent,” he added. “I’d do it again to-morrow if it wasn’t done already. If you stand by me, I’ll face him, and twenty like him, by Jove!”

“You don’t say nothing,” said her grandfather. “I wouldn’t be so ungrateful. Gentlemen like Mr. Copperhead ain’t picked up at every roadside.”

“They ain’t, by Jove!” said Clarence; “but she’s shy, that’s all about it,” he

added, tenderly; "when we're by ourselves, I don't complain."

Poor Phoebe! She smiled a dismal smile, and was very glad when breakfast was over. After that she took him into the garden, into the bright morning air, which kept her up, and where she could keep her Clarence in hand and amuse him, without allowing this revelation of the worst side of him. While they were there, Martha admitted the visitor of yesterday, Mr. Simpson from the Bank, bringing back to Phoebe's mind all the other matter of which it had been full.

"Don't you think you ought to go and see about the horse and the dog-cart?" she said suddenly, turning to her lover with one of those sudden changes which kept the dull young man amused. "You don't know what they may be about."

"They can't be up to much," said Clarence. "Thank you, Miss Phoebe, I like you better than the mare."

"But you can't be here all day, and I

can't be here all day," she said. "I must look after grandmamma, and you ought to go down and inquire after poor Mr. May—he is so ill. I have been there all night, helping Ursula. You ought to go and ask for him. People don't forget all the duties of life because—because a thing of this sort has happened—"

"Because they've popped and been accepted," said graceful Clarence. "By Jove! I'll go. I'll tell young May. I'd like to see his face when I tell him the news. You may look as demure as you like, but you know what spoons he has been upon you, and the old fellow too—made me as jealous as King Lear sometimes," cried the happy lover, with a laugh. He meant Othello, let us suppose.

"Nonsense, Clarence! But go, please go. I must run to grandmamma."

Mr. Simpson had gone in, and Phœbe's heart had begun to beat loudly in her throat; but it was not so easy to get rid of this ardent lover, and when at last he

did go, he was slightly sulky, which was not a state of mind to be encouraged. She rushed upstairs to her grandmother's room, which was over the little room where Tozer sat, and from which she could already hear sounds of conversation rapidly rising in tone, and the noise of opening and shutting drawers, and a general rummage. Phœbe never knew what she said to the kind old woman, who kissed and wept over her, exulting in the news.

“ I ain't been so pleased since my Phœbe told me as she was to marry a minister,” said Mrs. Tozer, “ and this is a rise in life a deal grander than the best of ministers. But, bless your heart, what shall I do without you ?” cried the old woman, sobbing.

Presently Tozer came in, with an air of angry abstraction, and began to search through drawers and boxes.

“ I've lost something,” he answered, with sombre looks, to his wife's inquiry. Phœbe

busied herself with her grandmother, and did not ask what it was. It was only when he had searched everywhere that some chance movement directed his eyes to her. She was trembling in spite of herself. He came up to her, and seized her suddenly by the arm. "By George!" he cried, "I'm in a dozen minds to search you!"

"Tozer! let my child alone. How dare you touch her—her as is as good as Mr. Copperhead's lady? What's she got to do with your dirty papers? Do you think Phœbe would touch them—with a pair of tongs?" cried the angry grandmother.

Phœbe shrank with all the cowardice of guilt. Her nerves were unstrung by weariness and excitement. And Tozer, with his little red eyes blazing upon her, was very different in this fury of personal injury, from the grandfather of the morning, who had been ready to see every virtue in her.

"I believe as you've got it!" he cried, giving her a shake. It was a shot at a

venture, said without the least idea of its truth; but before the words had crossed his lips, he felt with a wild passion of rage and wonder that it was true. "Give it up, you hussy!" he shrieked, with a yell of fury, his face convulsed with sudden rage, thickly and with sputtering lips.

"Tozer!" cried his wife, "flinging herself between them, "take your hands off the child. Run, run to your room, my darling; he's out of his senses. Lord bless us all, Sam, are you gone stark staring mad?"

"Grandpapa," said Phoebe, trembling, "if I had it, you may be sure it would be safe out of your way. I told you I knew something about it, but you would not hear me. Will you hear me now? I'll make it up to you—double it, if you like. Grandmamma, it is a poor man he would drive to death if he is not stopped. Oh!" cried Phoebe, clasping her hands, "after what has happened this morning, will you not yield to me? and after all the love

you have shown me? I will never ask anything, not another penny. I will make it up; only give in to me, give in to me—for once in my life! Grandpapa! I never asked anything from you before.”

“Give it up, you piece of impudence! you jade! you d—d deceitful——”

He was holding her by the arm, emphasising every new word by a violent shake, while poor old Mrs. Tozer dropped into a chair, weeping and trembling.

“Oh! it ain’t often as he’s like this; but when he is, I can’t do nothing with him, I can’t do nothing with him!” she cried.

But Phœbe’s nerves strung themselves up again in face of the crisis. She shook him off suddenly with unexpected strength, and moving to a little distance, stood confronting him, pale but determined.

“If you think you will get the better of me in this way, you are mistaken,” she said. “I am not your daughter; how dare you treat me so? Grandmamma,

forgive me. I have been up all night. I am going to lie down," said Phœbe. "If grandpapa has anything more to say against me, he can say it to Clarence. I leave myself in his hands."

Saying this, she turned round majestically, but with an anxious heart, and walked away to her room, every nerve in her trembling. When she got there, Phœbe locked the door hastily, in genuine terror; and then she laughed, and then she cried a little. "And to think it was here all the time!" she said to herself, taking out the little Russia leather purse out of her pocket. She went into the closet adjoining her room, and buried it deep in her travelling trunk which was there, relieving herself and her mind of a danger. Then—Phœbe did what was possibly the most sensible thing in the world, in every point of view. She went to bed; undressed herself quietly, rolled up her hair, and lay down with a grateful sense of ease and comfort. "When Clarence comes back

he will be disappointed ; but even for Clarence a little disappointment will be no harm," said the sensible young woman to herself. And what comfort it was to lie down, and feel all the throbs and pulses gradually subsiding, the fright going off, the satisfaction of success coming back, and gradually a slumberous, delicious ease stealing over her. Of all the clever things Phœbe had done in her life, it must be allowed that there was not one so masterly as the fact that she, then and there, went to sleep.

All this had taken up a good deal of time. It was twelve when Mr. Simpson of the bank disturbed the lovers in the garden, and it was one o'clock before Phœbe put a stop to all Tozer's vindictive plans by going to bed. What he said to Mr. Simpson, when he went back to him, is not on record. That excellent man of business was much put out by the long waiting, and intimated plainly enough that he could not allow his time to be thus

wasted. Mr. Simpson began to think that there was something very strange in the whole business. Tozer's house was turned upside down by it, as he could hear by the passionate voices and the sound of crying and storming in the room above; but Cotsdean was secure in his shop, apparently fearing no evil, as he had seen as he passed, peering in with curious eyes. What it meant he could not tell; but it was queer, and did not look as if the business was straightforward.

“When you find the bill, or make up your mind what to do, you can send for me,” he said, and went away, suspicious and half angry, leaving Tozer to his own devices. And the afternoon passed in the most uncomfortable lull imaginable. Though he believed his grand-daughter to have it, he looked again over all his papers, his drawers, his waste basket, every corner he had in which such a small matter might have been hid; but naturally his search was all in vain.

Clarence returned in the afternoon, and was received by poor old Mrs. Tozer, very tremulous and ready to cry, who did not know whether she ought to distrust Phœbe or not, and hesitated and stumbled over her words till the young man thought his father had come in his absence, and that Phœbe had changed her mind. This had the effect of making him extremely eager and anxious, and of subduing the bragging and magnificent mood which the triumphant lover had displayed in the morning. He felt himself "taken down a peg or two," in his own fine language. He went to the Parsonage and tried very hard to see Ursula, to secure her help in case anything had gone wrong, and then to Reginald, whose vexation at the news he felt sure of, and hoped to enjoy a sight of. But he could see no one in the absorbed and anxious house. What was he to do? He wandered about, growing more and more unhappy, wondering if he had been made to fling himself into the face of fate for no

reason, and sure that he could not meet his father without Phœbe's support. He could not even face her relations. It was very different from the day of triumph he had looked for; but, as Phœbe had wisely divined, this disappointment, and all the attending circumstances, did not do him any harm.

It was late in the afternoon when Northcote called. He too had acted on the information given by Betsy, and had gone to Cotsdean, who made him vaguely aware that Tozer had some share in the business in which Mr. May was involved, and who, on being asked whether it could be set right by money, grew radiant and declared that nothing could be easier. But when Northcote saw Tozer, there ensued a puzzling game at cross purposes, for Tozer had no notion that Mr. May had anything to do with the business, and declined to understand.

“I ain't got nothing to do with parsons, and if you'll take my advice, Sir, it 'ud

be a deal better for you to give 'em up too. You're a-aggravating the connection for no good, you are," said Tozer, surly by right of his own troubles and perplexities, and glad to think he could make some one else uncomfortable too.

"I shall do in that respect as I think proper," said Northcote, who was not disposed to submit to dictation.

"Fact is, he's a deal too well off for a minister," Tozer said to his wife when the young man disappeared, "they're too independent that sort; and I don't know what he means by his Mays and his fine folks. What have we got to do with Mr. May?"

"Except that he's been good to the child, Tozer; we can't forget as he's been very good to the child."

"Oh, dash the child!" cried the old man, infuriated, "if you say much more I'll be sorry I ever let you see her face. What has she done with my bill?"

"Bill? if it's only a bill what are you so

put out about?" cried Mrs. Tozer. "You'll have dozens again at Christmas, if that is all you want."

But the laugh was unsuccessful, and the old man went back to his room to nurse his wrath and to wonder what had come to him. Why had his grand-daughter interfered in his business, and what had he to do with Mr. May?

Phœbe got up refreshed and comfortable when it was time for the family tea, and came down to her lover, who had come back and was sitting very dejected by old Mrs. Tozer's side. She was fresh and fair, and in one of her prettiest dresses, having taken pains for him; and notwithstanding Tozer's lowering aspect, and his refusal to speak to her, the meal passed over very cheerfully for the rest of the party, and the two young people once more withdrew to the garden when it was over. The presence of Clarence Copperhead protected Phœbe from all attack. Her grandfather dared not fly out upon

her as before, or summon her to give up what she had taken from him. Whatever happened, this wonderful rise in life, this grand match could not be interfered with. He withdrew bitter and exasperated to his own den, leaving his poor wife crying and wretched in the family sitting-room. Mrs. Tozer knew that her husband was not to be trifled with, and that though the circumstances of Phœbe's betrothal subdued him for the moment, this effect in all probability would not last; and she sat in terror, watching the moments as they passed, and trembling to think what might happen when the young pair came in again, or when Clarence at last went away, leaving Phœbe with no protection but herself. Phœbe, too, while she kept her dull companion happy, kept thinking all the while of the same thing with a great tremor of suppressed agitation in her mind; and she did not know what was the next step to take—a reflection which took away her strength. She had taken the bill from her trunk again

and replaced it in her pocket. It was safest carried on her person she felt; but what she was to do next, even Phœbe, so fruitful in resources, could not say. When Northcote came back in the evening she felt that her game was becoming more and more difficult to play. After a brief consultation with herself, she decided that it was most expedient to go in with him, taking her big body-guard along with her, and confiding in his stupidity not to find out more than was indispensable. She took Northcote to her grandfather's room, whispering to him on the way, to make himself the representative of Cotsdean only, and to say nothing of Mr. May.

“Then you know about it?” said Northcote amazed.

“Oh, hush, hush!” cried Phœbe, “offer to pay it on Cotsdean's part, and say nothing about Mr. May.”

The young man looked at her bewildered; but nodded his head in assent; and then her own young man pulled her

back almost roughly, and demanded to know what she meant by talking to that fellow so. Thus poor Phœbe was between two fires. She went in with a fainting yet courageous heart.

“Pay the money!” said Tozer, who by dint of brooding over it all the day had come to a white heat, and was no longer to be controlled. “Mr. Northcote, Sir, you’re a minister, and you don’t understand business no more nor women do. Money’s money—but there’s more than money here. There’s my name, Sir, as has been made use of in a way!—me go signing of accommodation bills! I’d have cut off my hand sooner. There’s that girl there, she’s got it. She’s been and stolen it from me, Mr. Northcote. Tell her to give it up. You may have some influence, you as is a minister. Tell her to give it up, or, by George, she shall never have a penny from me! I’ll cut her off without even a shilling. I’ll put her out o’ my will—out o’ my house.”

“I say, Phœbe,” said Clarence, “look here, that’s serious, that is; not that I mind a little pot of money like what the poor old fellow’s got; but what’s the good of throwing anything away?”

“Make her give it up,” cried Tozer hoarsely, “or out of this house she goes this very night. I ain’t the sort of man to be made a fool of. I ain’t the sort of man—Who’s this a-coming? some more of your d—d intercessors to spoil justice,” cried the old man, “but I won’t have ’em. I’ll have nothing to say to them. What, who? Mr. Copperhead’s father? I ain’t ashamed to meet Mr. Copperhead’s father; but one thing at a time. Them as comes into my house must wait my time,” cried the buttermilk man seeing vaguely the group come in, whom we left at his door. “I’m master here. Give up that bill, you brazen young hussy, and go out of my sight. How dare you set up your face among so many men? Give it up!” he cried, seizing her by the elbow in renewed fury. The

strangers though he saw them enter, received no salutation from him. There was one small lamp on the table, dimly lighted, which threw a faint glow upon the circle of countenances round, into which came, wondering, the burly big Copperhead, holding fast by the shoulder of Mr. May, whose ghastly face, contorted with wild anxiety, glanced at Tozer over the lamp. But the old man was so much absorbed at first that he scarcely saw who the newcomers were.

“What’s all this about?” said Mr. Copperhead. “Seems we’ve come into the midst of another commotion. So you’re here, Clar! it is you I want, my boy. Look here, Northcote, take hold, will you? there’s a screw loose, and we’ve got to get him home. Take hold, till I have had a word with Clarence. That’s a thing that won’t take long.”

Clarence cast a glance at Phoebe, who even in her own agitation turned and gave him a tremulous smile of encouragement.

The crisis was so great on all sides of her, that Phœbe became heroic. "I am here," she said with all the steadiness of strong emotion, and when he had received this assurance of support he feared his father no more.

"All right, Sir," he said almost with alacrity. He was afraid of nothing with Phœbe standing by.

"Make her give me up my bill," said Tozer, "I'll hear nothing else till this is settled. My bill! It's forgery; that's what it is. Don't speak to me about money! I'll have him punished. I'll have him rot in prison for it. I'll not cheat the law— You people as has influence with that girl make her give it me. I can't touch him without the bill."

Mr. May had been placed in a chair by the two young men who watched over him; but as Tozer spoke he got up, struggling wildly, almost tearing himself out of the coat by which they held him. "Let me go!" he said. "Do you hear

him? Rot in prison! with hard labour; it would kill me! And it used to be hanging! My God—my God! Won't you let me go?"

Tozer stopped short, stopped by this passion which was greater than his own. He looked wonderingly at the livid face, the struggling figure, impressed in spite of himself. "He's gone mad," he said. "Good Lord! But he's got nothing to do with it. Can't you take him away?"

"Grandpapa," said Phoebe in his ear, "here it is, your bill; it was *he* who did it—and it has driven him mad. Look! I give it up to you; and there he is—that is your work. Now do what you please—"

Trembling, the old man took the paper out of her hand. He gazed wondering at the other, who somehow moved in his excitement by a sense that the decisive moment had come, stood still too, his arm half pulled out of his coat, his face wild with dread and horror. For a moment they looked at each other in a common

agony, neither the one nor the other clear enough to understand, but both feeling that some tremendous crisis had come upon them. "He—done it!" said Tozer appalled and almost speechless. "*He done it!*" They all crowded round, a circle of scared faces. Phœbe alone stood calm. She was the only one who knew the whole, except the culprit, who understood nothing with that mad confusion in his eyes. But he was over-awed too, and in his very madness recognised the crisis. He stood still, struggling no longer, with his eyes fixed upon the homely figure of the old buttermilk man, who stood trembling, thunderstruck, with that fatal piece of paper in his hand.

Tozer had been mad for revenge two moments before—almost as wild as the guilty man before him—with a fierce desire to punish and make an example of the man who had wronged him. But this semi-madness was arrested by the sight of the other madman before him, and by the extra-

ordinary shock of this revelation. It took all the strength out of him. He had not looked up to the clergyman as Cotsdean did, but he had looked up to the gentleman his customer, as being upon an elevation very different from his own, altogether above and beyond him; and the sight of this superior being, thus humbled, maddened, gazing at him with wild terror and agony, more eloquent than any supplication, struck poor old Tozer to the very soul. "God help us all!" he cried out with a broken, sobbing voice. He was but a vulgar old fellow, mean it might be, worldly in his way; but the terrible mystery of human wickedness and guilt prostrated his common soul with as sharp an anguish of pity and shame as could have befallen the most heroic. It seized upon him so that he could say or do nothing more, forcing hot and salt tears up into his old eyes, and shaking him all over with a tremor as of palsy. The scared faces appeared to come closer to Phoebe, to whom these moments seemed like years. Had her trust been vain?

Softly, but with an excitement beyond control, she touched him on the arm.

“That’s true,” said Tozer, half crying. “Something’s got to be done. We can’t all stand here for ever, Phœbe; it’s him as has to be thought of. Show it to him, poor gentleman, if he ain’t past knowing; and burn it, and let us hear of it no more.”

Solemnly, in the midst of them all, Phœbe held up the paper before the eyes of the guilty man. If he understood it or not, no one could tell. He did not move, but stared blankly at her and it. Then she held it over the lamp and let it blaze and drop into harmless ashes in the midst of them all. Tozer dropped down into his elbow chair sniffing and sobbing. Mr. May stood quite still, with a look of utter dullness and stupidity coming over the face in which so much terror had been. If he understood what had passed, it was only in feeling, not in intelligence. He grew still and dull in the midst of that strange madness which all the time was only half madness, a mixture of conscious excitement

and anxiety with that which possess the boundaries of consciousness. For the moment he was stilled into stupid idiocy, and looked at them with vacant eyes. As for the others, Northcote was the only one who divined at all what this scene meant. To Reginald it was like a scene in a pantomime—bewildering dumb show, with no sense or meaning in it. It was he who spoke first, with a certain impatience of the occurrence which he did not understand.

“Will you come home, Sir, now?” he said. “Come home, for Heaven’s sake! Northcote will give you an arm. He’s very ill,” Reginald added, looking round him pitifully in his ignorance; “what you are thinking of I can’t tell—but he’s ill and—delirious. It was Mr. Copperhead who brought him here against my will. Excuse me, Miss Beecham—now I must take him home.”

“Yes,” said Phœbe. The tears came into her eyes as she looked at him; he was not thinking of her at the moment,

but she knew he had thought of her, much and tenderly, and she felt that she might never see him again. Phœbe would have liked him to know what she had done, and to know that what she had done was for him chiefly—in order to recompense him a little, poor fellow, for the heart he had given her, which she could not accept, yet could not be ungrateful for. And yet she was glad, though there was a pang in it, that he should never know, and remain unaware of her effort, for his own sake; but the tears came into her eyes as she looked at him, and he caught the gleam of the moisture which made his heart beat. Something moved her beyond what he knew of; and his heart thrilled with tenderness and wonder; but how should he know what it was?

“Give my love to Ursula,” she said. “I shall not come to-night as she has a nurse, and I think he will be better. Make her rest, Mr. May—and if I don’t see her, say good-bye to her for me——”

“Good-bye?”

“Yes, good-bye—things have happened—Tell her I hope she will not forget me,” said Phœbe, the tears dropping down her cheeks. “But oh, please never mind me, look at him! he is quite quiet, he is worn out. Take him home.”

“There is nothing else to be done,” said poor Reginald, whose heart began to ache with a sense of the unknown which surrounded him on every side. He took his father by the arm, who had been standing quite silent, motionless, and apathetic. He had no need for any help, for Mr. May went with him at a touch, as docile as a child. Northcote followed with grave looks and very sad. Tozer had been seated in his favourite chair, much subdued and giving vent now and then to something like a sob. His nerves had been terribly shaken. But as he saw the three gentlemen going away, nature awoke in the old buttermilk. He put out his hand and plucked Northcote by the sleeve. “I’ll not say no to that money, not now, Mr. Northcote, Sir,” he said.

CHAPTER XIV.

PHŒBE'S LAST TRIAL.

“NOW if you please,” said Mr. Copperhead. “I think it’s my turn. I wanted May to hear what I had got to say, but as he’s ill or mad, or something, it is not much good. I can’t imagine what all these incantations meant, and all your play, Miss Phœbe, eyes and all. That sort of thing don’t suit us plain folks. If you don’t mind following your friends, I want to speak to old Tozer here by himself. I don’t like to have women meddling in my affairs.”

“Grandpapa is very tired, and he is upset,” said Phœbe. “I don’t think he

can have any more said to him to-night."

"By George, but he shall though, and you too. Look here," said Mr. Copperhead, "you've taken in my boy Clarence here. He's been a fool, and he always was a fool; but you're not a fool, Miss Phœbe. You know precious well what you're about. And just you listen to me; he shan't marry you, not if he breaks his heart over it. I ain't a man that thinks much of breaking hearts. You and he may talk what nonsense you like, but you shan't marry my boy; no, not if there wasn't another woman in the world."

"He has asked me," said Phœbe; "but I certainly did not ask him. You must give your orders to your son, Mr. Copperhead. You have no right to dictate to me. Grandpapa, I think you and I have had enough for to-night."

With this Phœbe began to close the shutters, which had been left open, and to put away books and things which were

lying about. Tozer made a feeble attempt to stop her energetic proceedings.

“Talk to the gentleman, Phœbe, if Mr. Copperhead ’as anything to say to you—don’t, don’t you go and offend him, my dear!” the old man cried in an anxious whisper; and then he raised himself from the chair, in which he had sunk exhausted by the unusual commotions to which he had been subjected. “I am sure, Sir,” Tozer began, “it ain’t my wish, nor the wish o’ my family, to do anything as is against your wishes—”

“Grandpapa,” said Phœbe, interrupting him ruthlessly, “Mr. Copperhead’s wishes may be a rule to his own family, but they are not to be a rule to yours. For my part I won’t submit to it. Let him take his son away if he pleases—or if he can,” she added, turning round upon Clarence with a smile. “Mr. Clarence Copperhead is as free as I am to go or to stay.”

“By Jove!” cried that young man, who

had been hanging in the background, dark and miserable. He came close up to her, and caught first her sleeve and then her elbow; the contact seemed to give him strength. "Look here, Sir," he said, ingratiatingly, "we don't want to offend you—I don't want to fly in your face; but I can't go on having coaches for ever, and here's the only one in the world that can do the business instead of coaches. Phœbe knows I'm fond of her, but that's neither here nor there. Here is the one that can make something of me. I ain't clever, you know it as well as I do—but she is. I don't mind going into parliament, making speeches and that sort of thing, if I've got her to back me up. But without her I'll never do anything, without her you may put me in a cupboard, as you've often said. Let me have her, and I'll make a figure, and do you credit. I can't say any fairer," said Clarence, taking the rest of her arm into his grasp, and holding her hand. He was stupid—

but he was a man, and Phœbe felt proud of him, for the moment at least.

“You idiot!” cried his father, “and I was an idiot too to put any faith in you; come away from that artful girl. Can’t you see that it’s all a made up plan from beginning to end? What was she sent down here for but to catch you, you oaf, you fool, you! Drop her, or you drop me. That’s all I’ve got to say.”

“Yes, drop me, Clarence,” said Phœbe, with a smile; “for in the meantime you hurt me. See, you have bruised my arm. While you settle this question with your father, I will go to grandmamma. Pardon me, I take more interest in her than in this discussion between him and you.”

“You shan’t go,” cried her lover, “not a step. Look here, Sir. If that’s what it comes to, her before you. What you’ve made of me ain’t much, is it? but I don’t mind what I go in for, as long as she’s to the fore. Her before you.”

“Is that your last word?” said Mr. Copperhead.

“Yes.” His son faced him with a face as set and cloudy as his own. The mouth shut close and sullen, was the same in both; but those brown eyes which Clarence got from his mother, and which were usually mild in their expression, looking out gently from the ruder face to which they did not seem to belong, were now not clear but muddy with resolution, glimmering with dogged obstinacy from under the drooping eyelids. He was not like himself; he was as he had been that day when Mr. May saw him at the Dorsets, determined, more than a match for his father, who had only the obstinacy of his own nature, not that dead resisting force of two people to bring to the battle. Clarence had all the pertinacity that was not in his mother, to reinforce his own. Mr. Copperhead stared at his son with that look of authority, half imperious, half brutal, with which he was in the habit of crushing all

who resisted him ; but Clarence did not quail. He stood dull and immovable, his eyes contracted, his face stolid, and void of all expression but that of resistance. He was not much more than a fool, but just by so much as his father was more reasonable, more clear-sighted than himself, was Clarence stronger than his father. He held Phœbe by the sleeve, that she might not escape him ; but he faced Mr. Copperhead with a dull determination, that all the powers of earth could not shake.

For the moment the father lost his self-control.

“Then I’ll go,” he said, “and when you’ve changed your mind, you can come to me ; but—” here he swore a big oath, “mind what you’re about. There never was a man yet but repented when he set himself against me.”

Clarence made no answer. Talking was not in his way. And Mr. Copperhead showed his wondering apprehension of a power superior to his own, by making

a pause after he had said this, and not going away directly. He stopped and tried once more to influence the rebel with that stare. "Phœbe—Phœbe—for God's sake make him give in, and don't go against Mr. Copperhead!" cried Tozer's tremulous voice, shaken with weakness and anxiety. But Phœbe did not say anything. She felt in the hesitation, the pause, the despairing last effort to conquer, that the time of her triumph had nearly come. When he went away, they all stood still and listened to his footsteps going along the passage and through the garden. When he was outside he paused again, evidently with the idea of returning, but changed his mind and went on. To be left like this, the victors on a field of domestic conflict, is very often not at all a triumphant feeling, and involves a sense of defeat about as bad as the reality experienced by the vanquished. Phœbe, who was imaginative, and had lively feeling, felt a cold shiver go over her as the

steps went away one by one, and began to cry softly, not knowing quite why it was ; but Clarence, who had no imagination, nor any feelings to speak of, was at his ease and perfectly calm.

“What are you crying for?” he said, “the governor can do what he likes. I’d marry you in spite of a hundred like him. He didn’t know what he was about, didn’t the governor, when he tackled *me*.”

“But, Clarence, you must not break with your father, you must not quarrel on my account—”

“That’s as it may be,” he said, “never you mind. When it’s cleverness that’s wanted, it’s you that’s wanted to back me up—but I can stick to my own way without you ; and my way is this,” he said, suddenly lifting her from the ground, holding her waist between his two big hands, and giving her an emphatic kiss. Phoebe was silenced altogether when this had happened. He was a blockhead, but he was a man, and could stand up for his

love, and for his own rights as a man, independent of the world. She felt a genuine admiration for her lout at that moment; but this admiration was accompanied by a very chill sense of all that might be forfeited if Mr. Copperhead stood out. Clarence, poor and disowned by his father, would be a very different person from the Clarence Copperhead who was going into parliament, and had "a fine position" in prospect. She did not form any resolutions as to what she would do in that case, for she was incapable of anything dishonourable; but it made her shiver as with a cold icy current running over her; and as for poor old Tozer he was all but whimpering in his chair.

"Oh, Lord!" he cried. "A great man like Mr. Copperhead affronted in my 'umble 'ouse. It's what I never thought to see. A friend of the connection like that—your father's leading member. Oh, Phœbe, it was an evil day as brought you here to make all this mischief! and if I

had known what was going on!" cried Tozer, almost weeping in his despair.

"You are tired, grandpapa," said Phœbe. "Don't be frightened about us. Mr. Copperhead is very fond of Clarence, and he will give in; or if he doesn't give in, still we shall not be worse off than many other people." But she said this with a secret panic devouring her soul, wondering if it was possible that such a horrible revolution of circumstances and change of everything she had looked for, could be. Even Clarence was silenced though immovable. He went away soon after, and betook himself to his room at the Parsonage, where all his possessions still were, while Phœbe attended upon her grandmother, whose agitation and fear she calmed without saying much. Tozer, quite broken down, retired to bed; and when they were all disposed of, Phœbe went out to the garden, and made a mournful little promenade there, with very serious thoughts. If Clarence was to be cast off by his

father, what could she do with him? It was not in Phœbe to abandon the stupid lover, who had stood up so manfully for her. No, she must accept her fate however the balance turned; but if this dreadful change happened what should she do with him? The question penetrated, and made her shiver to the depths of her soul; but never even in imagination did she forsake him. He was hers now, come good or ill; but the prospect of the ill was appalling to her. She went up and down the garden path slowly in the silence, looking up to the stars, with her heart very full. Phœbe felt that no usual burden had been put upon her. Last night her occupation had been one of the purest charity, and this Providence had seemed to recompense in the morning, by dropping at her very feet the prize she had long meant to win; but now she was down again after being lifted up so high, and a great part of its value was taken out of that prize. Was she mer-

cenary or worldly-minded in her choice? It would be hard to say so, for she never questioned with herself whether or not she should follow Clarence into obscurity and poverty, if things should turn out so. She would never abandon him, however bad his case might be; but her heart sank very low when she thought of her future with him, without the "career" which would have made everything sweet.

Mr. Copperhead, too, had very serious thoughts on this subject, and sat up long drinking brandy-and-water, and knitting his brows, as he turned the subject over and over in his mind, recognising with disgust (in which nevertheless there mingled a certain respect) that Clarence would not yield, that he was as obstinate as himself or more so. He had gone to the inn, where he was alone, without any of his usual comforts. It was perhaps the first time in his prosperous life that he had ever been really crossed. Joe had never attempted to do it, nor any of the

first family. They had married, as they had done everything else, according to his dictation; and now here was his useless son, his exotic plant, his Dresden china, not only asserting a will of his own, but meaning to have it; and showing a resolution, a determination equal to his own. His mother had never shown anything of this. She had yielded, as everyone else had yielded (Mr. Copperhead reflected) to whatever he ordered. Where had the boy got this unsuspected strength? A kind of smile broke unawares over the rich man's face, as he asked himself this question, a smile which he chased away with a frown, but which nevertheless had been there for a moment roused by a subtle suggestion of self-flattery. Where, but from himself, had his gentleman-son (as the millionaire proudly held him to be) got that strength of obstinacy? He chased the thought and the smile away with a frown, and went to bed gloomily nursing his wrath; but yet this suggestion

which he himself had made was more flattering to himself than words can say. As for Clarence, the only other person deeply concerned, after he had asked for Mr. May, and expressed his regret to learn how ill he was, the young man smoked a cigar on the doorsteps, and then went peaceably, without either care or anxiety, to bed, where he slept very soundly till eight o'clock next morning, which was the hour at which he was called, though he did not always get up.

When Mr. Copperhead began the new day, he began it with a very unwise idea, quickly carried out as unwise ideas generally are. Feeling that he could make nothing of his son, he resolved to try what he could make of Phœbe; a young woman, nay, a bit of a girl not more than twenty, and a minister's daughter, brought up in reverence of the leading member—any resistance on her part seemed really incredible. He could not contemplate the idea of giving up all the cherished plans

of his life by a melodramatic renunciation of his son. To give up Clarence whom he had trained to be the very apex and crowning point of his grandeur, was intolerable to him. But Mr. Copperhead had heard before now of young women, who, goaded to it, had been known to give up their lover rather than let their lover suffer on their account, and if this had ever been the case, surely it might be so in the present instance. Had he not the comfort of the Beecham family in his hands? Could not he make the Crescent Chapel too hot to hold them? Could he not awaken the fears of scores of other fathers very unlikely to permit their favourite sons to stray into the hands of pastors' daughters? There was nothing indeed to be said against Mr. Beecham, but still it would be strange if Mr. Copperhead, out and away the richest man in the community, could not make the Crescent too hot to hold him. He went down the Lane from the "George," where

he had slept, quite early next morning, with this purpose full in his head, and as good luck (he thought) would have it found Phœbe, who had been restless all night with anxiety, and had got up early, once more walking up and down the long garden path reflecting over all that had happened, and wondering as to what might happen still. What a piece of luck it was! He was accustomed to have fortune on his side, and it seemed natural to him. He went up to her with scarcely a pause for the usual salutations, and plunged at once into what he had to say.

“Miss Phœbe, I am glad to find you alone. I wanted a word with you,” he said, “about the affair of last night. Why shouldn’t you and I, the only two sensible ones in the business, settle it between ourselves? Old Tozer is an old ass, begging your pardon for saying so, and my son is a fool—”

“I do not agree to either,” said Phœbe

gravely, "but never mind, I will certainly hear what you have to say."

"What I have to say is this. I will never consent to let my son Clarence marry you." Here he was interrupted by a serious little bow of assent from Phœbe, which disconcerted and angered him strangely. "This being the case," he resumed more hotly, "don't you think we'd better come to terms, you and me? You are too sensible a girl, I'll be bound, to marry a man without a penny, which is what he would be. He would be properly made an end of, Miss Phœbe, if he found out after all his bravado last night, that you were the one to cast him off after all."

"He cannot find that out," said Phœbe with a smile, "unfortunately even if I could have done it under brighter circumstances my mouth is closed now. I desert him now, when he is in trouble! Of course you do not know me, so you are excused for thinking so, Mr. Copperhead."

The rich man stared. She was speaking a language which he did not understand. "Look here, Miss Phœbe," he said, "let's understand each other. High horses don't answer with me. As for deserting him when he's in trouble, if you'll give him up—or desert him, as you call it—he need never be in trouble at all. You can stop all that. Just you say no to him, and he'll soon be on his knees to me to think no more of it. You know who I am," Mr. Copperhead continued with a concealed threat. "I have a deal of influence in the connection, though I say it that shouldn't, and I'm very well looked on in chapel business. What would the Crescent do without me? And if there should be an unpleasantness between the minister and the leading member, why, you know, Miss Phœbe, no one better, who it is that would go to the wall."

She made no answer, and he thought she was impressed by his arguments. He went on still more strongly than before.

“Such a clever girl as you knows all that,” said Mr. Copperhead, “and suppose you were to marry Clarence without a penny, what would become of you? What would you make of him? He is too lazy for hard work, and he has not brains enough for anything else. What would you make of him if you had him? That’s what I want to know.”

“And that is just what I can’t tell you,” said Phoebe smiling, “it is a very serious question. I suppose something will turn up.”

“What can turn up? You marry him because he is going into parliament, and could give you a fine position.

“I confess,” said Phoebe with her usual frankness, “that I did think of his career; without that the future is much darker, and rather depressing.”

“Yes, you see that! A poor clod of a fellow that can’t work, that will be hanging upon you every day, keeping you

from working—that you will never be able to make anything of.”

“Mr. Copperhead,” said Phœbe sweetly, “why do you tell all this to me? Your mere good sense will show you that I cannot budge. I have accepted him being rich, and I cannot throw him over when he is poor. I may not like it—I don’t like it—but I am helpless. Whatever change is made, it cannot be made by me.”

He stared at her in blank wonder and dismay. For a moment he could not say anything. “Look here,” he faltered at last, “you thought him a great match, a rise in the world for you and yours; but he ain’t a great match any longer. What’s the use then of keeping up the farce? You and me understand each other. You’ve nothing to do but to let him off; you’re young and pretty, you’ll easily find some one else. Fools are plenty in this world,” he added, unable to refrain from that one fling. “Let him off and all

will be right. What's to prevent you? I'd not lose a moment if I were you."

Phoebe laughed. She had a pretty laugh, soft yet ringing like a child's. "You and I, I fear, are no rule for each other," she said. "Mr. Copperhead, what prevents me is a small thing called honour, that is all."

"Honour! that's for men," he said hastily, "and folly for them according as you mean it; but for women there's no such thing, it's sham and humbug; and look you here, Miss Phoebe," he continued, losing his temper, "you see what your father will say to this when you get him into hot water with his people! There's more men with sons than me; and if the Crescent ain't too hot to hold him within a month—Do you think I'll stand it, a beggarly minister and his belongings coming in the way of a man that could buy you all up, twenty times over, and more!"

The fury into which he had worked

himself took away Mr. Copperhead's breath. Phœbe said nothing. She went on by his side with soft steps, her face a little downcast, the suspicion of a smile about her mouth.

"By George!" he cried, when he had recovered himself, "you think you can laugh at me. You think you can defy *me*, you, a bit of a girl, as poor as Job!"

"I defy no one," said Phœbe. "I cannot prevent you from insulting me, that is all; which is rather hard," she added, with a smile, which cost her an effort, "seeing that I shall have to drag your son through the world somehow, now that you have cast him off. He will not give me up, I know, and honour prevents me from giving him up. So I shall have hard work enough, without any insults from you. It is a pity," said Phœbe, with a sort of sympathetic regret for herself so badly used. "I could have made a man of him. I could have backed him up to get on as

well as most men ; but it will certainly be uphill work now."

She did not look at the furious father as she spoke. She was quite calm, treating it reflectively, regretfully, as a thing past and over. Mr. Copperhead tried to burst forth again in threats and objurgations ; but in spite of himself, and though she never said another word, the big, rich, noisy man was silenced. He went away, threatening to appeal to her father, which Phoebe, with a last effort, begged him smilingly to do. But this was the last of which she was capable. When she had closed the door after him, she rushed upstairs to her room, and cried bitterly. Everything was very dark to her. If he did appeal to her father, the appeal would spread confusion and dismay through the pastor's heart and family ; and what was to become of herself, with Clarence on her hands, who could do nothing that was useful, and could earn neither his own living nor hers? All this was very terrible.

to Phœbe, and for a moment she contemplated the unheard of step of having a headache, and staying upstairs. But she reflected that her poor old grandfather had done *his* duty, at no small sacrifice, according to her bidding, yesterday; and she bathed her eyes heroically, and collected her strength and went down to breakfast as usual. It was her duty which she must do.

As for Mr. Copperhead, he took a long walk, to reflect upon all the circumstances, which were complicated enough to cause him much trouble. He could not give up his cherished scheme, his Member of Parliament, his crown of glory. It was what he had been looking forward to for years. He tried to realize the failure of his hopes, and could not—nay, would not, feeling it more than he could bear. No; without his gentleman son, his University man, his costly, useless production, who was worth so much money to him, yet brought in nothing, he felt that he must shrink in the opinion of all his friends, even of his

own sons, the "first family," who had so envied, sneered at, undervalued Clarence, yet had been forced to be civil to him, and respect their father's imperious will as he chose that it should be respected. What a sorry figure he should cut before all of them if he cast off Clarence, and had to announce himself publicly as foiled in all his plans and hopes! He could not face this prospect; he shrank from it as if it had involved actual bodily pain. The men who would laugh at his failure were men of his own class, to whom he had bragged at his ease, crowing and exulting over them, and he felt that he could not face them if all his grand anticipations collapsed. There was nothing for it but to give in. And on the other hand this girl Phœbe was a very clever girl, able not only to save the expense of coaches, but to cram the boy, and keep him up better than any coach could do. She could make his speeches for him, like enough, Mr. Copperhead thought, and a great many reasons

might be given to the world why she had been chosen instead of a richer wife for the golden boy. Golden girls, as a general rule, were not of so much use. "Fortune ain't worth thinking of in comparison with brains. It was brains I wanted, and I've bought 'em dear; but I hope I can afford it," he almost heard himself saying to an admiring, envious assembly; for Mr. Copperhead so far deserved his success that he could accept a defeat when it was necessary, and make the best of it. When he had nearly ended his walk, and had reached in his thoughts to this point, he met his son, who was walking up from the Parsonage to No. 6 in the Lane. Clarence looked cheerful enough as he walked along, whistling under his breath, towards his love; but when he saw his father, a change came over his face. Once more his eyelids drooped over his eyes, and those muddy brown orbs got fixed in dull obstinacy; once more his upper lip shut down sullen and fast upon the lower. The

entire expression of his face changed. Mr. Copperhead saw this afar off, from the moment his son perceived him, and the sight gave to all his thinking that force which reality gives to imagination; the risk he was running became doubly clear.

“Good morning, Clarence,” he said.

“Good morning, Sir,” responded the other, with lowering brows and close-shut mouth.

“I suppose you were coming to the George to me? Come along, I’ve had no breakfast; and let’s hope, my boy, that you’re in a better mind than last night.”

“Look here, Sir,” said Clarence; “you might as well ask one of those houses to walk with you to the George, and show a better mind. I’m of one mind, and one only. I’ll marry Phœbe Beecham, whether you like it or not, and no other woman in this world.”

“Is that your last word?” said the father, curiously repeating, without being aware of it, his question of the previous night.

“That’s my last word,” said the son, contemplating his father sullenly from under the heavy lids of his obstinate eyes.

“Very well,” said Mr. Copperhead ; “then come along to breakfast, for I’m hungry, and we can talk it over there.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST.

THIS is how Phœbe's difficulties ended, contrary to her every expectation, Mr. Copperhead made a great brag of her powers wherever he went. "Money is money," he said, "but brains is brains, all the same—we can't get on without 'em—and when you want to make a figure in the world, Sir, buy a few brains if they fall in your way—that's my style. I've done with stupid ones up till now; but when I see there's a want of a clever one, I ain't such a fool as to shut my eyes to it. They cost dear, but I'm thankful to say I can afford that, ay, and a good

deal more." Thus everything was satisfactorily arranged. Tozer and his wife cried together for joy on the wedding-day, but they did not expect to be asked to that ceremony, being well aware that Phœbe having now completely entered into the regions of the great, could not be expected to have very much to say to them. "Though I know, the darling, as she'd just be the same if she was here, and wouldn't let nobody look down upon you and me" said the old woman.

"She's a wonderful girl, she is," said old Tozer. "Wind us all round her little finger, that's what she could do—leastways, except when there was principle in it, and there I stood firm. But I've done things for Phœbe as I wouldn't have done for no other breathing, and she knew it. I wouldn't give in to her tho' about church folks being just as good as them as is more enlightened. That's agin' reason. But I've done things for 'em along of her!— Ah! She's a wonderful girl is Phœbe—

Phœbe, Junior, as I always call her. There ain't her match between here and London, and that's what I'll always say."

But we will not try to describe the glory and joy that filled Mr. Beecham's house in the Terrace, when Mrs. Clarence Copperhead went back there with all their friends to the wedding-breakfast, which was in the very best style, and regardless of expense. Even at that moment it gave Phœbe a little pang to see her mother in the bright colours which she loved, but which made her so much pinker and fatter than was needful. Little Mrs. Copperhead, in dim neutral tints, looked like a little shadow beside the pastor's buxom wife, and was frightened and ill at ease and sad to the heart to lose her boy, who had been all she possessed in the world. Sophy Dorset, specially asked for the purpose with Ursula May, who was a bridesmaid, looked on with much admiration at the curious people, so rich, so fine, and so overwhelming, among whom her father

had found it so remarkable to meet not one person whom he knew. "Now, Ursula," she said, "if you had played your cards properly that beautiful bridegroom and that nice little house in Mayfair, and the privilege, perhaps, of writing M.P. after your name some time or other, might all have been yours instead of Miss Beecham's. Why did you let her carry off the prize?"

"Cousin Sophy!" cried Ursula indignantly. "As if I ever thought of him as a prize! But I know you are only laughing at me. The strange thing is that she likes him, though I am sure she knew very well that Reginald—Oh, when one thinks how many people there are in this world who do not get what they wish most—and how many people there are—" Ursula paused, involved in her own anti-thesis, and Sophy ended it for her with a sigh.

"Who do—and the one is no happier than the other, most times, little Ursula; but you don't understand that, and come

you are going to be one of the blessed ones, so you need not take to making reflections; that is my privilege, my dear."

"Oh, Cousin Sophy, why were not you one of the blessed ones too?" cried Ursula, clasping her arms suddenly round her kind friend. This, be it understood, was after the breakfast was over, and when, in the deep gloom which generally concludes a wedding day, everybody had gone home. The two were in a magnificent large bed-chamber in Portland Place, in the vast silent mansion of the Copperheads, where at present there was nothing more cheerful than the bridegroom's soft-eyed mother, taking herself dreadfully to task for not being happy, and trying not to cry, though there was to be a great dinner and entertainment that night.

"Don't you know?" said Sophy putting her aside with a certain proud coldness, and a momentary laugh, "he I loved proved false; that is to say in simple language, he turned out so poor a creature

that it is very good of me not to despise humanity for his sweet sake. Never mind. If all had gone well, and he had been a real man instead of the sham image of one, I don't suppose I should have ever been among the blessed ones. Anne is, who never thought of such mysteries at all; and so you will be, my little Ursula—very happy. I am sure of it—though how you can manage to be happy, my dear, marrying a man who is not a good Churchman, it is not for me to say.”

“Cousin Sophy, have I been brought up in a way to make me so fond of Churchmen?” said Ursula solemnly. She could not have told how much or how little she knew about her father's behaviour, and the “shock to his mental system;” but vaguely and by instinct there was a great deal that she did know.

“You have been behind the scenes too much perhaps,” said Sophy Dorset shrugging her shoulders, “but don't think any worse of the world than you ought, if you

can't think very much better. No class is good or bad, Ursula. Men are but men all over the world."

This made Ursula cry, though it is difficult to say why. She thought it cynical, and probably so will the reader. Perhaps Sophy Dorset abandoned the cause of mankind too easily, as most people of her temperament and age are disposed to do. Anyhow the evening entertainment took place and was very fine, and every honour was done to Clarence Copperhead's marriage, especially by his mother, who appeared in the most lovely satin that eyes ever saw, and diamonds—and almost succeeded all the evening in keeping herself from crying, but not entirely. She did break down when the health of bridegroom and bride was drunk as it ought to be; but recovered herself hastily when the mother on the other side gave her a kiss of sympathy. Though it was an honest kiss, it filled poor little Mrs. Copperhead's mind with the most unchristian

feelings, and gave her strength to keep up for the rest of the evening, and do her duty to the last. Nevertheless Phœbe was the best of daughters-in-law, and ended by making her husband's mother dependent on her for most of the comforts of her life. And Clarence got into Parliament, and the reader, perhaps (if Parliament is sitting) may have had the luck to read a speech in the morning paper of Phœbe's composition, and if he ever got the secret of her style would know it again, and might trace the course of a public character for years to come by that means. But this secret is one which no bribe nor worldly inducement will ever tempt our lips to betray.

Northcote was released from the charge of Salem Chapel directly after these events, by the return of the minister safe and sound from his holiday, to the great delight of the congregation, though they had not been very fond of their old pastor before. Now they could not sufficiently

exult over the happy re-instalment. "The other one never crossed our doors from the day he came till now as he's going away," said one indignant member; "nor took no more notice of us chapel folks nor if we were dirt beneath his feet." "That time as the Meeting was held, when he spoke up again the sinecure, was the only time as my mind was satisfied," cried another. "And a deal came of it after, making friends with the very man as he had abused." "All his friends was Church folks," said a third; "he was a wolf in sheep's clothing, that's what I calls him; and a poor moralist as a preacher, with never a rousing word in them things as he called his sermons. We're well rid of the likes of him, though he may be clever. I don't give much for that kind of cleverness; and what's the good of you, minister or not minister, if you can't keep consistent and stick to your own side." The chorus was so strong that the echo of it moved Tozer, who was a kind of arch-deacon and leading

member too, in his way, where he sat twiddling his thumbs in his little room. "I'm one as is qualified to give what you may call a casting vote," said Tozer, "being the oldest deacon in Salem, and one as has seen generations coming and going. And as for Church and Chapel, I've served 'em both, and seen the colour of their money, and there's them as has their obligations to me, though we needn't name no names. But this I will say, as I'm cured of clever men and them as is thought superior. They ain't to be calculated upon. If any more o' them young intellectuals turns up at Carlingford, I'll tell him right out, 'You ain't the man for my money.' I'll say to him as bold as brass, 'I've been young, and now I'm old, and it's my conviction as clever young men ain't the sort for Salem. We want them as is steady going, and them as is consistent; good strong opinions, and none o' your charity, that's what we wants here.'" Now Tozer

had loved clever young men in his day more well than wisely, as everybody knew, and this deliverance carried all the more weight in consequence, and was echoed loudly by one general hum of content and applause.

Northcote took this very quietly, but he retired, after he had married Ursula, from the office of pastor, for which he was not fitted, and from the Liberation Society, and various other societies, coming to see that Disestablishment was not a panacea for national evils any more than other things. He was in the habit of quoting his brother-in-law, Reginald May, as the best man he knew ; but this did not make him a Churchman ; for naturally he could not say the same of other members of the same class and family. He was shaken out of his strong opinions ; but it is doubtful how far this was good for him, for he was a man of warlike disposition, and not to have something which he could go to the stake for—something which he

could think the devil's own stronghold to assail, was a drawback to him, and cramped his mental development; but he was happy in his home with his pretty Ursula, which is probably all the reader will care to know. He paid Tozer's hundred and fifty pounds. And he made no inquiries, and tried not to ask himself what all that strange scene had meant—and whatever it did mean it was over for ever, and nobody asked any further questions or made any revelations on the subject. As for Mr. May, his mysterious illness went on for some time, the doctors never venturing to put any name to it. It was "mental shock," and perhaps aberration, though he was sanè enough to calm down after that incomprehensible scene. Mr. Simpson of the Bank had a good guess at the secret of the enigma, but even Tozer got hazy about it after a while, and though he knew that he had done Mr. May a wonderful service, could scarcely have told what it was—and neither when it was all over, could the

culprit have told. He got better and worse for about a year, and then he died, his strength failing him without any distinct reason, no one could tell how. Reginald got the living and stepped into his father's place, making a home for the children, which sharp Janey rules over, not so softly or steadily as Ursula, with a love of theories and experiments not quite consistent with the higher graces of housekeeping, yet with an honest meaning through it all. As the times are so unsettled, and no one can tell what may become within a year of any old foundation, the trustees have requested Reginald to retain his chaplaincy at the old College; so that he is in reality a pluralist, and almost rich, though they say the hardest-worked man in Carlingford. He has his vagaries too, which no man can live without, but he is the kindest guardian to his brothers and sisters, and bears with Janey's freaks with exemplary gentleness. And he has a curate, whom in the course of nature Janey will pro-

bably marry—though this has not yet been revealed to either party, who have reached only the first stage of hating each other up to this time. It is not thought in the family that Reginald will ever marry. She was never worthy of him, the sisters say ; but he thinks differently, as yet at least. However, he is young, and things may mend.

THE END.

MESSRS. HURST AND BLACKETT'S

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