YOUNG MUSGRAVE.

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BY

MRS. OLIPHANT.

Author of "The Curate in Charge," &c.

"No man can redeem his brother."—Ps. xlix. 7.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAPTER X.

CHAPTER XI.

CHAPTER XII.

CHAPTER XIII.

YOUNG MUSGRAVE.

CHAPTER I.

DUCKS AND DRAKES.

THE Squire made use of that discretion which is the better part of valour. When Randolph for the second time insisted upon coming to an understanding on family affairs, which meant deciding what was to be done on the Squire's death, Mr. Musgrave, not knowing how else to foil his son, got up and came away. "You can settle these matters with Mary," he said, quietly enough. It would not have been dignified to treat the suggestion in any other way. But he went out with a slight acceleration of his pulses, caused half by anger and half by the natural human thrill of feeling with which a man has his own death brought home

to him. The Squire knew that there was nothing unnatural in this anticipation of his own end. He was aware that it required to be done, and the emergency prepared for; but yet it was not agreeable to him. He thought they might have awaited the event, although in another point of view it would have been imprudent to await the event. He felt that there was something undesirable, unlovely, in the idea of your children consulting over you for their own comfort "afterwards." But then his children were no longer children whose doings touched his affections much—they were middle-aged people, as old as he was—and in fact it *was* important that they should come to an arrangement and settle everything. Only he could not—and this being so, would not—do it; and he said to himself that the cause of his refusal was no reluctance on his own part to consider the inevitable certainty of his own death, but only the intolerableness of the inquiry in other respects. He walked out in a little strain and excitement of feeling, though outwardly his calm was intense. He steadied himself, mind and body, by an effort, putting a smile upon his lip, and walking with a deliberate slow movement. He would have scorned himself had he showed any excitement; but

strolled out with a leisurely slow step and a smile. They would talk the matter out, the two whom he had left; even though Mary's heart would be more with him than with her brother, still she would be bound to follow Randolph's lead. They would talk of his health, of how he was looking feeble, his age beginning to tell upon him, and how it would be very expedient to know what the conditions of his will were, and whether he had made any provision for the peculiar circumstances, or arrangement for the holding of the estate. "I ought to be the first person considered," he thought he heard Randolph saying. Randolph had always thought himself the first person to be considered. At this penetration of his own the Squire smiled again, and walked away very steadily, very slowly, humming a bar of an old-fashioned air.

He went thus through the broken woodland towards the east, and strolled into the Chase like a man taking a walk for pleasure. The birds sang overhead, little rabbits popped out from the great tree-trunks, and a squirrel ran up one of them and across a long branch, where it sat peering at him. All was familiar, certain, well known; he had seen the same sights and heard the same sounds for the last seventy

years; and the sunshine shone with the same calm assurance of shining as at other times, and all this rustling, breathing life went on as it had always gone on. There was scarcely a leaf, scarcely a moss-covered stone, that did not hide or shelter something living. The air was full of life; sounds of all kinds, twitter and hum and rustle, his own step among other movements, his own shadow moving across the sunshine. And he felt well enough, not running over with health and vigour as he had sometimes felt long ago, not disposed to vault over walls and gates in that unlicensed exuberance which belongs to youth only, but well enough—quite well, in short; steady afoot, his breathing easy, his head clear, everything about him comfortable. Notwithstanding which, his children were discussing, as in reference to a quite near and probable event, what was to be done when he should die! The Squire smiled at the thought, but it was a smile which got fixed and painful on his lip, and was not spontaneous or agreeable. The amusement to be got from such an idea is not of a genial kind. He was over seventy, and he knew, who better? that threescore and ten has been set down as the limit of mortal life. No doubt he must die—every man must die. It was a thing

before him not to be eluded; the darkness, indeed, was very near, according to all ordinary law; but the Squire did not feel it, was not in his soul convinced of it. He believed it, of course; all other men of his age die, and in their case the precautions of the family are prudent and natural; in his own case it is true he did not feel the necessity; but yet no doubt it must be so. He kept smiling to himself; so living as he was, and everything round, it was an odd sort of discord to think of dying. He felt a kind of blank before him, a sense of being shut in. So one feels when one walks along a bit of road surrounded with walls, a *cul de sac* from which there is no outlet. A sense of imprisonment is in it, of discouragement, too little air to breathe, too little space to move in—certainly a disagreeable, stifling, choking sensation. Involuntarily a sigh came from his breast; and yet he smiled persistently, feeling in himself a kind of defiance to all the world, a determination to be amused at it all, notwithstanding the sentence they were passing against him.

While the Squire continued his walk, amid the twitter of the birds and the warble and the crackle and rustle and hum in the woods, and all the sounds of living, now and then another

sound struck in—a sound not necessarily near, for in that still summer air sounds travel easily —an echo of voices, now one soft cry or laugh, now a momentary babble. It struck the old man as if an independent soul had been put into the scene. He knew very well what it meant—very well—no one better. By very dint of his opposition to them he recognised the sound of the children wherever they were. They were there now, the little things whose presence had moved Randolph to this assault upon his father. They were altogether antagonistic to Randolph, or rather he to them; this gave them a curious perverse interest in their grandfather's eyes. They offered him an outlet from his *cul de sac;* the pressure seemed suddenly removed which had bowed him down; in a moment he felt relieved, delivered from that sense of confinement. A new idea was like the opening of a door to the old man; he was no longer compelled to contemplate the certainty before him, but was let softly down into the pleasant region of uncertainty—the world of happy chances. The very character of the smile upon his face changed. It became more natural, more easy, although he did not know the children, nor had any intention of noticing them. But they

were there, and Randolph might scheme as he liked; here was one who must bring his schemes to confusion. A vague lightening came into the Squire's thoughts. He was reprieved, if not from the inevitable conclusion, at least from the necessity of contemplating it; and he continued his walk with a lighter heart. By and by, after a somewhat long round, and making sundry observations to himself about the state of the timber which would bear cutting, and about the birds which, without any keeper to care for them, were multiplying at their own will, and might give some sport in September, Mr. Musgrave found himself by the lake again with that fascination towards the water which is so universal. The lake gleamed through the branches, prolonging the blue of the sky, and calling him with soft plashing upon the beach, the oldest of his friends, accompaniment of so many thoughts, and of all the vicissitudes of his life. He went towards it now in the commotion of feeling which was subsiding into calm, a calm which had something of fatigue in it; for reluctant as he was to enter into the question of age and the nearly approaching conclusion, the fact of age made him easily tired with everything, and with nothing more than

excitement. He was fatigued with the strain he had been put to, and had fallen into a languid state which was not unpleasant; the condition in which we are specially disposed to be easily amused if any passive amusement comes in our way.

So it happened that as he walked along the margin of the lake, with the water softly foaming over the pebbles at his feet, Mr. Musgrave's ear was caught by a series of sharp little repetitions of sound, like a succession of small reports—one, two, three. He listened in the mild, easily-roused, and not very active curiosity of such a moment, and recognised with a smile the sound of pebbles skipping across the water; presently he saw the little missiles gleaming along from ripple to ripple, flung by a skilful but not very strong hand. The Squire did not even ask himself who it was, but went on quietly, doubting nothing. Suddenly turning round a corner upon the edge of a small bay, he saw a little figure between him and the shining water, making ducks and drakes with varying success.

The Squire's step was inaudible on the turf, and he paused in sympathy with the play. He himself had made ducks and drakes in the Penninghame water as long as he could

recollect. He had taught his little boys to do it; he could not tell how it was that this suddenly came to his mind just now—though how it should do so with Randolph, a middle-aged, calculating parson, talking about family arrangements—Pah! but even this recollection did not affect him now as it did before. Never mind Randolph. This little fellow chose the stones with judgment, and really, for such a small creature, launched them well. The Squire felt half disposed to step forward and try his skill too. When one shot failed he was half-sorry, half-inclined to chuckle as over an antagonist; and when there came a great success, a succession of six or seven reports one after another as the flat pebble skimmed over fold after fold of the water, he could not help saying, "Bravo!" in generous applause; generous, for somehow or other he felt as if he were playing on the other side. This sensation aroused him; he had not been so self-forgetting for many a day. "Bravo!" he cried, with something like glee in his voice.

The little boy turned round hastily. What a strange meeting! Oddly enough it had never occurred to the Squire to think who it was. Strangers were rife enough in these regions, and people would now and then come

to Penninghame with their families—who would stray into the Chase, taking it for public property. But for the ducks and drakes which interested him, he would probably have collared the little fellow, and demanded to know what right he had to be here. He was therefore quite unprepared for the encounter, and looked with the strangest emotions of wonder and half-terror into the face which was so familiar to him, but so strange, the face of his grandson and heir. When once he had seen the child no further doubt was possible. He stared at him as if he had been a little ghost. He had not presence of mind to turn on his heel and go away at once, which would have been the only way of keeping up his former tactics; he was speechless and overpowered; and there was nobody by to spy upon him, no grown-up spectators—not even the other child to observe what he did, or listen to what he said. In this case the Squire did not feel the need to be vigilant, which in other circumstances would have given him self-command. Thus the shock and surprise, and the perfect freedom of his position, unwatched and unseen, alike broke down all his defences. After the first start he stood still and gazed at the child, who still, more

frankly and with much less emotion, gazed at him.

"Who are you, sir?" the grandfather said, with a tone that was meant to be very peremptory. The jar in it was incomprehensible to Nello: but yet it gave him greater courage.

"I am Ne—that is to say," the little fellow answered, with a sudden flush and change of countenance, "my name, it is John."

"John what? Speak up, sir. Do you know you are a little trespasser, and have no business to be here?"

"Oh yes, I have a business to be here," said Nello. "I don't know what it is to be a trespasser. I live at the Castle, me. I can come when I please, and nobody has any business to send me away."

"Do you know who I am?" asked the Squire, bending his brows. Nello looked at him curiously, half amused, though he was half frightened. He had never been so near, or looked his grandfather in the face before.

"I *know;* but I may not tell," said Nello. He shook his head, and though he was not very quick-witted, some latent sense of fun brought a mischievous look to his face. "We know very well, but we are never to tell," he added, shaking his head once more, looking up with

watchful eyes, as children have a way of doing, to take his cue from the expression of the elder face; and there was something very strange in that gleam of fun in Nello's eyes. "We know, but we are never, never to tell."

"Who told you so?"

"It was—Martuccia," said the boy, with precocious discretion. His look grew more and more inquisitive and investigating. Now that he had the opportunity he determined to examine the old man well, and to make out the kind of person he was.

Mr. Musgrave did not answer. He on his side was investigating too, with less keenness and more feeling than the child showed. He would have been unmoved by the beauty of Lilias, though it was much greater than that of Nello. The little girl would have irritated him; but with the boy he felt himself safe, he could not tell how; he was more a child, less a stranger. Mr. Musgrave himself could not have explained it, but so it was. A desire to get nearer to his descendant came into the old man's mind; old recollections crept upon him, and stole away all his strength. "You know who I am; do you know who you are, little fellow?" he asked, with a strange break in his voice.

"I told you; you are—the old gentleman at home," said Nello. "I know all about it. And me? I am John. There is no wonder about that. It is just—me. We were not always here. We are two children who have come a long way. But now I know English quite well, and I have lessons every day."

"Who gives you lessons, my little boy?" The Squire drew a step nearer. He had himself had a little brother sixty years ago, who was like Nello. So it seemed to him now. He would not think he had likewise had a son thirty years ago, whom Nello was like. He crept a little nearer the child, shuffling his foot along the turf, concealing the approach from himself. Had he been asked why he changed his position, he would have said it was a little damp, boggy, not quite sure footing just there.

"Mr. Pen gives us lessons," said Nello. "I have a book all to myself. It is Latin, it is more easy than English. But it takes a great deal of time; it does not leave so much for play."

"How long have you been at your lessons, my little man?"

The Squire's eyes began to soften, a smile

came into them. His heart was melting. He gave a furtive glance round, and there was nobody near to make him afraid, not even the little girl.

"Oh, a long, long time," said Nello. "One whole hour, it was as much as that, or perhaps six hours. I did not think anything could be so long."

"One whole hour!" the Squire said in a voice of awe; and his eyes melted altogether into smiling, and his voice into a mellow softness which it had not known for years. Ah! this was the kind of son for an old man to have, not such as Randolph. Randolph was a hard, disagreeable equal, superior in so much as he had, or thought he had, many more years before him; but the child was delightful. He did the Squire good. "Or perhaps six hours! And when did this long spell of study happen? Is it long ago?"

"There was no spell," said Nello. "And it was to-day. I readed in my book, and so did Lily; but as she is a girl it was different from mine. Girls are not clever, Martuccia says. She can't make the stones skim. That was a good one when you said 'Bravo!' Where did you find out to say Bravo? They don't talk like that here."

"It was a very good one," said the Squire; "suppose we were to try again."

"Oh! can *you* do it?" said Nello, with round eyes of wonder. "Can you do it as well as me?"

"When I was a child," said the Squire, quite overcome, "I had a little brother just like you. We used to come out here, to this very place, and play ducks and drakes. He would make them go half across the water. You should have seen them skimming. As far out as that boat. Do you see that boat——"

"When he was no bigger than me? And what did you do? were *you* little too? did you play against him? did he beat you? I wish I had a brother," said Nello. "But you can't have quite forgotten, though you are an old gentleman. Try now! There are capital stones here. I wish I could send one out as far as that boat. Come, come! Won't you come and try?"

The Squire gave another searching look round. He had a sort of shame-faced smile on his face. He was a little shy of himself in this new development. But there was no one near, not so much as a squirrel or a rabbit, which could watch and tell. The birds were

singing high up in the tree-tops, quite absorbed in their own business: nothing was taking any notice. And the child had come close to him, quite confiding and fearless, with eager little eyes, waiting for his decision. He was the very image of that little brother so long lost. The Squire seemed to lose himself for a moment in a vague haze of personal uncertainty whether all this harsh, hard life had not been a delusion, and whether he himself still was not a child.

"Come and try," cried Nello, more and more emboldened, and catching at his coat. When the old man felt the touch, it was all he could do to suppress a cry. It was strange to him beyond measure, a touch not like any other—his own flesh and blood.

"You must begin then," he said, a strange falter in his voice, half-laughing, half-crying. That is one sign of age that it is so much nearer to the springs of emotion than anything else, except youth. Indeed, are not these two the fitting partners, not that middle state, that insolent strength which stands between? The Squire permitted himself to be dragged to the margin of his own water, which lay all smiling in soft ripples before him as it had done when he was a child. Nello was as grave as a judge in the

importance of the occasion, breathless with excitement and interest. He sought out his little store of stones with all the solemnity of a connoisseur, his little brows puckered, his red lips drawn in; but the Squire was shy and tremulous, half-laughing, half-crying, ashamed of his own weakness, and more near being what you might call happy (a word so long out of use for him!) than he had been, he could not remember when.

Nello was vexed with his first throw. "When one wants to do very good, one never can," he said, discomfited as his shot failed. "Now you try, now you try; it is your turn." How the Squire laughed, tremulous, the broken red in his old cheeks flushing with pleasure and shame! He failed too, which encouraged Nello, who for his part made a splendid shot the second time. "Two, three, four, *five*, SIX, SEVEN!" cried the child in delight. "Don't be afraid, you will do better next time. Me too, I could not make a shot at all at first. Now come, now come, it is your turn again."

What a thing it is to have a real long summer afternoon! It was afternoon when the Squire's calm was broken by his son Randolph; and it was afternoon still, dropping into evening, but with a sun still bright

and not yet low in the sky when Mr. Musgrave warmed to his work, and, encouraged by Nello, made such ducks and drakes as astonished himself. He got quite excited as they skimmed and danced across the water. "Two, three, four, five, *six*, *seven*, EIGHT!" Nello cried, with a shriek of delight. How clever the old gentleman was—how much nicer than *girls*. He had not enjoyed his play so much for—never before, Nello thought. "Come back to-morrow—will you come back to-morrow?" he said at every interval. He had got a playmate now after his own heart—better than Mr. Pen's Johnnie, who was small and timid—better than any one he had ever seen here.

The two players did not in the growing excitement of their game think any more of the chance of spectators; and did not see a second little figure which came running across the grass through the maze of the trees, and stopped wondering in the middle of the brushwood, holding back the branches with her hands to gaze at the strange scene. Lilias was never quite clear of the idea that this wood was fairy-land: so she was not surprised at anything she saw. Yet at this, for the first moment, she was tempted to be surprised. The old gentleman! playing at ducks and

drakes with Nello! He who pretended never to see them, who looked over their heads whenever they appeared, for whom they always had to run out of the way, who never took any notice! Lilias stood for two or three whole minutes, holding the branches open, peeping through with a rapt gaze of wonder; yet not surprised. She applied her little faculties at once, on the instant, to solve the mystery; and what so natural as that the old gentleman had been "only pretending" all the time? Half the pleasure which Lilias herself had in her life came from "pretending." Pretending to be Queen Elizabeth, pretending to be a fairy and change Nello into a lion or a mouse, both of which things Nello "pretended" to be with equal success; pretending to be Mr. Pen preaching a sermon, pretending to be Mary, pretending even now and then to be "the old gentleman" himself, sitting up in a chair with a big book, just like him. She stood and peeped through the branches, and made up her mind to this in a way that took away all her surprise. No doubt he was "only pretending" when he would not let it be seen that he saw them. Motives are not necessary to investigators of twelve; there was nothing strange in it; for was not pretending the chief

occupation, the chief recreation of life? She stood and made this out to her own satisfaction, and then with self-denial and with a sigh went back to Martuccia. It was very tempting to see the pebbles skimming across the water, and so easy it seemed! "Me too, me too," Lilias could scarcely help calling out. But then it came into her head that perhaps it was herself whom the old gentleman disliked. Perhaps he would not go on playing if she claimed a share, perhaps he would begin "pretending" not to see her. So Lilias sighed, and with self-denial gave up this new pleasure. It very nice for Nello to have some one to play with—some one *new*. He was always the lucky one; but then he was the youngest, such a little fellow. She went back and told Martuccia he was playing, he was coming soon, he was not in any mischief—which was what the careful elder sister and mild indulgent nurse most feared.

When Lilias let the branches go, however, with self-denial which was impulsive though so true, the sweep with which they came together again made more sound than could have been made by rabbit or squirrel, and startled the Squire, who was quite hot and excited in his new sport. He came to himself

with a start, and with the idea of having been seen, felt a pang of shame and half-anger. He looked round him and could see nobody; but the branches still vibrated as if some one had been there; and his very forehead, weather-beaten as it was, flushed red with the idea of having been seen, perhaps by Randolph himself. This gave him a kind of offence and resentment and self-assertion which mended matters. Why should he care for Randolph? What had Randolph to do with it? Was he to put himself under tutelage, and conform to the tastes of a fellow like that, a parson, an interloper? But all the same this possibility stopped the Squire. "There, my little man," he said with some confusion, dropping his stone, "there! I think it is time to stop now."

"Oh!—was it some one come for you?" said Nello, following the direction of the old gentleman's eyes. "Stay a little longer, just a little longer. Can't you do just what you please—not like me——"

"Can you not do what you please, my little boy?" The Squire was a little tremulous with the unusual exertion. Perhaps it was time to stop. He stooped down to lave his hand in the water where it came shallow

among the rocks, and that act took away his breath still more, and made him glad to pause a moment before he went away.

"It is a shame," said Nello, "there is Lily, and there is Martuccia, and there is Mary,—they think I am too little to take care of myself; but I am not too little—I can do a great many things that they can't do. But come to-morrow, won't you *try* to come to-morrow?" said the child, coming close up to his grandfather, and taking hold of the skirt of his coat. "Oh please, please *try* to come! I never have any one to play with, and it has been such fun. Say you will come! Don't you think you could come if you were to *try?*"

The Squire burst out into a broken laugh. It would have been more easy to cry, but that does not do for a man. He put his soft old tremulous hand upon the boy's head. "Little Johnny," he said, "little Johnny!—that was my little brother's name, long, long ago."

"Did he play with you? I wish I had a little brother. I have nothing but girls," said Nello. "But say you will come to-morrow—do say you will try!"

The Squire gave another look round him. Nobody was there, not a mouse or a bird. He

took the child's head between his trembling hands, and stooped down, and gave him a hasty kiss upon his soft round forehead—"God bless you, little man!" he said, and then turned round defiant, and faced the world—the world of tremulous branches and fluttering leaves, for there was nothing else to spy upon the involuntary blessing and caress. Then he plunged through the very passage in the brushwood where the branches had shaken so strangely—feeling that if it was Randolph he could defy him. What right had Randolph to control his actions? If he chose to acknowledge this child who belonged to him, who was the image of the little Johnny of sixty years ago, what was that to any one? What had Randolph,—*Randolph*, of all men in the world,—to do with it? He would tell him so to his face if he were there.

CHAPTER II.

THE BAMPFYLDES.

THE same day on which these incidents occurred the Stanton family were in full conclave at Elfdale. It was the birthday of Laura, and there were various merrymakings on hand, an afternoon party, designed to include all her "young friends," besides a more select company in the evening. As Laura was the one whom the family intended to be Lady Stanton, her affairs, with the willing consent, and indeed by the active energy of her sister, were generally pushed into the foreground. And Geoff and his mother were the chief of the guests specially invited, the only visitors who were staying in the house.

To say that the family intended Laura to be Lady Stanton is perhaps too wild a statement, though this settlement of conflicting claims had been tacitly decided upon when they were children. It was chiefly Lydia who

actively intended it now, moved and backed up by some of the absent brothers, who thought it "hard luck" that the young unnecessary Geoff should have interfered between their father and the title, and vowed by Jove that the only fit thing to do in the circumstances was to marry him to one of the girls. Lydia, however, was the most active mind in the establishment at Elfdale, and carried things her own way, so that though Sir Henry disliked fuss, and disliked Geoff's mother, who had done him so much wrong, yet the party in the evening had been specially selected to suit her, and Maria, Lady Stanton, was established in the house.

"It can't last long, papa," Lydia said; "but we can't have Geoff without her."

"What do you want with Geoff?" growled Sir Henry.

"Papa! in the first place he is our cousin; and Laura likes him; and you know we girls must marry somebody. You can't get commissions and nominations for us, more's the pity; so we must marry. And Laura may as well have Stanton as any one else, don't you think? and of course in that case she ought to be on good terms with her mother-in-law; and people expect us——"

"Oh, that will do," said Sir Henry, "ask whom you like, only free me from all this clatter. But keep that woman off me with her sanctified airs, confound her," said the baronet. He had forgiven Geoff for being born, but he could not forgive Geoff's mother for bringing him so unnecessarily into the world.

And thus it was that Geoff and his mother were at Elfdale. The elder Lady Stanton was no more disposed to go than Sir Henry was to ask her. Visits of this kind are not rare—the invitors unwilling to ask, the invited indisposed to go; and with such cordial results as might be anticipated. "I care for nobody in that house except Cousin Mary," Lady Stanton said, "and even she perhaps—though it is wrong to say so, Geoff, my dear boy, for of course everybody means for the best." With these mutual objections the party had met all the same. The other Lady Stanton was very mild and very religious. She could not prevent herself from having an occasional opinion—that is to say, as she explained it herself, for "caring for" one person more than another; but that was because she had not seen enough of the others perhaps—had not quite understood them. "Yes, Geoff, I do not doubt, my dear, that the girls are very

nice. So many things are changed since my time. Manners are different. And we are all such prejudiced, unjust creatures, we constantly take the outside for our standard as if that was everything. There is but One that sees fully, and what a blessing, Geoff, that it is Him whom we have most to deal with!" said his mother. For it was one of her troubles in life that she had uneasy instincts about the people she met with, and likings and dislikings, such as she felt—the latter at least—a true Christian ought not to indulge in. There was a constant conflict of duty in her against such rebellious feelings. As for Cousin Mary, Sir Henry Stanton's wife, she was one of those whom Geoff's mother had no difficulty in liking, but a cold doubt had been breathed into her mind as to the "influence" which this lady might exercise over her boy. She could not quite get it out of her thoughts. Mary could mean no harm, that was certain, but—and then Lady Stanton would upbraid herself for the evil imagination that could thus believe in evil. So that altogether she was not happy to go to Elfdale. When she was there, however, the family paid her a sort of court, though the girls frankly considered her a

hypocrite. What did that matter? "All the people one meets with are humbugs more or less," Lydia said with superior philosophy. Lydia was the one who saw through everybody, and was always unmasking false pretensions. Laura only acquiesced in the discoveries her sister made, and generally followed her in whatever was going on.

The morning of the birthday dawned brightly and promised to be all that could be desired, and the presents were pretty enough to please any *débutante*. Laura was nineteen, and so far as the county gaieties went she had been already "out" for nearly a year. Any more splendid introduction into society had been denied to the girls. They had entertained dreams of London, and had practised curtseys for a problematical drawing-room during one whole year, but it had come to nothing, Sir Henry being economical and Lady Stanton shy. It was to their step-mother's account that Laura and Lydia set down this wrong, feeling convinced that if she had been their *real* mother she would have managed it somehow. "You'll see she'll find some way of doing it when these little things grow up," the elder sisters said to each other, and they bore her a grudge in

consequence, and looked at her with glances of reproaches whenever London was spoken of — though that she was not their real mother could not be held to be poor Mary's fault. However, all this was forgotten on the merry morning, when with the delights of the garden party and a dance before them they came to breakfast and found Laura's place at table blocked up with presents. Many of them it is true were not of very much value, but there was a pretty bracelet from Geoff and a locket from his mother, which amply rewarded the young ladies for their determination to have their cousin and his mother invited. The opening of the presents made a little pleasant commotion. The donors were all moved by an agreeable curiosity to see how their gifts were received, and as Laura was lavish in her expressions of delight and Lydia in generous admiration, and the little girls hovered behind in fluttering awe, curiosity, and excitement, a general air of family concord, sympathy, and happiness was diffused over the scene. There was not very much love perhaps in the ill-compacted household. But Sir Henry could not help sharing the infection of the half-real amiability of the moment, and his wife could

not but brighten under any semblance of kindness. They sat down quite happily to breakfast and began to chatter about the amusements of the afternoon. Even little Fanny and Annie were allowed to have their say. To them was allotted a share in the croquet, even in the delightful responsibility of arranging the players. All the old fogies, the old-fashioned people, the curate and his sister, the doctor and his niece, the humbler neighbours, were reserved for that pastime which is out of fashion—the girls kept the gayer circle and the more novel amusements for Geoff and their own set. And moved by the general good-nature of the moment Sir Henry made apologies to his guests for the occupations which would occupy his morning. He was an active magistrate, and found in this version of public duty a relief from the idleness of his retired life.

"I have that scamp Bampfylde in hand again," he said; "he is never out of mischief. Have you ever seen that fellow, Geoff? Wild Bampfylde they call him. I think the keepers have a sneaking kindness for him. There is no poaching trick he is not up to. I am tired of hearing his name."

"What did you say was his name?" said Geoff's mother.

The other Lady Stanton had looked up too with a little start, which attracted Geoff's attention. He stopped short in the middle of an animated discussion with the girls on the arrangements of the afternoon, to hear what was being said.

"Ah! to be sure—Bampfylde; for the moment I had forgotten," Sir Henry said. "Yes—that family of course, and a handsome fellow; as fine a man as you could see in the north country. Certainly they are a good-looking race."

"I suppose it is gipsy blood," said the elder Lady Stanton, with a sigh. "Poor people! Yes, I say poor people, Sir Henry, for there is no one to care what evil ways they take. So far out of the way among the hills, no teaching, no clergyman; oh, I make every excuse for them! They will not be judged as we are, with our advantages."

"I don't know about our advantages," said Sir Henry, somewhat grimly; "but I sha'n't make excuses for them. A pest to the country; not to speak of the tragedy they were involved in——"

"Oh, don't let us speak of that," said Mary, under her breath.

Sir Henry gave her a look which irritated young Geoff. The young man felt himself his beautiful cousin's champion, and he would have liked to call even her husband to account for such a glance under frowning eyebrows at so gentle a creature. Sir Henry for his part did not like his wife to show any signs of recollecting her own past history. He did not do very much to make her forget it, and was a cold and indifferent husband, but still he was affronted that she should be able to remember that she had not always been his wife.

"I wish it did not hurt you, cousin Mary," said Geoff, interposing, "for I should like to speak of it, to have it all gone into. I am sure there is wrong somewhere. You said yourself about that young Musgrave——"

"Oh hush, hush, Geoff!" she said under her breath.

"He cannot be young now," said the elder lady. "I am very sorry for him too, my dear. It is not given to us to see into men's hearts, but I never believed that John Musgrave——. I beg your pardon, Mary, for naming him before you, of course it must be painful. And to me too. But it is such a long time ago, and I think if it were all to do over again——"

"It would have been done over again and the whole case sifted if John Musgrave had not behaved like a fool, or a guilty man," said Sir Henry. "It is not a pleasant subject for discussion, is it? I was an idiot to bring up the fellow's name. I forgot what good memories you ladies have," he said, getting up and breaking up the party. And there was still a frown upon his face as he looked at his wife.

"What is the matter with papa?" cried the girls in a breath. "You have been upsetting him. You have worried him somehow!" exclaimed Lydia, turning upon her stepmother. "And everything was going so well, and he was in such a good humour. But it is always the way just when we want a little peace and comfort. I never saw such a house as ours! And he is not very unreasonable, not when you know how to manage him—papa."

As for Mary, she broke down and cried, but smiled again, trying to keep up appearances. "It is nothing," she said; "your father is not angry. It will all be right in a moment. I suppose I am very silly. Run, little ones, and bring me some eau-de-cologne, quick! You must not think Sir Henry was really

annoyed," she said, turning to Lady Stanton. "He is just a little impatient; you know he has all his old Indian ways; and I am so silly."

"I don't think you are silly," said Lady Stanton, who herself was flushed and excited. "It was natural you should be disturbed, and I too. Sir Henry need not have been so impatient; but we don't know his motives," she added hastily, with the habitual apology she made for everybody who was or seemed in the wrong.

"Oh, how tiresome it all is," cried Lydia, stamping her foot, "when people will make scenes! Come along, Geoff; come with us and let us see what is to be done. Everything has to be done still. I meant to ask papa to give the orders; but when he is put out, it is all over. Do come; there are the hoops to put up, and everything to do. Laura, never mind your tiresome presents. Come along! or the people will be here, and nothing will be done."

"That is how they always go on," said Laura, following her sister with her lap full of her treasures. "Come, Geoff. It is so easy to put papa out; and when he is put out he is no good for anything. Do come.

I do not think this time, Lydia, it was *her* fault."

"Oh, it is always her fault," said the harsher sister; "and sending these two tiresome children for the eau-de-cologne! She always sends them for the eau-de-cologne. As if that could do any good! like putting out a fire with rose-water. There now, Laura, put your rubbish away, and I will begin settling everything with Geoff."

The young man obeyed the call unwillingly; but he went with his cousins, having no excuse to stay, and did their work obediently, though his mind was full of very different things. He had put aside the Musgrave business since his visit to Penninghame, not knowing how to act, and he had not spoken of it to his mother; but now it returned upon him with greater interest than ever. Bampfylde he knew was the name of the girl whom John Musgrave had married, whom his brother Walter had loved, and whom the quarrel was about; and she it was who, with her mother, had been accused of helping young Musgrave's escape. All the story seemed to reopen even upon him with the name; and how much more upon those two ladies who were so much more deeply

interested. The two girls and their games had but a slight hold of Geoff's mind in comparison with this deeper question. He did what they wanted him, but he was *distrait* and preoccupied; and as soon as he was free went anxiously in search of his mother, who, he hoped, would tell him more about it. He knew all about it, but not as people must do who had been involved in the circumstances, and helped to enact that sad drama of real life. He found his mother very thoughtful and preoccupied too, seated alone in a little sitting-room up-stairs, which was Lady Stanton's special sanctum. The elder Lady Stanton was very serious. She welcomed her son with a momentary smile and no more. "I have been thinking over that dreadful story," she said; "it has all come back upon me, Geoff. Sometimes a name is enough to bring back years of one's life. I was then as Mary is now. No, no, my dear, your good father was very different from Sir Henry; but a stepmother is often not very happy. It used to be the other way, the story-books say. Oh, Geoff, young people don't mean it — they don't think; but they can make a poor woman's life very wretched. It has brought everything

back to me. That—and the name of this man."

"You have never told me much about it, mother."

"What was the use, my dear? You were too young to do anything; and then, what was there to do? Poor Mr. Musgrave fled, you know. Everybody said that was such a pity. It would have been brought in only manslaughter if he had not escaped and gone away."

"Then it was madness and cowardice," said Geoff.

"It was the girl," said his mother. "No, I am not blaming her; perhaps she knew no better. And his father and all his family were so opposed. Perhaps they thought, to fly away out of everybody's reach, the two together, was the best way out of it. When young people are so much attached to each other," said the anxious mother, faltering, half-afraid even to speak of such mysteries to her son, "they are tempted to think that being together is everything. But it is not everything, Geoff. Many others, as well as John Musgrave, have lost themselves for such a delusion as that."

"Is it a delusion?" Geoff asked, making

his mother tremble. Of whom could the boy be thinking? He was thinking of nobody—till it suddenly occurred to him how the eyes of that little girl at Penninghame might look if they were older; and that most likely it was the same eyes which had made up to John Musgrave for the loss of everything. After all, perhaps this unfortunate one, whom everybody pitied, might have had some compensation. As he was thinking thus, and his mother was watching him, very anxious to know what he was thinking, Lady Stanton came in suddenly by a private door, which opened from her own room. She had a little additional colour on her cheeks, and was breathless with haste.

"Oh, where is Geoff, I wonder?" she said; then seeing him, ran up to him. "Geoff, there is some one down stairs you will like to see. If you are really so interested in all that sad story—really so anxious to help poor John——"

"Yes, who is it? Tell me who it is, and I will go."

"Elizabeth Bampfylde is down stairs," she said, breathless, putting her hand to her heart. "The mother of the man Sir Henry was speaking of—the mother of—the girl.

There is no one knows so much as that woman. She is sitting there all alone, and there is nobody in the way."

"Mary!" cried the elder lady, "is it right to plunge my boy into it? We have suffered enough already. Is it right to make Geoff a victim—Geoff, who knows nothing about it? Oh, my dear, I know you mean it for the best!"

Mary fell back abashed and troubled.

"I did not mean to harm him, Lady Stanton. I did not think it would harm him. Never mind; never mind, if your mother does not approve. After all, perhaps, she knows no more than we do," she said, with an attempt at a smile. "The sight of her made me forget myself."

"Where is she?" said the young man.

"Ah! that is just what overcame me," said Mary, with a sob, and a strange smile at the irony of fate—"down stairs in my husband's room. I have seen her often in the road and in the village—but here, in my house! Never mind, Geoff; it was she that helped him to get out of prison. They were bold, they had no fear of anything; not like us, who are ladies, who cannot stir a step without being watched. Never mind, never mind! it is not

really of any consequence. She is sitting there in—in *my* husband's room!" Mary said, with a sob and a little hysterical laugh. It was not strange to the others, but simple enough and natural. She alone knew how strange it was. "But stop, stop—oh, don't pay any attention. Don't go now, Geoff!"

"Geoff! my dear Geoff!" cried his mother running to the door after him, but for once Geoff paid no attention. He hurried down stairs, clearing them four or five steps at a time. The ladies could not have followed him if they would. The door of Sir Henry's business room stood open, and he could see an old woman seated like a statue, in perfect stillness, on a bench against the wall. She wore a large grey cloak with a hood falling back upon her shoulders, and a white cap, and sat with her hands crossed in her lap, waiting. She raised her eyes quickly when he came in with a look of anxiety and expectation, but when she found it was not the person she expected, bowed her fine head resignedly and relapsed into quiet. The delay which is always so irksome did not seem to affect her. There was something in the pose of the figure which showed that to be seated there quite still and undisturbed was not disagreeable to her. She was not

impatient. She was an old woman and glad to rest; she could wait.

"You are waiting for Sir Henry?" Geoff said, in his eagerness. "Have you seen him? Can I do anything for you?"

"No, sir. I hope you'll forgive me rising. I have walked far and I'm tired. Time is not of so much consequence now as it used to be. I can bide." She gave him a faint smile as she spoke, and looked at him with eyes undimmed, eyes that reminded him of the child at Penninghame. Her voice was fine too, large and melodious, and there was nothing fretful or fidgety about her. Except for one line in her forehead everything about her was calm. She could bide.

And this is a power which gives its possessor unbounded superiority over the impatient and restless. Geoff was all curiosity, excitement, and eagerness. "I don't think Sir Henry will have any time for you to-day," he said; "tell me what it is. I will do all I can for you. I should like to be of use to you. Sir Henry is going to his luncheon presently. I don't think you will see him to-day."

Just at this moment a servant came in with the same information, but it was given in a somewhat different tone. "Look here, old

lady," said the man, "you'll have to clear out of this. There's a party this afternoon, and Sir Henry he hasn't got any time for the likes of you. So march is the word.—I beg your lordship ten thousand pardons. I didn't see as your lordship was there."

"You had better learn to be civil to everyone," said Geoff, indignantly; "beg *her* pardon, not mine. You are—Mrs. Bampfylde, I think? May I speak to you, since Sir Henry cannot see you? I have very urgent business——"

She rose slowly, paying no attention to the man—looking only at Geoff. "And you are the young lord?" she said with an intent look. There was a certain dignity about her movements, though she seemed to set herself in motion with difficulty, stiffly, as if the exertion cost her something. "I've had a long walk," she added, with a faint smile and half apology for the effort, "there's where age tells. And all my trouble for nothing!"

"If I can be of any use to you I will," said Geoff. Then he paused and added, "I want you to do something for me."

"What is it that old 'Lizabeth Bampfylde could do for a fine young gentleman? Your fortune?—ay, I'll give you your fortune easy;

a kind tongue and a bright eye carries that all over the world. And you look as if you had a kind heart."

"It is not my fortune," he said with an involuntary smile.

"You're no believer in the likes of that? May be you have never met with one that had the power. It runs in families; it runs in the blood. There was one of your house, my young lord, that I could have warned of what was coming. I saw it in his face. And, oh that I had done it! But he would not have been warned. Oh! what that would have saved me and mine, as well as you and yours!"

"You think of my brother then when you see me?" he said, eager at once to follow out this beginning. She looked at him again with a scrutinizing gaze.

"What had I to do with your brother, young gentleman? He never asked me for his fortune any more than you; he did not believe in the likes of me. It is only the silly folk and the simple folk that believe in us. I wish they would be guided by us that are our own flesh and blood—and then they would never get into trouble like my boy."

"What has he done?" asked Geoff, thinking to conciliate. He had followed her out of the

house, and was walking by her side through the shrubberies by the back way.

"What has he done? Something, nothing. He's taken a fish in the river, or a bird out of the wood. They're God's creatures, not yours, or Sir Henry's. But the rich and the great, that have every dainty they can set their face to, make it a crime for a poor lad when he does that."

Geoff did not make any answer, for he had a respect for game, and would not commit himself; but he said, "I will do anything I can for your son, if you will help me. Yes, you can help me, and I think you know you can, Mrs. Bampfylde."

"I am called 'Lizabeth," said the old woman, with dignity, as if she had said, I am called Princess. Her tone had so much effect upon Geoff that he cried, "I beg your pardon," instinctively, and faltered and coloured as he went on—

"I want to know about what happened when I was a child—about my brother's death —about—the man who caused it. They tell me you know more than any one else. I am not asking for idle curiosity. You know a great deal, or so I have heard, about John Musgrave."

"Hus—sh!" she cried, "it is not safe to say names—you never know who may hear."

"But all the world may hear," said Geoff. "I am not afraid. I want him to come home. I want him to be cleared. If you know anything that can help him, tell me. I will never rest now till I have got that sentence changed and he is cleared."

The old woman looked at him, growing pale, with a sort of alarmed admiration. "You're a bold boy," she said, "very bold! It's because you're so young—how should you know? When a man has enemies we should be careful how we name him. It might bring ill-luck or more harm."

"I don't believe much in ill-luck, and I don't believe in enemies at all," said Geoff, with the confidence of his years.

"Oh!" she cried, with a long moan, wringing her hands. "Oh, God help you, innocent boy!"

"No," Geoff repeated, more boldly still, "neither in enemies nor in ill-luck, if the man himself is innocent. But I believe in friends. I am one; and if you are one—if you are his friend, his true friend, why, there is nothing we may not do for him," the young man cried, standing still to secure her attention. She paused

too for a moment, gazing at him, with a low cry now and then of wonder and distress; her mind was travelling over regions to which young Geoff had no clue, but his courage and confidence had compelled her attention at least. She listened while he went on repeating his appeal; only to tell him what she knew, what she remembered—to tell him everything. It seemed all so simple to Geoff; he went on with his pleadings, following through the winding walk. It was all he could do to keep up with her large and steady stride as she went on, quickening her pace. The stiffness had disappeared, and she walked like one accustomed to long tramping over moor and hill.

"My young lord," she exclaimed abruptly, stopping him in the midst of a sentence, "you've talked long enough; I know all you can say now; and here's the bargain I'll make. If my lad gets free, I'll take his advice—and if he consents, and you have a mind to come up to the fells and see me where I bide——"

"Certainly I will come," cried Geoff, feeling a delightful gleam of adventure suddenly light up his more serious purpose. "Certainly I will come; only tell me where I shall find you——"

"You're going too fast, my young gentleman. I said if my lad gets free. Till I have talked to him I'll tell you nothing. And my bit of a place is a lonely place where few folk ever come near."

"I can find it," said Geoff. "I do not mind how lonely it is. I will come—to-morrow, whenever you please."

"Not till my lad comes to fetch you," said 'Lizabeth, with a gleam of shrewd humour crossing her face for a moment. "I must see my lad first, and hear what he says, and then I'll send him to show you the way."

"It would be better not to make it dependent on that chance," said Geoff, prudently. "He might not care to come; I don't know your son; why should he take so much trouble for me? He may decline to do it, or he may dislike my interference, or——"

"Or he may not get free," said 'Lizabeth, stopping short, and dismissing her young attendant almost imperiously. "Here you and me part paths, my young lord. It will be soon enough to say more when my lad is free."

Geoff was left standing at the outer gate, startled by the abruptness of his dismissal, but incapable he felt of resisting. He gazed after her as she sped along the road with long swift

steps, half-appalled, greatly excited, and with a touch of amusement too. "I am to cheat justice for her in the first place, and elude the law," he said to himself as he watched her disappearing along the dusty road.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW FRIEND.

THE result of this interview was that Geoff, as was natural, threw himself body and soul into the cause of Wild Bampfylde. When he had once made up his mind to this, a certain comic element in the matter delighted him and gave him double fervour. The idea of defeating justice was delightful to the young man, not much older than a schoolboy. He talked to all the people he met about the case of this wild man of the woods, this innocent savage, to whom all the sylvan sins came by nature; and he engaged the best lawyer who could be had to defend him, and if possible get the wild fellow free. Where was the harm? Wild Bampfylde had never been guilty of violence to any human creature, he ascertained. It was only the creatures of the woods he waged war against, not even the gamekeepers. And when Sir Henry, coming home from

Quarter Sessions, informed the party that Wild Bampfylde had managed to get off by some quibble, the magistrates being fairly tired of convicting him, everybody was delighted to hear of the safety of Geoff's *protégé* except the two elder ladies, who showed no satisfaction. Neither of them were glad, notwithstanding that Geoff was so much interested; Lady Stanton from a vague concern for her son, and Mary because of the prejudice in her which all her gentleness could not eradicate. She looked at Geoff with tears in her eyes. "You will have nothing to do with them," she said; "him nor any of them? Oh, Geoff, promise!" which was inconsistent, as it was she herself who had put the old mother in his way. But Geoff only laughed, and asked what he could have to do with them, and made no promise. This episode had not interfered with the business of life, with the afternoon party or the dinner, the dancing or the croquet. All had "gone off" as well as possible. Laura and Lydia had "enjoyed themselves" to their hearts' content. They had been admired and praised and fêted, and every one had said it was a delightful party. What more could any young lady of nineteen desire? Geoff was very good-natured, and did every-

thing that was asked of him. And Laura wore his bracelet, which was much admired by her friends, and gave rise to many pleasant suggestions. "He is just the very person for you," Lydia said reflectively, as she examined it. "Now I should have liked emeralds or diamonds, or grown-up jewels; but the turquoises are the very thing for you. He sees your taste. If he were not Lord Stanton, just for simple suitableness you should marry Geoff —he is the very person for you."

"I do not see why I should be made to marry any one for simple suitableness, as if I were a baby," was Laura's protestation; but she liked the turquoises, and she did not dislike the hints and smiling gossip. And when young Lord Stanton and his mother went away, the house regretted them from the highest to the lowest. The little girls stood behind backs, crying, when the carriage drove away. "I should like to know what they have to cry about," Lydia said; "what is Geoff to them? It is such nonsense; but they always are encouraged in everything. You two little things, stop that, and be off with you! You are always in some one's way."

"He is as much our cousin as yours," said

Fanny, who was always known to be saucy; but they skimmed away in a panic when Lydia turned round upon them, not knowing what she might do. "Oh, how nice it would be to have nothing but a mamma!" they said to each other as they alighted in her room, where it was always quiet, and smoothed down their ruffled plumes. Poor little doves! it was not for Geoff alone they were crying, for Geoff's mother had been very good to them. They had hung about her for hours, and had stories told to them, and the world seemed an empty sort of place when these two visitors went away.

The mother and son drove home to their own house, he a little sorry, she a little glad. It was wrong perhaps to be glad, implying a kind of tacit censure on the people she had left; but there was no harm in being happy to get home. Stanton Hall was not an immemorial place like Penninghame, nor a cosy unpretending country house like Elfdale, but a great mansion intended to be grand and splendid, and overawe the country. The splendour had fallen into a little disuse during Geoff's long minority, but as he had lived chiefly at home with his mother, it had proportionately gained in comfort and the home

aspect which only being lived in can give to a house. They lived chiefly in one wing, leaving the state part of the mansion almost unoccupied. Geoff had not been brought up as most youths of his age are brought up. His mother had been too timorous, both physically and spiritually, to trust her child amid all the appalling dangers and indulgences of a public school. And he had not even, more wonderful still, gone to any university. She was his sole guardian, no one sharing her powers, for it never had been supposed that little Geoff would be anybody in particular, or that it was of the least importance how his mother brought him up. His education had therefore been chiefly conducted at home by a tutor, chosen rather for his goodness than his learning. Did it matter very much? Geoff was not very clever, and it does not require much learning, as Mrs. Hardcastle concluded in the case of her son Tony Lumpkin, to spend fifteen thousand a year. Geoff had learned a great many things which university men do not much meddle with, and he had forgotten as successfully as any university man could do. He had a great deal less Greek, but a good deal more French than most of those heroes; and he was a good, honest,

simple-hearted boy, as, Heaven be praised, in spite of their many advantages, a great many of those same university men manage to be. And, in short, he was very much like his contemporaries, though brought up so very differently—a fact which would have wounded his mother's feelings more than anything else you could have said; for if the result is just about the same as it would have been by the other process, what is the good of taking a great deal of additional trouble? Mr. Tritton, the tutor, had been all alone at Stanton during this visit to Elfdale. He was a very good man. He had been as kind as a father to Geoff from the moment he took charge of him, and had watched over him with unfailing care; indeed he was like a second mother as well—perhaps more like that than the other —very anxious not to "overtire" his pupil, or to put any strain on his faculties. They were the most peaceful household that could be conceived, and Geoff, according to all rule, ought to have grown up a very feminine youth. But by good luck he had not done so. In that demure household he got to be a lively, energetic, out-door sort of person, and loved adventure, and loved life perhaps all the better in consequence of the meek atmosphere of

quietness which surrounded him. To tell the truth it was he who, for a long time, had held the helm of the house in his hand, and had everything his own way.

Mr. Tritton was upon the steps to welcome them, and the servants, who were glad to see them back after the week of quiet. Who does not know the kind of servants Lady Stanton would have?—men and women who had seen the boy grow up, and thought or seemed to think there was nobody in the world like Geoff—a housekeeper to whom her mistress was very obsequious and conciliatory, but whom Geoff treated with a familiarity which sometimes froze the very blood in his mother's veins, who would not for the world have taken such liberties; and a butler, who felt himself an independent country gentleman, and went and came very much at his own pleasure, and governed his inferiors *en bon prince*, but with a lively sense of his own importance. These all received the travellers with cordiality at the door, and brought them tea and were very kind to them. It was quite touching and gratifying to Lady Stanton that they should always be so kind. Harris, the butler, took her little travelling-bag, and carried it into the drawing-room with his own hand; and Mrs.

Benson herself came to pour out her cup of tea. "I hope your ladyship is not too much tired with your long drive," Mrs. Benson said; and Harris kindly lingered to hear her reply, and to assure her that all had been going on well at Stanton while she was away.

Geoff did not pay so much attention to the kindness of the servants. He went off to the stables to give some orders, leaving Mr. Tritton with his mother. Geoff called his tutor Old Tritton as easily as if he had mixed in the world of men at Eton or Oxford, and went off about his own business unconcerned. But when he had turned the corner of the house to the stables, Geoff's whistle stopped suddenly. He found a man standing there with his back against the wall, whose appearance startled him. A poacher is a thing that is obnoxious to every country gentleman, however easy his principles may be on the question of game; and a tramp is a thing that nobody with a house worth robbing can away with. The figure that presented itself thus suddenly before Lord Stanton's eyes was the quintessence of both; a tall, loose-limbed man, with strong black locks and an olive skin, in coarse velveteen and gaiters, and a coat with multitudinous pockets, with a red handkerchief

knotted round his neck, a soft felt hat crushed into all manner of shapes, and a big stick in his hand. He stood in a careless attitude, at his ease, leaning against the wall. What had such a man to do there? and yet there he was for a purpose, as any one could see, lying in wait; was it to rob, or to kill? Geoff's heart gave a little leap at the sight of the intruder. He had not had much experience of this kind.

"What are you doing here?" he asked sharply, the instincts of property and authority springing up in disapproval and resistance. What had such a fellow to do here?

"I am doing nothing," said the man, not changing his attitude, or even taking off his hat, or showing the smallest mark of respect. He continued even to lounge against the wall with rude indifference. "I am here on your business, not on mine," he said, carelessly.

"On my business! Yes, I know," said Geoff, suddenly bethinking himself; "you are Bampfylde? I am glad you've got off; and you come to me from——"

"Old 'Lizabeth; that is about it. She's a funny woman: whatever silly thing she wants she always gets her way. She wants you now, and I've come to fetch you. I suppose you'll

come, since she says it. And you'd better make up your mind soon, for it does not suit me to stay here."

"I suppose not," said Geoff, scarcely noticing what he said.

"Why should you suppose not?" said the man, rousing himself with an air of offence. He was taller than Geoff, a lanky but muscular figure. "I have eyes and feelings as well as you. I like a fine place. Why shouldn't I take my pleasure looking at it? You have a deal more, and yet you're not content."

"We were not discussing our feelings," said Geoff, half contemptuous, half sympathetic. "You have brought me a message, perhaps, from your mother?"

"I've come from old 'Lizabeth. She says if you like to start to-night along with me we'll talk your business over, and if she can satisfy you she will. Look you here, my young lord, your lordship's a deal of consequence to some, but it's nothing to her and me. Come, if you like to come; it's your business, not ours. If there's danger it's your own risk, if there's any good it's you that will have it, not us——"

"Danger!" said Geoff; "the danger of a walk up the fells! and good—to me? Yes, you can say it is to me if you like, but you

ought to be more interested than I am. However, words don't matter. Yes, let us say the good is mine, and the danger, if any, is mine——"

"Have it your own way," said Bampfylde. "I'll come back again, since you've made up your mind, at ten to-night and show you the way."

"But why at night?" said Geoff; "to-morrow would be better. It is not too far to go in a day."

"There's the difference between you and us. Night is our time, you see. It must be by night or not at all. Would you like to walk with me across country, my lord? I don't think you would, nor I wouldn't like it. We shouldn't look natural together. But at night all's one. I'll be here at ten; there's a moon—and a two hours' walk, or say three at the most, it's nothing to a young fellow like you."

This was a very startling proposition, and Geoff did not know what to make of it. It grew more and more like a mysterious adventure, and pleased him on that side; but he was a modern young man, with a keen perception of absurdity, and everything melodramatic was alarming to him. Why should he walk mysteriously in the middle of the

night to a cottage about which there need be no mystery on a perfectly innocent and honest errand? He stared at his strange visitor with a perplexity beyond words.

"What possible object could be gained," he said at last, "by going in the night?"

"Oh, if you're afraid!" said this strange emissary, "don't go—that's all about it: neither me nor her are forcing you to hear what we may happen to know."

"I am not afraid," said Geoff, colouring. It was an accusation which was very hard to bear. "But there is reason in all things. I don't want to be ridiculous—" The man shrugged his shoulders—he laughed—nothing could have been more galling. Geoff standing, looking at him, felt the blood boiling in his veins.

"Quite right too," said Bampfylde. "What can we know that's worth the trouble? You'll take a drive up some day in your coach and four, and oblige us. That is just what I would do myself."

"In Heaven's name, what am I expected to do?" cried Geoff; "make a melodramatic ass of myself, and go in the middle of the night?"

"I'm no scholar: long words are not my

sort. Do or don't, that's the thing I understand, and it is easy to settle. If you're not coming, say No, and I'll go. If you are coming, let me know, and I'll be here. There's nothing to make such a wonder about."

Geoff was in great doubt what was best to do. The adventure pleased him; but the idea of ridicule held him back. "It is not pleasant to be thought a fool," he said. Then, nettled by the jeer in the face of this strange fellow who kept his eyes—great, dark, and brilliant as they were—fixed upon him, the young man cut the knot hurriedly. "Then never mind the absurdity; be here at ten, as you say, and wait if I am not ready. I don't want everybody to know what a fool I am," he said.

"You are coming then?" said the man with a laugh. "That's plucky, whatever happens. You're not afraid?"

"Pooh!" cried Geoff, turning away. He was too indignant and annoyed to speak. He went on impatiently to the stables, leaving the stranger where he stood. He was not afraid; but his young frame thrilled in every fibre with excitement. Had not adventures of this kind sounded somewhat ridiculous to the ideas of to-day, the mysterious expedition would have been delightful to him. But that uneasy

sense of the ridiculous kept down his anticipations. What could old 'Lizabeth have to tell that could justify such precautions? But if she chose to be fantastic about her secret, whatever it was, he must humour her. When he went in again, there was no sign of his visitor, except the half-effaced mark of a footstep on the soft gravel. The man had ground the heel of his boot into it while he stood talking, and there it was, his mark to show the place where he had been.

The evening passed very strangely to young Lord Stanton. He heard his mother and Mr. Tritton talking calmly of to-morrow. To-morrow the old family lawyer was expected, and some of the arrangements attendant on his coming of age, which was approaching, were to be discussed; and he was asked, What he would like—in one or two respects. Should this be done, or that, when his birthday came? Geoff could not tell what curious trick of imagination affected him. He caught himself asking, Would he ever come of age? Would to-morrow be just as the other days, no more and no less? How absurd the question was! What could possibly happen to him in a long mountain walk, even though it might be through the darkness? There is nothing in

that homely innocent country to make midnight dangerous. Wild Bampfylde might be an exciting sort of companion; but what more? As for enemies, Geoff remembered what he had said so short a time before. He did not believe in them; why should he? he himself, he felt convinced, possessed no such thing in all the world.

But it was astonishing how difficult it was that evening to get free. Lady Stanton, who generally was fatigued with the shortest journey, was cheerful and talkative to-night, and overflowing with plans; and even Mr. Tritton was entertaining. It was only by saying that he had letters to write that Geoff at last managed to get away. He disliked writing letters so much that the plea was admitted with smiles. "We must not balk such a virtuous intention," the tutor said. He went into the library with a beating heart. This room had a large window which opened upon the old-fashioned bowling-green. Geoff changed his dress with great speed and quiet, putting on a rough shooting suit. The night was dark, but soft, with stars faintly lighting up a hazy sky. He stepped out from the big window and closed it after him. The air was very fresh, a little chilly, as even a midsummer night

generally is in the north country. He gave a little nervous shiver as he came out into the darkness and chillness. "There's some one walking over your grave," said a voice at his elbow. Geoff started, to his own intense shame and annoyance, as if he had received a shot. "Very likely," he said, commanding himself; "over all our graves perhaps. That harms nobody. You are there, Bampfylde? That's well; don't talk, but go on."

"You're a good bold one after all," said the voice by his side. Geoff's heart beat uneasily at the sound, and yet the commendation gave him a certain pleasure. He was more at his ease when they emerged from the shadow of the house, and he could see the outline of his companion's figure, and realize him as something more than a voice. He gave a somewhat longing look back at the scattered lights in the windows as he set out thus through the silence and darkness. Would any one find out that he was gone? But his spirit rose as they went on, at a steady pace, swinging along under the deep hedgerows, and across the frequent bridges where so many streamlets kept crossing the road, adding an unseen tinkle to the sounds of the summer night.

CHAPTER IV.

A MIDNIGHT WALK.

When young Lord Stanton left his own house with Wild Bampfylde there was a tingle of excitement in the young man's veins. Very few youths of his age are to be found so entirely home-bred as Geoff. He had never been in the way of mischief, and he had no natural tendency to lead him thitherward, so that he had passed these first twenty years of his existence without an adventure, without anything occurring to him that might not have been known to all the world. To leave your own house when other people are thinking of going to bed, for an expedition you know not where, under the guidance of you know not whom, is a sufficiently striking beginning to the path of mystery and adventure, and there was a touch of personal peril in it which gave Geoff a little tingle in his veins. His brother

had been killed by some one with whom this wild fellow was closely connected; it was a secret of blood which the young man had set himself to solve one way or other; and this no doubt affected his imagination, and for a short time the consciousness of danger was strong in him, quickening his pulses and making his heart beat. This was increased by a sense of wrong-doing, in so far as Geoff felt that he might be exposing the tranquil household he had left behind to agonies of apprehension about him, did he not return sufficiently early to escape being found out. Finally, on the top of this consciousness of conditional fault came a feeling, perhaps the most strong of all, of the possible absurdity of his position. Romantic adventure, if it never ceases to be attractive to the young, is looked upon with different eyes at different periods, and the nineteenth century has agreed to make a joke of melodrama. Instead of being moved by a fine romantic situation, the modern youth laughs; and the idea of finding himself in such picturesque and dramatic circumstances strikes him as the most curious and laughable, if not ridiculous, idea. To recognise himself as setting out, like the hero of a novel or a play (of the old school), to search out a

mystery—into the haunts of a law-defying and probably law-breaking class, under the guidance of a theatrical vagrant, tramp, or gipsy, to ask counsel of the weird old woman, bright-eyed and solemn, who held all the threads of the story in her hands, filled Geoff with mingled confusion and amusement. He had almost laughed to himself as he realized it; but with the laugh a flush came over his face—what would other people think? He felt that he would be laughed at as romantic, jibed at as being able to believe that any real or authentic information could be obtained in this ridiculous way. 'Lizabeth Bampfylde in the witness-box would no doubt be valuable, but the romances she might tell in her own house, to a young man evidently so credulous and of such a theatrical temperament—these two things were entirely different, and he would be thoroughly laughed at for his foolishness.

This consciousness of something ridiculous in the whole business reassured him, however; and better feelings rose as he went on with a half-pleased, half-excited, exhilaration and curiosity. The night was fine, warm, and genial, but dark; a few stars shone large and lambent in the veiled sky, but there was as

yet no moon, so that all the light there was was concentrated above in the sky, and the landscape underneath was wrapped in darkness, a soft, cool, incense-breathing obscurity—for night is as full of odours as the morning. It is full of sounds too, all the more mysterious for having no kind of connection with the visible; and no country is so full of sounds as the North country, where the road will now thread the edge of a dark, unseen, heathery, thymy moor, and now cross, at a hundred links and folds, the course of some invisible stream, or some dozens of little runlets tinkling on their way to a bigger home of waters. Now dark hedgerows would close in the path; now it would open up and widen into that world of space, the odorous, dewy moorland; now lead by the little street, the bridge, the straggling outskirts of a village. Generally all was quiet in the hamlets, the houses closed, the inhabitants in bed; but sometimes there would be a sudden gleam of lightness into the night, a dazzle from an open door or unshuttered window. The first of these rural places was Stanton, the village close to the great House, where Geoff unconsciously stole closer into the shadow, afraid to be seen. Here it was the smithy that was still open, a dazzling centre

of light in the gloom. The smith came forward to his door as they passed, roused by the steady tread of their footsteps, and looked curiously out upon them, his figure relieved against the red background of light. "What, Dick! is't you, lad?" he said, peering out. "Got off again? that's right, that's right; and who's that along with you this fine night?" Bampfylde did not stop to reply, to Geoff's great relief. He went on with long swinging steps, taking no notice. "If anybody asks you, say you don't know," he said as he went on, throwing back a sort of challenge into the gloom. He did not talk to his companion. Sometimes he whistled low, but as clearly as a bird, imitating indeed the notes of the birds, the mournful cry of the lapwing, the grating call of the corn-crake; sometimes he would sing to himself low crooning songs. In this way they made rapid progress to the foot of the hills.

Geoff had been glad of the silence at first; it served to deliver him from those uncomfortable thoughts which had filled his mind, the vagabond's carelessness reassuring and calming his excitement; for neither the uneasy sense of danger he had started with, nor the equally uneasy sense of the ludicrous which had possessed

him, were consistent with the presence of this easy, unexcited companion, who conducted himself as if he were alone, and would stop and listen to the whirr and flutter of wild creatures in the hedgerows or on the edge of the moor, as if he had forgotten Geoff's very presence. All became simple as they went on, the very continuance of the walk settling down and calming the agitation of the outset. By and by, however, Geoff began to be impatient of the silence, and of the interest his companion showed in everything except himself. Could he be, perhaps, one of the "naturals" who are so common in the North, a little less imbecile than usual, but still incapable of continuous attention? Thus, after his first half-alarmed, half-curious sense of the solemnity of the enterprise, Geoff came back to an everyday boyish impatience of its unusual features and a disposition to return to the lighter intercourse of ordinary life.

"How far have we to go now?" he asked. They had come to the end of the level, and were just about to ascend the lower slopes of hilly country which shut in the valley. The fells rising before them made the landscape still more dark and mysterious, and seemed to thrust themselves between the wayfarers'

eyes and that light which seemed to retire more and more into the clear pale shining of the sky.

"Tired already?" said the man, with a shrug of his shoulders. He had stopped to investigate a hollow under a great gorse-bush, just below the level of the road, from which came rustlings and scratchings indistinguishable. Bampfylde raised himself with a half laugh, and came back to Geoff's side. "These small creatures is never tired," he said; "they scuds about all day, and sleep that light at night that a breath wakes them; and yet they're but small, not so big as my hand; and knows their way, they does, wherever they've got to go."

"I allow they are cleverer than I am," said Geoff, good-humouredly, "but then they cannot speak to ask their way. Men have a little advantage. And even I am not so ignorant as you think. I have been on the fells in a mist, and knew my way, or guessed it. At all events, I got home again, and that is something."

"There will be no mist to-night," said Bampfylde, looking up at the sky.

"No; but it is dark enough for anything. Look here, I trust you, and you might trust me. You know why I am going."

"How do you trust me, my young lord?"

"Well," said Geoff; "supposing I am a match for you, one man against another, how can I tell you have not got comrades about? My brother lost his life—by some one connected with you. Did you know my brother?"

The suddenness of this question took his companion by surprise. He wavered for a moment, and fell backward with an involuntary movement of alarm.

"What's that for, lad, bringing up a dead man's name out here in the dark, and near midnight? Do you want to fley me? *I* never meddled with him. He would be safe in his bed this night, and married to his bonnie lady, and bairns in his house to heir his title and take your lordship from you, if there had been nobody but me."

"I believe that," said Geoff, softened. "They say you never harmed man."

"No, nor beast—except varmint, or the like of a hare or so—when the old wife wanted a bit o' meat. Never man. For man's blood is precious," said the wild fellow with a shudder. "There's something in it that's not in a brute. If I were to kill you or you me in this lonesome place, police and that sort might never find it out; but all the same,

the place would tell—there would be something there different; they say man's blood never rubs out."

Geoff felt a little thrill run through his own veins as he saw his companion shiver and tremble; but it was not fear. The words somehow established perfect confidence between himself and his guide; and he had all the simplicity of mind of a youth whose faith had never been tampered with, and who believed with the unshaken sincerity of childhood. "The stain on the mind never wears out," he said, thoughtfully. "I knew a boy once who had shot his brother without knowing it. How horrible it was! he never forgot it; and yet it was not his fault."

"Ah! I wish as I had been that lucky—to shoot my brother by accident," said Wild Bampfylde, with a long sigh, shaking into its place a pouch or game-bag which he wore across his shoulder. "It would have been the best thing for him," he added, in answer to Geoff's cry of protest; "then he wouldn't have lived—for worse——"

"Have you a brother so unfortunate?"

"Unfortunate! I don't know if that is what you call it. Yes, unfortunate. He never meant bad. I don't credit it."

"You are not speaking," said Geoff, in a very low voice, overpowered at once with curiosity and interest, "of John Musgrave?"

"The young Squire? No, I don't mean him; he's bad, and bad enough, but not so bad. You've got a deal to learn, my young lord. And what's your concern with all that old business? If another man's miserable, *that* don't take bit or sup from you—nor a night's rest, unless you let it. You've got everything that heart could desire. Why can't you be content, and let other folks be?"

"When we could help them, Bampfylde?" said Geoff. "Is that the way you would be done by? Left to languish abroad; left with a stain on your name, and no one to hold out a hand for you—nobody to try to get you righted; only thinking of their own comfort, and the bit and the sup and the night's rest?"

"You've never done without neither one nor t'other," came in a hoarse undertone from Bampfylde's lips. "It's fine talking; but it's little you know."

"No, I've never had the chance," said Geoff. "I can't tell what it's like, that's true; but if it ever comes my way——"

"Ah, ay! it's fine talking—it's fine talking!"

Geoff did not know how to reply. He went

on impatiently, tossing aloft his young head, as a horse does, excited by his own words like the playing of a trumpet. They proceeded so up a stiff bit of ascent that taxed their strength and their breathing, and made conversation less practicable. The winding mountain road seemed to pierce into the very fastnesses of the hills, and the tall figure of the vagrant a step in advance of him appeared to Geoff like the shadow of some ghostly pioneer working his way into the darkness. No twinkle of a lamp, no outline of any inhabited place looming against the lighter risings of the manifold slopes, encouraged their progress. The hills, which would have made the very brightness of the morning dark, increased the gloom of the night. Only the tinkle of here and there a little stream, the sound of their own footsteps as they passed on, one in advance of the other, the small noises which came so distinctly through the air—here a rustle, there a jar of movement, something stirring under a stone, something moving amid the heather, were to be heard. Bampfylde himself was stilled by these great shadows. His whistle dropped; and the low croon of song which he had raised from time to time did not take its place. He became almost inaudible, as he was almost invisible;

only the sound of a measured step and a large confused outline seen at times against the uncertain openings and bits of darkling sky.

When they came abreast again, however, on a comparatively smooth level, after a stiff piece of climbing, he spoke suddenly. "It's queer work going like this through the dark. Many a night I have done it with no company, and then a man's drawn out of himself watching the living things: one will stir at your foot, and one go whirr and strike across your very face, for they put more trust in you in the dark. You see they have the use of their eyesight, and the like of you and me haven't. So they know their advantage. But put a man down beside another man, and a's changed. I cannot understand the meaning of it. It puts things in your head, and it puts away the innocent creatures. Men's seldom innocent: but they're awful strange," said the vagrant, with a sigh.

"Do you think they are so strange? I am not sure that I do," said Geoff, bewildered a little. "They are just like everything else—one is dull, one is clever; but except for that——"

"Clever! it's the creatures that are clever. Did you ever see a bird make a fuss to get

you off where her nest was? A woman wouldn't have sense to do that. She'd run and shriek, and get hold of her bairns; but the bird's clever. That's what I calls clever. It's something stranger than that. When a man's beside you, all's different; there's him thinking and you thinking; and though you're close, and I can grip you"—here Bampfylde seized upon Geoff with a sudden, startling grasp, which alarmed the young man —"I can't tell no more than Adam where your mind is. Asking your pardon, my young lord, I didn't mean to startle you," he added, dropping his hold. "Now the creatures is all there; you know where you have 'em. Far the contrary with a man."

Geoff was not given to abstract thoughts, and this sudden entry into the regions of the undiscovered perplexed him. "You like company, then?" he said, doubtfully. He knew a great deal more than his companion did of almost everything that could be suggested, but not of this.

"Like company? it's confusing, very confusing. But the creatures is simple. You can watch their ways, and they're never double-minded. They're at one thing, one thing at a time. Now, a man, there's notions

in his head, and you can never tell how they got there."

"I suppose," said young Geoff, perplexed yet reverential, "it is because men are immortal; not like the beasts that perish."

"Ay, ay—I suppose they perish," said Bampfylde. "What would they be like us for, and sicken, and pine? They get the good of it all the time; run wild as they like, and do mischief as they like, and never put in gaol for it. You think they're sleeping now? and so they are, and waking too—as still as the stones and as lively as the stars up yonder. That's them; but us, if we're sleeping, it's for hours long, and dreams with it; one bit of you lying like a log, t'other bit of you off at the ends of the airth. So, if you're woke sudden, chances are you aren't there to be woke—and there's a business; but the creatures, they're always there."

"That is true," said Geoff, who was slightly overawed, and thought this very fine and poetical—finer than anything he had ever realized before. "But sometimes they are ill, I suppose, and suffer too?"

"Then them that is merciful puts them out of their pain. The hardest-hearted ones will do that. A bird with a broken wing, or a

beast with a broken leg, unless it be one of the gentlefolks' pets, that's half mankind, and has to suffer for it because his master's fond of him (and that's funny too)—the worst of folks will put them out of their pain. But a man—we canna' do it," cried the vagrant; "there's law again' it, and more than law. If it was nothing but law, little the likes of me would mind; but there's something written here," he said, putting his hand to his breast; "something that hinders you."

"I hope so indeed," said Geoff, a little breathless, with a sense of horror; "you would not take away a life?"

"But the creatures, ay; they have the best of it. You point your gun at them, or you wring their necks, and it's all over. I'm fond of the creatures—creatures of all kinds. I'm fond of being out with them on a heathery moor like this all myself. They know me, and there's no fear in them. In the morning early, when the air's all blue with the dawn, the stirring and the moving there is, and the scudding about, setting the house in order! A thing not the size of your hand will come out with two bright eyes, and cock its head and look up at you. A cat may look at a king; a bit of a moor chicken, or a rabbit the size o' my thumb, up and faces you, and 'Who are

you, my man?' That is what they looks like; but you never see them like that after it's full day."

"Then is night their happy time?" said Geoff, humouring his strange companion.

"Night, they're free. There's none about that wishes them harm; and though I snare varmint, and sometimes take a hare or a bird, —I'll not deny it, my young lord, though you were to clap me in prison again to-morrow— they're not afraid o' me; they know I'll not harm them. Even the varmint, if they didn't behave bad and hurt the rest, I'd never have the heart. When you go back, if you do go back——"

"I must go back," said Geoff, very gravely. "Why should not I? You don't think I could stay up here?"

"I was not thinking one thing or another. The like of you is contrary. I've little to do with men; but when you go, if you go, it might be early morning, the blue time, at the dawn. Then's the time to see; when there's all the business to be done afore the day, and after the night. Children is curious," said Bampfylde, with a softening of his voice, which felt in the darkness like a slowly dawning smile; "but creatures is more

curious yet. I like to watch them. You'll see all the life that's in the moors if it's that time when you go."

"I suppose if there is anything to tell me I cannot go sooner," said Geoff. His tone was grave, and so was his face, though that was invisible. "Then it will be day before I get home, and they will all know—perhaps I was a fool."

"For coming?" said the man, turning round to peer into his face, though it was covered by the darkness; and then he gave a low laugh. "I could have told you that!"

For a moment Geoff's blood ran colder; he felt a little thrill of dismay. Was this strange creature a "natural" as he had thought, or did what he said imply danger? But no more was said for a long time. Bampfylde sank back again all at once into the silence he had so suddenly broken, or rather into the low crooning of monotonous old songs with which he had beguiled the first part of the journey. There was a kind of slumbrous soothing in them which half-interested, half-stupefied Geoff. They all went to one tune, a tune not like anything he knew—a kind of low chant, recalling several airs, that did not vary from verse to verse, but repeated itself,

and so lulled the wayfarer that all active sensation seemed to go from him, and the monotonous, mechanical movement of his limbs seemed to beat time to the croon of sound which accompanied the gradual march. There was something weird in it, something like "the woven paces and the waving hands" of the enchantress. Geoff felt his eyes grow heavy, and his head sinking on his breast, as the low, regular tramp and chant went on.

At length, all at once, the hills seemed to clear away from the sky, opening up on either hand; and straight before them, hanging low, like a signal of trouble, a late risen and waning moon that seemed thrust forward out into the air, and hanging from the sky, appeared in the luminous but mournful heaven in front of them. There is always something more or less baleful and troublous in this sudden apparition, so late and out of date, of a waning moon; the oil seems low in the lamp, the light ready to be extinguished, the flame quivering in the socket. Between them and the sky stood a long, low cottage, rambling and extensive, with a rough, grey stone wall built round it, upon which the pale moonlight shone. Long before they reached it, as soon as their steps could be audible, the mingled

baying and howling of a dog was heard, rising doleful and ominous in the silence; and from under the roof—which was half rough thatch and half the coarse tiles used for labourers' cottages—a light strangely red against the radiance of the moon flickered with a livid glare. A strange black silhouette of a house it was, with the low moonlight full upon it, showing here and there in a ghostly full white upon a bit of wall or roof, and contrasting with the red light in the window: it made a mystic sort of conclusion to the journey. Bampfylde directed his steps towards it without a word. He knocked a stroke or two on the door, which seemed to echo over all the country and up to the mountain-tops in their great stillness. "We are at home, now," he said.

CHAPTER V.

THE COTTAGE ON THE FELLS.

THERE was a sound of movement within the house, but no light visible as they stood at the door. Then a window was cautiously opened, and a voice called out into the darkness, "Is that you, my lad?" Geoff felt more and more the little thrill of alarm which was quite instinctive, and meant nothing except excited fancy; such precautions looked unlike the ordinary ease and freedom of a peasant's house. A minute after the door was opened, and 'Lizabeth Bampfylde made her appearance. She had her red handkerchief as usual tied over her white cap, and the flash of this piece of colour and of the old woman's brilliant eyes were the first things which warmed the gloom, the blackness and whiteness and mystic midnight atmosphere. She made an old-fashioned curtsey, with a certain dignity in it, when she saw Geoff, and her face, which had been somewhat eager in expression, paled

and saddened instantly. The young man saw her arms come together with a gesture of pain, though the candle she held prevented the natural clasp of the hands. She was not glad to see him, though she had sent for him. This troubled Geoff, whom from his childhood most people had been pleased to see. "You've come, then, my young lord?" she said, with a half-suppressed groan.

"Indeed, I thought you wanted me to come," he said, unreasonably annoyed by this absence of welcome; "you sent for me."

"You thought the lad would be daunted," said Wild Bampfylde, "and I told you he would not be daunted if he had any metal in him. So now you're at the end of all your devices. Come in and welcome, my young lord. I'm glad of it, for one."

Saying this, the vagrant disappeared into the gloom of the interior, where his step was audible moving about, and was presently followed by the striking of a light, which revealed, through an open door, the old-fashioned cottage kitchen, so far in advance of other moorland cottages of the same kind, that it had a little square entrance from the door, which did not open direct into the family living-room. This rude little ante-room had

even a kind of rude decoration, dimly apparent by the light of 'Lizabeth's candle. A couple of old guns hung on one wall, another boasted a deer's head with fine antlers. Once upon a time it had evidently been prized and cared for. The open door of the room into which Bampfylde had gone showed the ordinary cottage dresser with its gleaming plates (a decoration which in these days has mounted from the kitchen to the drawing-room), deal table, and old-fashioned settle, lighted dimly by a small lamp on the mantelpiece, and the smouldering red of the fire. 'Lizabeth closed the door slowly, and with trembling hands, which trembled still more when Geoff attempted to help her. "No, no; go in, go in, my young gentleman. Let me be. It's me to serve the like of you, not the like of you to open or shut my door for me. Ah, these are the ways that make you differ from common folk!" she said, as the young man stood back to let her pass. "My son leaves me to do whatever's to be done, and goes in before me, and calls me to serve him; but the like of you—. It was that, and not his name or his money, that took my Lily's heart."

Geoff followed her into the kitchen. It was low and large, with a small deep-set window

at each corner, as is usual in such cottages. Before the fire was spread a large rug of home manufacture, made of scraps of coloured cloth, arranged in an indistinct pattern upon a black background, and Bampfylde was occupying himself busily, putting forward a large high easy-chair in front of the fire, and breaking the "gathered" coals to give at once heat and light. "Sit you down there," he said, thrusting Geoff into it almost with violence, "you're little used to midnight strolling. Me, it's meat and drink to me to be free and aneath the stars. Let her be, let her be. She's not like one of your ladies. Her own way, that's all the like of her can ever get to please them —and she's gotten that," he said, giving another vigorous poke to the fire. Up here among the fells the fire was pleasant, though it was the middle of August: and Geoff's young frame was sufficiently unused to such long trudges to make him glad of the rest. He sat down and looked round him with a grateful sense of the warmth and repose. A north-country cottage was no strange place to young Lord Stanton, and all the tremour of the adventure had passed from him at the sight of the light and the homely, kindly interior. No harm could possibly happen in so familiar

an atmosphere, and in such a natural place. Meantime old 'Lizabeth, with a thrill of agitation in her movements which was very apparent, busied herself in laying the table, putting down a clean tablecloth, and placing bread, cheese, and milk upon it. "I have wine, if you like wine better," she said. "He will get it, but he takes none himself—nothing, poor lad, nothing. He's a good son and a good lad—many a time I've thanked God that He's left me such a lad to be the comfort of my old age."

Wild Bampfylde gave a laugh which was harsh and broken. "You were not always so thankful," he said, producing out of some unseen corner a black bottle; "but the milk is better of its kind, being natural, than the wine."

"Hush, lad; milk is little to the like of him; but *that's* good, for I have it here for—a sick person. Take something, take something, young gentleman. You can trust them that have broken bread in your presence, and sat at your table. Well, if you will have the milk, though it costs but little, it's good too; I would not give my brown cow for ne'er a one in the dales; and eat a bit of the wheaten bread,—it's baker's bread, like what

you eat at your own grand house. I would not be so mean as to set you down, a gentleman like you, to what's good and good enough for us. The griddle-cake! no, but you'll not eat that, my young lord, not that; it's o'er homely for the like of you."

"I am not hungry," said Geoff, "and I came here, you know, not to eat and drink, but to hear something you had to tell me, Mrs. Bampfylde—"

"My name is 'Lizabeth—nobody says mistress to me."

"Well; but you have something to tell me. I left home without any explanation, and I wish to get back soon, that they—that my mother," said Geoff, half-ashamed, yet too proud to omit the apparently (he thought) childish excuse, since it was true, "may not be uneasy."

"Your mother? forgive me that did not mind your mother! Oh, you're a good lad; you're worthy a woman's trust that thinks of your mother, and dares to say it! Ay, ay—there's plenty to tell; if I can make up my mind to it—if I can make up my mind!"

"Was not your mind made up then," said Geoff with some impatience, "when in this way, in the night, you sent for me?"

"Oh lad!" cried 'Lizabeth, wringing her

hands. "How was I to know you would come, the like of you to the like of me? I put it on Providence that has been often contrairy—oh, aye contrairy, to mine and me. I shouldn't have tempted God. I said to myself, if he comes it will be the hand of Heaven. But who was to think you would come? You a lord, and a fine young gentleman, and me a poor old woman, old as your grandmother. I thought my heart would have sunk to my shoes when I saw he had come after a'!"

"I told you he would come," said Bampfylde, who stood leaning against the mantelpiece. He had taken his bread and cheese from the table, and was eating it where he stood.

"Of course I would come," said Geoff. "I could not suppose you would send for me for nothing. I knew it must be something important. Tell me now, for here I am."

'Lizabeth sat down, dropping into a wooden arm-chair at the end of the table with a kind of despair, and throwing her apron over her head, fell a-crying feebly. "What am I to do? what am I to do?" she said, sobbing. "I have tempted Providence—Oh, but I forgot what was written, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'"

For a minute or two neither of the men

spoke, and the sounds of her distress were all that was audible. Once or twice, indeed, Geoff thought he heard a faint sound, like the echo of some low wail or moan come through the silence. Not the moan itself, but an echo, a ghost of it. But his companions took no notice of this, and he thought he must be mistaken. Everything besides was still. The fire by this time had burned up, and now and then broke into a little flutter of flame; the clock went on ticking with that measured steady movement which 'beats out the little lives of men;' and the broken sobs grew lower. An impatience of the stillness began to take possession of Geoff, but what was he to do? He restrained himself with an effort.

"You should make a clean breast," said Bampfylde, munching his bread and cheese as he spoke, with his eyes fixed on the fire, not looking at his mother. "Long since it would have been well to do it and an ease to your mind. I would make a clean breast now."

"Oh, lad, a clean breast, a clean breast!" she said, rocking herself, "If it was only me it concerned—if it was only me!"

"If it was only you what would it matter?" said the vagrant, with a philosophy which sounded less harsh to the person addressed

than to him who looked on. "You—you're old, and you'll die, and there would be an end of it; but them that suffer most have years and years before them, and if you die before you do justice——"

"Then *you* can tell, that have aye wanted to tell!" she cried with a hot outburst of indignation mingled with tears. Then she resumed that monotonous movement, rocking herself again and again, and calmed herself down. It is not so intolerable to a peasant to be told of his or her approaching end as it is to others. She was used to plain speech, and was it not reasonable what he said? "It's all true, quite true. I'm old, and I cannot bide here for ever to watch him and think of him—and I might make a friend, the Lord grant it, and find one to stand by him——"

"You mean another, a second one," said her son. He stood through all this side dialogue munching his bread and cheese without once glancing at her even, his shoulders high against the mantelpiece, his eyes cast down.

After a moment's interval 'Lizabeth rose. She came forward moving feebly in her agitation to where Geoff sat. "My young lord, if I tell you *that* that I would rather die than tell—that that breaks my heart: you'll mind

that I am doing it to make amends to the dead and to the living—and—you'll swear to me first to keep it secret? You'll swear your Bible oath?—without that, not another word."

"Swear!" said Geoff, in alarm.

"Just swear—you can do it as well, they tell me, in one place as another, in a private house or a justice court. I hope we have Bibles here—Bibles enough—if we but make a right use of them," said the old woman, perplexed, mingling the formulas of common life with the necessities of an extraordinary and unrealized emergency. "Here is a Testament, that is what is taken to witness in the very court itself. You'll lay you hand upon it, and you'll kiss the book and swear. Where are you going to, young man?"

Geoff rose and pushed away the book she had placed before him. He was half indignant, half disappointed. "Swear!" he said; "do you know what I want this information for? Is it to lock it up in my mind, as you seem to have done? I want it for use. I want it to help a man who has been cruelly treated between you. I have no right to stand up for him," said Geoff, his nostrils expanding, his cheeks flushing, "but I feel for him—and do you think I will consent to put

my last chance away, and hear your story for no good? No, indeed; if I am not to make use of it I will go back again and find out for myself —I don't want to be told."

The old woman, and it may be added her son also, stood and gazed upon the glowing eager countenance of the young man with a mingling of feelings which it would be impossible to describe. Admiration, surprise, and almost incredulity were in them. He had not opposed them hitherto, and it was almost impossible to believe that he would have the courage to oppose them so decidedly; but as he stood confronting them, young, simple, ingenuous, reasonable, they were both convinced of their error. Geoff would yield no more than the hill behind. His very simplicity and easiness made him invulnerable. Wild Bampfylde burst into that sudden broken laugh which is with some the only evidence of emotion. He came forward hastily and patted Geoff's shoulder, "That's right, my lad, that's right," he cried.

"You will not," said old 'Lizabeth; "not swear?—and not hear me?—oh but you're bold—oh, but you've a stout heart to say that to me in my ain house! Then the Lord's delivered me, and I'll say nothing," she said with a sudden cry of delight.

Her son came up and took her by the arm. "Look here," he said, "it was me that brought him. I did not approve, but I did your bidding, as I've always done your bidding; but I've changed my mind if you've changed yours. Now that he is here, make no more fuss, but tell him; for, remember, I know everything as well as you do, and if you will not, I will. We have come too far to go back now. Tell him; or I will take him where he can see with his own eyes."

"See! what will he see?" cried 'Lizabeth, with a flush of angry colour. "Do you threaten me, lad? He'll see a poor afflicted creature; but that will tell him nothing."

"Mother! are you aye the same? Still *him*, always him, whatever happens. What has there been that has not yielded to him? the rest of us, your children as well, and justice and honour and right and your own comfort, and the young Squire's life. Oh, it's been a bonnie business from first to last! And if you will not tell now, then there is no hope that I can see; and I will do it myself. I am not threatening; but what must be, must be. Mother, I'll have to do it myself."

When he first addressed her as mother, 'Lizabeth had started with a little cry. What

might be the reason that made this mode of expression unusual it was impossible to say; but it affected the old woman as nothing had yet done. She looked up at him with a wondering, wistful inquiry in her face, as if to ask in what meaning he used the word—kindly or unkindly, taunting or loving? When he repeated the name she started up as if the sound stung her, and stood for a moment like one driven half out of herself by force of pressure. She looked wildly round her as if looking for some escape, then suddenly seized the lighted candle, which still burned on the table. "Then if it must be, let it be," she said. "Oh, lad! it's years and years since I've heard that name! you that would not, and him that could not, and her that was far away; was there ever a mother as sore punished?" But it would seem that this expression of feeling exhausted the more generous impulse, for she set down the light on the table again, and dropping into her seat, threw her apron over her head. "No, I canna do it; I canna do it. Let him die in quiet. It canna be long."

The vagrant watched her with a keen scrutiny quite unlike his usual careless ways. "It's not them as are a burden on the earth

that dies," he said. "You've said that long —let him die in peace; let him die in peace. Am I wishing him harm? There's ne'er a one will hurt *him*. He's safe enough. Whoever suffers, it will not be him."

"Oh, lad, lad!" cried the mother, uncovering her face to look at him. At 'Lizabeth's age there are no floods of tears possible. Her eyes were drawn together and full of moisture —that was all. She looked at him with a passion of reproach and pain. "Did you say suffer? What's a' the troubles that have been into this house to his affliction? My son, my son, my miserable lad! You that can come and go as you like, that have a mind free, that have your light heart—oh ay, you have a light heart, or how could you waste your days and your nights among beasts and wild things? How can the like of you judge the like of him?"

During this long discussion, to which he had no sort of clue, Geoff stood looking from one to another in a state of perplexity impossible to describe. It could not be John Musgrave they were talking of? Who could it be? Some one who was "afflicted," yet who had been exempt from burdens which had fallen in his stead upon others. Young

Lord Stanton, who had come here eager to hear all the story in which he was so much interested, anxious to discover everything, stood, his eyes growing larger, his lips dropping apart in sheer wonder, listening; and feeling all the time that these two peasants spoke a different language from himself, and one to which he had no clue. Just then, however, in the dead silence after 'Lizabeth had spoken, the faint sound like a muffled cry which he had heard before, broke in more loudly. It made Geoff start, who could not guess what it meant, and it roused his companions effectually, who did know. 'Lizabeth wrung her hands; she raised her head in an agony of listening. "He has got one of his ill turns," she said. Bampfylde, too, abandoned his careless attitude by the mantelpiece, and stood up watchful, startled into readiness and preparation as for some emergency. But the cry was not repeated, and gradually the tension relaxed again. "It would be but an ill dream," said 'Lizabeth, pressing a handkerchief to her wet eyes.

Geoff did not know what to do. He was in the midst of some family mystery, which might or might not relate to the other mystery which it was his object to clear up; and this intense

atmosphere of anxiety awoke the young man's ready sympathies. All his feelings had changed since he came into the cottage. He who had come a stranger, ready to extract what they could tell by any means, harsh or kind, and who did not know what harshness he might encounter or what danger he might himself run, had passed over entirely to their side. He was as safe as in his own house; he was as deeply interested as he would have been in a personal trouble. His voice faltered as he spoke. "I don't know what it is that distresses you," he said; "I don't want to pry into your trouble; but if I can help you you know I will, and I will betray none of your secrets that you trust me with. I will say nothing more than is necessary to clear Musgrave—if Musgrave can be cleared."

"Musgrave! Musgrave!" cried old 'Lizabeth, impatiently; "it's him you all think of, not my boy. And what has he lost, when all's done? He got his way, and he got my Lily; never since then have I set eyes on her, and never will. I paid him the price of my Lily for what he did; and was that nothing? Musgrave! Speak no more o' Musgrave to me!"

"Oh, mother," said her son, with kindred impatience, as he walked towards her and

seized her arm in sudden passion; "oh, 'Lizabeth Bampfylde! You do more than murder men, for you kill the pity in them! What's all you have done compared to what John Musgrave has done? and me—am I nothing? Two—three of us! Lily, too, you've sacrificed Lily! And is it all to go on to another generation, and the wrong to last? I think you have a heart of stone—a heart of stone to them and to me!"

At this moment there was another louder cry, and mother and son started together with one impulse, forgetting their struggle. 'Lizabeth took up the candle from the table, and Bampfylde hastily went to a cupboard in the corner, from which he took out something. He made an imperative sign to Geoff to follow, as he hurried after his mother. They went through a narrow winding passage lighted only by the flickering of the candle which 'Lizabeth carried, and by what looked like a mass of something white breaking the blackness, but was in reality the moonlight streaming in through a small window. At the end of the passage was a steep stair, almost like a ladder. Already Geoff, hurrying after the mother and son, was prepared by the cries for what the revelation was likely to be; and he was scarcely surprised

when, after careful reconnoitring by an opening in the door, defended by iron bars, they both entered hastily, though with precaution, leaving him outside. Geoff heard the struggle that ensued, the wild cries of the madman, the aggravation of frenzy which followed, when it was evident they had secured him. Neither mother nor son spoke, but went about their work with the precision of long use. Geoff had not the heart to look in through the opening which Bampfylde had left free. Why should he spy upon them? He could not tell what connection this prison chamber had with the story of John Musgrave, but there could be little doubt of the secret here inclosed. He did not know how long he waited outside, his young frame all thrilling with excitement and painful sympathy. How could he help them? was what the young man thought. It was against the law, he knew, to keep a lunatic thus in a private house, but Geoff thought only of the family, the mysterious burden upon their lives, the long misery of the sufferer. He was overawed, as youth naturally is, by contact with misery so hopeless and so terrible. After a long time Bampfylde came out, his dress torn and disordered, and great drops of moisture hanging on his forehead. "Have you

seen him?" he asked in a whisper. He did not understand Geoff's hesitation and delicacy, but with a certain impatience pointed him to the opening in the door, which was so high up that Geoff had to ascend two rough wooden steps placed there for the purpose, to look through. The room within was higher than could have been supposed from the height of the cottage; it was not ceiled, but showed the construction of the roof, and in a rude way it was padded here and there, evidently to prevent the inmate doing himself a mischief. The madman lay upon a mattress on the floor, so confined now that he could only lie there and pant and cry; his mother sat by him, motionless. Though his face was wild, and distorted, and his eyes gleaming furiously out of its paleness, this unhappy creature had the same handsome features which distinguished the family. Young Geoff could scarcely restrain a shiver, not of fear, but of nervous excitement, as he looked at this miserable sight. Old 'Lizabeth sat confronting him, unconscious of the hurried look which was all Geoff could give. She was clasping her knees with her hands in one of those forced and rigid attitudes almost painful, which seem to give a kind of ease to pain—and sat with her head raised, and her strained

eyes pitifully vacant, in that pause of half-unconsciousness in which all the senses are keen, yet the mind stilled with very excitement. "I cannot spy upon them," said Geoff, in a whisper. "Is it safe to leave her there?"

"Quite safe; and at his maddest he never harmed her," said Bampfylde, leading the way down stairs. "That's my brother," he said, with bitterness, when they had reached the living-room again; "my gentleman brother! him that was to be our honour and glory. You see what it's come to; but nothing will win her heart from him. If we should all perish, what of that? 'Lizabeth Bampfylde will aye have saved her son from shame. But come, come, sit down and eat a bit, my young lord. At your age the like of all this is bad for you."

"For me—what does it matter about me?" cried Geoff; "you seem to have borne it for years."

"You may say that: for years—and would for years more, if she had her way; but a man must eat and drink, if his heart be sore. Take a morsel of something and a drink to give you strength to go home."

"I am very, very sorry for you," said Geoff, "but—you will think it heartless to say so—I

have learned nothing. There is some mystery, but I knew as much as that before."

Bampfylde was moving about in the background searching for something. He reappeared as Geoff spoke with a bottle in his hand, and poured out for him a glass of dark-coloured wine. It was port, the wine most trusted in such humble houses. "Take this," he said; "take it, it's good, it will keep up your strength; and bide a moment till she comes. She will tell you herself—or if not I will tell you; but now you've seen all the mysteries of this house, she will have to yield, she will have to yield at the last."

Geoff obeyed, being indeed very much exhausted and shaken by all that had happened. He swallowed the sweet, strong decoction of unknown elements, which Bampfylde called port wine, and believed in as a panacea, and tried to eat a morsel of the oat-cake. They heard the distant moans gradually die out, as the blueness of dawn stole in at the window. Bampfylde, whose tongue seemed to be loosed by this climax of excitement, began to talk; he told Geoff of the long watch of years which they had kept, how his mother and he relieved each other, and how they had hoped the patient was growing calmer, how he had

mended and calmed down, sometimes for long intervals, but then grown worse again; and the means they had used to restrain him, and all the details of his state. When the ice was thus broken, it seemed a relief to talk of it. "He was to make all our fortunes," Bampfylde said; "he was a gentleman—and he was a great scholar. All her pride was in him; and this is what it's come to now."

They had fallen into silence when 'Lizabeth came in. Their excitement had decreased, thanks to the conversation and the natural relief which comes after a crisis, but hers was still at its full height. She came in solemnly, and sat down amongst them, the blue light from the window making a paleness about her as she placed herself in front of it; though the lamp was still burning on the mantelshelf, and the fire kept up a ruddy variety of light. She seated herself in the big wooden arm-chair with a solemn countenance and fixed her eyes upon Geoff, who, moved beyond measure by pity and reverence, did not know what to think.

"He will have told you," she said. "I would have died sooner, my young lord; and soon I'll die—but, my boy first, I pray God. Ay, you've seen him now. That was him that

was my pride; that was the hope I had in my life; that was him that killed young Lord Stanton and made John Musgrave an exile and a wanderer. Ay—you know it all now."

CHAPTER VI.

AN EARLY MEETING.

GEOFF left the cottage when the sun had just risen. He was half-giddy, half-stunned by the strange new light, unexpected up to the last moment, which had been thrown upon the whole question which he had undertaken to solve. He was giddy too with fatigue, the night's watch, the long walk, the want of sleep. Besides all these confusing influences there is something in the atmosphere of the very early morning, the active stillness, the absence of human life, the pre-occupation of Nature with a hundred small (as it were) domestic cares, such as she never exhibits to the eye of man, that moves the mind of an unaccustomed observer to a kind of rapture, bewildering in its solemn influence. To come out from the lonely little house folded among the hills, with all its miseries past and present, its sad story, its secret, the atmosphere

of human suffering in it, to all the still glory of the summer morning, was of itself a bewilderment. The same world, and only a step between them: but one all pain and darkness, mortal anguish, and confusion—the other all so clear, so sweet, so still, solemn with the serious beginning of the new day, and instinct with that great, still pressure of something more than what is seen, some soul of earth and sky which goes deeper than all belief, and which no sceptic of the higher kind, but only the gross and earthly, can disbelieve in. Young Geoff disbelieving nothing, his heart full of the faith and conviction of youth, came out into this wide purity and calm with an expansion of all his being. It was all he could do not to burst into sudden tears when he felt the sudden relief—the dew crept to his eyelids though it did not fall, his bosom contracted and expanded as with a sob. To this world of mountain and cloud—of rising sunshine and soft breathing air, and serene delicious silence, pervaded by the soft indistinguishable hum of unseen water and rustling grasses, and minute living creatures unseen too beneath the mountain herbage—what is the noblest palace built with hands but a visible limitation and contraction of the world, an

appropriation of a petty corner out of which human conceit makes its centre of the earth? Bampfylde, who had come out with him, and to whom the story Geoff had just heard was not new, felt the relief more simply. He drew a long breath of refreshment and ease, expanding his breast and stretching out his arms; and then this rough vagrant fellow, unconscious of literature, did what Virgil in the *Purgatorio* did in such a morning for his poet companion; he spread both his hands upon the fragrant grass, all heavy with the early dew, and bathed his face and weary eyes.

"That's life," said the man of woods and hills; the freshness of nature was all the help he had, all the support as well as all the poetry his maimed existence could possess.

Bampfylde went with his young companion round the shoulder of the hill to show him the way. It was a nearer and shorter road to the level country than that by which they had come, for Geoff was anxious to get home early. Bampfylde pointed out to him the line of road which twisted about and about like a ribbon, crossing now one slope, now another, till it disappeared upon the shadowed side of the green hill which presided over Penninghame, and

beyond which the lake gleamed blue, not yet reached by the sunshine.

"It's like the story," he said; "it's like a parable; ye come by Stanton, my young lord, and ye go by Penninghame. It's your nearest way; and there, if you ask at John Armstrong's in the village, ye'll get a trap to take you home."

Geoff was not sufficiently free in mind to be able to give any attention to the parable. Those fantastic symbolisms of accident or circumstance which so often would seem to be arranged like shadows of more important matters by some elfish secondary providence, need a spirit at rest to enter into them. He was glad to be alone, to realize all that he had heard, to compose the wonderful tangle of new information and new thoughts into something coherent, without troubling himself about the fact that he was now bending his steps direct, the representative of Walter Stanton who had been killed, towards the house from which John Musgrave had been wrongfully driven for having killed him. He did not even yet know all the particulars of the story, and as he endeavoured to disentangle them in his mind Geoff felt in his bewilderment that absolute want of

control over his own intelligence and thoughts which is the common result of fatigue and overstrain. Instead of thinking out the imbroglio and deciding what was to be done, his mind, like a tired child, kept playing with the rising light which touched every moment a new peak and caught every moment a new reflection in some bit of mountain stream or waterfall, or even in a ditch or moorland cutting, so impartial is Heaven; or his ear was caught by that hum of mystic indistinguishable multitude—"the silence of the hills," so called—the soft rapture of sound in which not one tone is distinct or anything audible; or his eye by the gradual unrolling of the landscape as he went on, one fold opening beyond another, the distant hills on one hand, the long stretch of Penninghame water with all its miniature bays and curves. Then for a little while he lost the lake by a doubling of the path, which seemed to reinclose him among the hollows of the hills, and which pleased his languid faculties with the complete change of its shade and greenness; until turning the next corner, he found the sun triumphant over all the landscape, and Penninghame water lying like a sheet of silver or palest gold, dazzling and flashing

between its slopes. This wonderful glory so suddenly bursting upon him completed the discomfiture of young Geoff's attempts at thought. He gave it up then, and went on with weary limbs and a mind full of languid soft delight in the air about him and the scene before his eyes, attempting no more deductions from what he had heard or arrangements as to what he should do. Emotion and exertion together had worn him out.

About the time he resigned himself (with the drowsy surprise we feel in dreams) to this incapable state, his eye was caught by a speck upon the road beneath advancing towards him, so small in the distance that Geoff's languid imagination, capable of no more active exercise, began to wonder who the little pilgrim could be, so little and so lonely, and so early astir. Perhaps it was the distance that made the advancing passenger look so small. Little Lilias at the Castle would have satisfied her mind by the easy conclusion that it was some little fairy old woman, the traveller most naturally to be met with at such an hour and place. But Geoff, more artificial, did not think of that. He kept watching the little wayfarer, as the figure appeared and disappeared on the winding road. By and by he

made out that it was either a very small woman or a little girl, coming on steadily to meet him, with now and then an occasional pause for breath, for the ascent was steep. Geoff's mind got quite entangled with this little figure. Who could it be? who could she be? A little cottager bound on some early expedition, seeking some of the mountain fruits, blackberries, cranberries, wild strawberries, perhaps: but then she never turned aside to the rougher ground, but kept on the path;—or she might be going to some farmhouse to get milk for the family breakfast: but then there were no farmhouses in that direction. Altogether Geoff felt himself quite sufficiently occupied as he came gradually downwards watching this child, his limbs feeling heavy, and his head somewhat light. At last, after losing sight of the little figure which had given him for some time a sort of distant companionship, another turn brought him full in sight of her, and so near that he recognised her with the most curious and startling interest. He could not restrain an exclamation of surprise. It was the little girl whom he had met at the door of Penninghame Castle, John Musgrave's child, the most appropriate, yet the most extraordinary, of all

encounters he could have made. He stood still in his surprise, awaiting her; and as for little Lilias, she made a sudden spring towards him, holding out her hand with a cry of joy, her little pale face crimsoned over with relief and pleasure. Her heart and limbs were beginning to fail her; she had begun to grow frightened and discouraged by the loneliness; and to see a face that had been seen before, that had looked friendly, that recognised her—what a relief it was to the little wayfaring soul! She sprang forward to him, and then in the comfort of it fairly broke down, and sobbed and cried, trying to smile all the time, and to tell him that she was glad, and that he must not mind.

Geoff, however, minded very much. He was full of concern and sympathy. He took her hand, and putting his arm round her (for she was still a child), led her to the soft, mossy bank on the edge of the path, and placed her there to rest. He was not at all sorry to place himself beside her, notwithstanding his haste. He, too, was so young and so tired! though for the moment he forgot both his fatigue and his youth, and felt most fatherly, soothing the little girl, and entreating her to take comfort, and not to cry.

"Oh," said little Lilias, when she recovered the power of speech, "I am not crying for trouble, *now;* I am crying for pleasure. It was so lonely. I thought everybody must be dead, and there was no one but only me in all the world."

"That was exactly what I felt too," said Geoff; "but what are you doing here, so far away, and all alone? Have you lost yourself? Has anything happened? When you have rested a little, you must come back with me, and I will take you home."

The tears were still upon the child's cheeks, and two great lucid pools in her eyes, which made their depths of light more unfathomable than ever. And after the sudden flush of excitement and pleasure, Lilias had paled again; her little countenance was strangely white; her dark hair hung, loosely curling, about her cheeks; her eyes were full of pathetic meaning. Geoff, who had thrown himself down beside her, with one arm half round her, and holding her small hand in his, felt his young breast swell with the tenderest sympathy. What was the child's trouble that was so great? Poor little darling! How sweet it was to be able to fill up her world, and prove to her that there was not "only me." One

other made all the difference; and Geoff felt this as much as she did. Her face had gleamed so often across his imagination since he saw it: the most innocent visitant that could come and look a young man in the face in the midst of his dreams—only a child! He felt disposed to kiss the little hand in half fondness, half reverence; but did not, being restrained by something more reverent and tender still.

"I would like to go with you," said Lilias, "but not home. I am not going home. I am going up there—up, I don't know how far—where the old woman lives. I am trying to find something out, something about papa. Oh, I wonder if you know! Are you a friend of my papa? You look as if you had a friend's face—but I don't know your name."

"My name—is Geoffrey Stanton—but most people call me Geoff. I should like you to call me Geoff—and I am a friend, little Lily. You are Lily *too*, are you not? I am a sworn friend to your papa."

"Lilias," said the child, with a sigh; "but I don't think I am little any more. I was little when I came, but old; oh! much older than any one thought. They thought I was only ten because I was so little; but I was twelve! and that will soon be a year ago.

I have always taken care of Nello as long as I can remember, and that makes one old, you know. And now here is this about papa, which I never knew, which I never heard of, which is not true, I know. I know it is not true. Papa kill any one! *papa?* Do you know what that means? It is as if——the sky should kill some one, or the beautiful kind light, or a little child. All that, all that, sooner than papa! Me, I have often felt as if I could kill somebody; but *he*——" the tears were streaming in a torrent down the child's cheeks, and got into her voice; but she went on, "he! people don't know what they are saying. I do not know any words to tell you how different he is—that it is impossible, *impossible! impossible!*" she cried, her voice rising in intensity of emphasis. As for Geoff, he held her hand ever closer, and kept gazing at her with the tears coming to his own eyes.

"He did not do it," he said. "Listen to me, Lilias, and if you write to him, you can tell him. Tell him Geoffrey Stanton knows everything, and will never rest till he is cleared. Do you know what I mean? You must tell him——"

"But I never write—we do not know where

he is ; but tell me over again for me, *me*. He did not do it ! Do you think I do not know that ? But Mr. Geoff (if that is your name), come with me up to the old woman, and take her to the tribunal, and make her tell what she knows. That is the right way, Martuccia says so, and I have read it in books. She must go to the judge, and she must say it all, and have it written down in a book. It is like that—I am not so ignorant. Come with me to the old woman, Mr. Geoff."

"What old woman ?" he asked. "And tell me how you heard of all this, Lilias ? You did not know it when I saw you before."

"Last night—only last night ; there is a man, an unkind, disagreeable man, who is at the Castle now. Mary said he was my uncle Randolph. They were in the hall, and I heard them talking. That man said it all ; but Mary did not say No as I do, she only cried. And then I rushed and asked Miss Brown what it meant. Miss Brown is Mary's maid, and she knows everything. She told me about a gentleman, and then of some one who was mamma, and of an old woman who could tell it all, up, up on the mountain. I think perhaps, it is the same old woman I saw."

"Did you see her? When did you see her, Lily?"

"I was little then," said Lilias, with mournful, childish dignity. "I had not begun to know. I thought, perhaps, it was a fairy. Yes, you will laugh. I was only not much better than a child. And when children are in the woods, don't you know, fairies often come? I was ignorant, that was what I thought. She was very kind. She kissed me, and asked if I would call her granny. Poor old woman! She was very very sorry for something. I think that must be the old woman. She knows everything, Miss Brown says. Mr. Geoff," said Lilias, turning round upon him, putting her two clasped hands suddenly upon his shoulder, and fixing her eyes upon his face, "I am going to her, will you not come with me? It is dreadful, dreadful, to go away far alone—everything looks so big and so high, and one only, one is so small; and everything is singing altogether, and it is all so still; and then your heart beats and thumps, and you have no breath, and it is so far, far away. Mr. Geoff, oh! I would love you so much, I would thank you for ever, I would do anything for you, if you would only come with me! I am not really tired; only

frightened. If I could have brought Nello, it would have been nothing. I should have had him to take care of,— but Nello is such a little fellow. He does not understand anything; he could not know about papa as I do, and as you seem to do. Mr. Geoff, when was it you saw papa? Oh! will you come up, up yonder, and go to the old woman with me?"

"Dear little Lily," said Geoff, holding her in his arms, "you are not able to walk so far; it is too much for you; you must come with me, home."

"I am able to go to the end of the world," cried Lilias, proudly. "I am not tired. Oh, if you had never come I should have gone on, straight on! I was thinking, perhaps, you would go with me, that made me so stupid. No, never mind, since you do not choose to come. Good-bye, Mr. Geoff. No, I am not angry. Perhaps you are tired yourself:—and then," said Lilias, her voice quivering, "you are not papa's child, and it is not your business. Oh! I am quite able to go on. I am not tired—not at all tired; it was only," she said, vehemently, the tears overpowering her voice, "only because I caught sight of you so suddenly, and I thought 'he will come with me,'

and it made my heart so easy—but never mind, never mind!"

By this time she was struggling to escape from him, to go on, drying her tears with a hasty hand. Her lips were quivering, scarcely able to form the words. The disappointment, after that little burst of hope, was almost more than Lilias could bear.

"Lily," he said, holding her fast, despite her struggles, "listen first. I have just been there. I have seen the old woman. There is nothing more for you to do, dear. Won't you listen to me,—won't you believe me? Dear little Lily, I have found out everything. I know everything. I cannot tell it you all, out here on the hill-side; but it was another who did it, and your father was so kind, so good, that he allowed it to be supposed it was he, to save the other man——"

"Ah!" cried Lilias, ceasing to struggle, "ah! yes, that is like him. I know my papa, there! yes, that is what he would do. Oh, Mr. Geoff, dear Mr. Geoff, tell me more, more!"

"As we go home," said Geoff. He was so tired that it was all he could do to raise himself again from the soft cushions of the mossy grass. He held Lilias still by the hand. And

in this way the two wearied young creatures went down the rest of the long road together —she, eager, with her face raised to him ; he stooping towards her. They leaned against each other in their weariness, walking on irregularly, now slow, now faster, hand in hand. And oh! how much shorter the way seemed to Lilias as she went back. She vowed never, never to tell any one ; never to talk of it except to Mr. Geoff: while Geoff, on his part, promised that everything should be set right, that everybody should know her father to be capable of nothing evil, but of everything good ; that all should be well with him ; that he should come and live at home for ever, and that all good people should be made happy, and all evil ones confounded. The one was scarcely more confident than the other that all this was possible and likely, as the boy and the girl came sweetly down the hill together, tired but happy, with traces of tears about their eyes, but infinite relief in their hearts. The morning, now warm with the full glory of the sun, was sweet beyond all thought—the sky, fathomless blue, above them —the lake a dazzling sheet of silver at their feet. Here and there sounds began to stir of awakening in the little farmhouses, and under

the thatched cottage eaves; but still they had the earth all to themselves like a younger Adam and Eve—nothing but blue space and distance, sweet sunshine warming and rising, breathing of odours and soft baptism of dew upon the new-created pair.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HENS AND THE DUCKLING.

It was still early, and Stanton, so easy-going and leisurely a house, was not yet astir when Geoff got home. Hours of sunshine and morning light are over even in August before seven o'clock, which was the earliest hour at which Lady Stanton's servants, who were all "so kind" to her, began to stir. They kept earlier hours at Penninghame, where Geoff managed to get a dog-cart, with an inquisitive driver, who recognised, and would fain have discovered what brought him from home at that hour. The young man, however, first took leave of his little companion, whom he deposited safely at the door of the old hall, which was already open, and where they parted with mutual vows of reliance and faith in each other. These vows, however,

were not exchanged by the hall-gate, but in a shady corner of the Chase, where the two young creatures paused for a moment.

"You will trust me that I will do everything for him, as if he had been my own father?" said Geoff.

Lilias, over whom some doubts had begun to steal, faltered a little, and replied with some hesitation:

"I would rather it was me; I would rather find out everything, and bring him home," she said.

"But Lily, what could you do? while you see I know a great deal already," Geoff said. Now that he was about to vanish out of her sight the bargain began to feel less satisfactory to the little woman, who was thus condemned, as so many grown women have been, to wait indefinitely for the action of another, in a matter so deeply interesting to herself. Lilias looked at him wistfully, with an anxious curve over her eyebrows, and a quiver in her mouth. The tension of suspense had begun for her, which is one of the hardest burdens of a woman. Oh, if she could but have gone herself, not waiting for any one, to the old woman on the hill! It was true the mountains were very lonely, and

the relief of meeting Geoff had been intense; and though she had not gone half way, or nearly so much, her limbs were aching with the unusual distance; but yet to be tired, and lonely, and frightened is nothing, as Lilias felt, to this waiting, which might never come to an end. And already the ease and comfort and sudden relief with which she had leant upon Geoff's understanding and sympathy, had evaporated a little, leaving behind only the strange story about her father, the sudden discovery of trouble and sorrow which had startled her almost into womanhood out of childhood. She looked up into Geoff's face very wistfully—very anxiously; her eyes dilated, and gleaming with that curve over them which once indented in young brows so seldom altogether disappears again.

"Oh, Mr. Geoff!" she said, "but papa—is not your papa: and you will perhaps have other things to do: or—perhaps—you will forget. But me, I shall be always thinking, I shall never forget," said the little girl.

"And neither shall I forget, my little Lily!" he cried. He too was nervous and tremulous with excitement and fatigue. He stooped towards her, holding her hands. "Give me a kiss, Lily, and I will never forget."

The day before she would not have thought much of that infantile salutation—and she put up her soft cheek readily enough, with the child's simple habit; but when the two faces touched, a flood of colour came over both, scorching Lilias, as it seemed, with a sense of shame which bewildered her, which she did not understand. She drew back hastily, with a sudden cry. Sympathy, or some other feeling still more subtle and incomprehensible, made Geoff's young countenance flame too. He looked at her with a tenderness that brought the tears to his eyes.

"You are only a child," he said, hastily, apologetically; "and I suppose I am not much more, as people say," he added, with a little broken laugh. Then, after a pause—"But Lily, we will never forget that we have met this morning; and what one of us does will be for both of us; and you will always think of me as I shall always think of you. Is it a bargain, Lily?"

"Always!" said the little girl, very solemnly; and she gave him her hand again which she had drawn away, and her other cheek; and this time the kiss got accomplished solemnly, as if it had been a religious cere-

mony on both sides—which indeed, perhaps, in one way or another it was.

When Geoff felt himself carried rapidly, after this, behind a fresh country horse, with the inquisitive ruddy countenance of Robert Gill from the "Penninghame Arms" by his side, along the margin of Penninghame Water towards his home, there was a thrill and tremor in him which he could not quite account for. By the time he had got half way home, however, he had begun to believe that the tremor meant nothing more than a nervous uncertainty as to how he should get into Stanton, and in what state of abject terror he might find his mother. Even to his own unsophisticated mind, the idea of being out all night had an alarming and disreputable sound; and probably Lady Stanton had been devoured by all manner of terrors. The perfectly calm aspect of the house, however, comforted Geoff; no one seemed stirring, except in the lower regions, where the humblest of its inhabitants — the servants' servants—were preparing for their superiors.

Geoff dismissed his dog-cart outside the gates, leaving upon the mind of Robert Gill a very strong certainty that the young lord was "a wild one, like them that went before

him," and had been upon "no good gait." "Folks don't stay out all night, and creep into th' house through a side door as quiet as pussy, for good," said the rural sage, with perfect reasonableness.

As for Geoff, he stole up through the shrubberies to reconnoitre the house and see where he could most easily make an entrance, with a half-comic sense of vagabondism; a man who behaved so ought to be guilty. But he was greatly surprised to see the library window through which he had come out on the previous night wide open; and yet more surprised to hear, at the sound of his own cautious footstep on the gravel, a still more cautious movement within, and to descry the kindly countenance of Mr. Tritton, his tutor, with a red nose and red eyes as from want of sleep, looking out with great precaution.

Mr. Tritton's anxious countenance lighted up at sight of him. He came to the window very softly, but with great eagerness, to admit Geoff, and threw himself upon his pupil. "Where have you been—where have you been? But thank God you have come back," he cried, in a voice which was broken by agitation.

Geoff could not but laugh, serious as he

had been before. Good Mr. Tritton had a dressing-gown thrown over his evening toilet of the previous night; his white tie was all rumpled and disreputable. He had caught a cold, poor good man, with the open window, and sneezed even as he received his prodigal; his nose was red, and so were his eyes, which watered, half with cold, half with emotion.

"Oh, my dear Geoff," he cried, with a shiver: "what is the cause of this? I have spent a most unhappy night. What can be the cause of it! But thank God you have come back; and if I can keep it from the knowledge of her ladyship, I will." Then, though he was so tired and so serious, Geoff could not but laugh.

"Have you been sitting up for me? How good of you! and what a cold you have got!" he said, struggling between mirth and gratitude. "Have you kept it from my mother? But I have been doing no harm, master. You need not look at me so anxiously. I have been walking almost all the night, and doing no harm."

"My dear Geoff? I have been very uneasy, of course. You never did anything of the kind before. Walking all night! you must be dead tired; but that is secondary, quite

secondary: if you can really assure me, on your honour——" said the anxious tutor, looking at him, with his little white whiskers framing his little red face, more like a good little old woman than ever, and with a look of the most anxious scrutiny in his watery eyes. Mr. Tritton was very virtuous and very particular in his own bachelorly person, and there had crept upon him besides something of the feminine fervour of anxiety about his charge, which was in the air of this feminine and motherly house.

"On my honour!" said Geoff, meeting his gaze with laughing eyes.

And a pang of relief filled Mr. Tritton's mind. He was almost overcome by it, and could have cried but for his dignity—and, indeed, did cry for his cold. He said, faltering, "Thank Heaven, Geoff! I have been very anxious, my dear boy. Your mother does not know anything about it. I found the window open, and then I found your room vacant. I thought you might have—stepped out—perhaps gone to smoke a cigar. A cigar in the fresh air after dinner is perhaps the least objectionable form of the indulgence, as you have often heard me say. So I waited, especially as I had something to say to you.

Then, as I found you did not come in, I became anxious—yes, very anxious as the night went on. You never did anything of the kind before; and when the morning came and woke me—for I suppose I must have dozed, though I was too miserable to sleep, in a draught——"

"Yes, I see, you have caught cold. Go to bed now, master, and so shall I," said Geoff. "I am dead tired. What a sneeze! and all on my account; and you have such bad colds."

"Yes," said Mr. Tritton, blowing his nose vehemently, "I have very bad colds. They last so long. I have sneezed so I really did fear the house would be roused, but servants fortunately sleep through anything. Geoff! I don't want to force confidence, but it really would be right that you should confide in me: otherwise how can I be sure that her ladyship —ought not," said the good man with a fresh sneeze, "to know— ?"

"You ought to be in bed, and so ought I," said Geoff. "I will tell my mother, don't fear; but perhaps it will be as well not to say anything more just at present. Master, you must really go this moment and take care of yourself. Come, and I will see you to your room——"

"Ah! it is my part to look after you,

Geoff," said good Mr. Tritton, "It might be supposed—her ladyship might think—that I had neglected——"

"Come along," said Geoff, arbitrarily, "to bed." And how glad he was to stretch out his own young limbs, and forget everything in the profound sleep of his age! Mr. Tritton had very much the worst of it. He did nothing but sneeze for the next two hours, waking himself up every time he went to sleep; and his head ached, and his eyes watered, and the good man felt thoroughly wretched.

"Oh, there is that poor Mr. Tritton with one of his bad colds again," Lady Stanton said, who was disturbed by the sound; and, though she was a good woman, the pity in her face was not unmixed by other sentiments. "We shall have nothing but sneezing for the next month," she said to herself in an undertone. And doubtless still less favourable judgments were pronounced down stairs. A glass was found on the table of the library in which Mr. Tritton, good man, had taken some camphor by way of staving off his cold while he sat and watched. Harris the butler, perversely and unkindly (for who could mistake the smell of camphor?) declared that "old Tritton had been making a night of it. He

don't surprise me with his bad colds," said that functionary; "look at the colour of his nose!" And indeed it could not be denied that this was red, as the nose of a man subject to fits of sneezing is apt to be.

When Geoff woke in the broad sunshine, and found that it was nearly noon, his first feeling of consternation was soon lost in the strange realization of all that had happened since his last waking, which suddenly came upon his mind like something new, and more real than before. The perspective even of a few hours' sleep makes any new fact or discovery more distinct. So many emotions had followed each other through his mind, that such an interval was necessary to make him feel the real importance of all that he had heard and seen. 'Lizabeth Bampfylde had said what there was to say in few words, but the facts alone were sufficient to make the strange story clear. The chief difficulty was that Geoff had never heard of the elder son, whom the vagrant called his gentleman brother, and to whom the family and more than the family seemed to have been sacrificed. He did not remember any mention of the Bampfyldes except of the mother and daughter who had helped John Musgrave to escape, and one of whom had

disappeared with him, and the mystery which surrounded this other individual, who seemed really the chief actor in the tragedy, had yet to be made out. His mind was full of this as he dressed hastily, with sundry interruptions. The household had not quite made out the events of the past night, but that there had been something "out of the common" was evident to the meanest capacity. The library window had been open all night, which was the fault of Mr. Tritton, who had undertaken to close it, begging Harris to go to bed, and not to mind. Mr. Tritton himself had been seen by an early scullion in his white tie, very much ruffled, at six o'clock; and the volleys of sneezing which had disturbed the house at seven had been distinctly heard moving about like musketry on a march, now at one point, now another, of the corridor and stairs. To crown all these strange commotions was the fact that the young master of the house, instead of obeying Harris's call at half-past seven, did not budge (and then with reluctance) till eleven o'clock. If all these occurrences meant nothing, why then Mr. Harris pronounced himself a Dutchman; and the wonder breathed upwards from the kitchen and housekeeper's room to my lady's chamber, where her maid did

all a maid could do (and this is not little, as most heads of a family know) to awaken suspicion. It was suggested to her ladyship that it was very strange that Mr. Tritton should have been walking about the house at six in the morning, waking up my lady with his sneezings—and it was a mercy there had not been a robbery, with the library window "open to the ground," left open all night: and then for my lord to be in bed at eleven was a thing that had never happened before since his lordship had the measles. "I hope he is not sickening for one of these fevers," Lady Stanton's attendant said.

This made Geoff's mother start, and give a suppressed scream of apprehension, and inquire anxiously whether there was any fever about. She had already in her cool drawing-room, over her needlework, felt a vague uneasiness. Geoff had never, since those days of the measles, missed breakfast and prayers before; he had sent her word that he had overslept himself, that he had been sitting up late on the previous night—but altogether it was odd. Lady Stanton, however, subdued her panic, and sat still and dismissed her maid, waiting with many tremors in her soul till Geoff should come to account for himself.

He had been the best boy in the world, and had never given her any anxiety; but all Lady Stanton's neighbours had predicted the coming of a time when Geoff would "break out," and when the goodness of his earlier days would but increase the riot of the inevitable sowing of wild oats. Lady Stanton had smiled at this, but with a smouldering sense of insecurity in her heart; alarmed, though she knew there was no cause. Mothers are an order of beings peculiarly constituted, full of certainties and doubts, which moment by moment give each other the lie. Ah, no, Geoff would not "break out," would not "go wrong;" it was not in him. He was too true, too honourable, too pure—did not she know every thought in his mind, and feeling in his heart? But oh, the anguish if Geoff should not be so true and so pure—if he should be weak, be tempted and fall, and stain the whiteness which his mother so deeply trusted in, yet so trembled for! Who can understand such paradoxes? She would have believed no harm of her boy—and yet in her horror of harm for him the very name of evil gave her a panic. Nothing wonderful in that. She sat and trembled to the very tyings of her shoe, and yet was sure, certain,

ready to answer to the whole world for her son, who had done no evil. Other women who have sons know what Lady Stanton felt. She sat nervously still, listening to every sound, till he should come and explain himself. Why was he so late? What had happened last night to make the house uneasy? Lady Stanton would not allow herself to think that she was alarmed. It was true that pulses beat in her ears, and her heart mounted to her throat, but she sat as still as a statue, and went on with her knitting. "One may not be able to help being foolish, but one can always help showing it," she said to herself.

The sight of Geoff when he appeared, fresh and blooming, made all the throbbings subside at once. She even made a fine effort to laugh. "What does this mean, Geoff? I never knew you so late. The servants have been trying to frighten me, and I hear Mr. Tritton has got a very bad cold," she said, getting the words out hurriedly, afraid lest she might break down or betray herself. She eyed him very curiously over her knitting, but she made believe not to be looking at him at all.

"Yes; poor old Tritton," he said; "it is my fault; he sat up for me. I went out——" he made a little pause; for Geoff reflected

that other people's secrets were not his to confide, even to his mother—"with Wild Bampfylde, who came, I suppose, out of gratitude for what little I did for him."

"You went out—with that poacher fellow, Geoff?"

"Yes:" he nodded, meeting her horrified eyes quite calmly and with a smile; "why not, mother? You did not think I should be afraid of him, I hope?"

"Oh how very imprudent, Geoff! You, whose life is of so much value!—who are so very important to me and everybody!"

"Most fellows are important who have mothers to make a fuss," he said, smiling. "I don't think there is much more in me than the rest. But he has not harmed me much, you can see. I have all my limbs as usual; I am none the worse."

"Thank God for that!" said Lady Stanton; "but you must not do the like again. Indeed, indeed, Geoff, you are too bold; you must not put yourself in the way of trouble. Think of your poor brother. Oh, my dear, what an example! You must not be so rash again."

"I will not be rash—in that way," he said. "But, mother, I want you to tell me something. You remember all about it: did you

ever know of any more Bampfyldes? There was the mother, and this fellow. Did you ever know of any other?"

"You are missing out the chief one, Geoff —Lily, the girl."

"Yes, yes; I know about her. I did not mean the girl. But think! Were those three all? Were there more—another——?"

Lady Stanton shook her head. "I do not remember any other. I think three were quite enough. There is mischief in one even, of that kind."

"What do you mean by that kind? You did not know them. I hope my mother is not one of the kind who, not knowing people, are unjust to them."

"Geoff!" Lady Stanton was bewildered by this grand tone. She looked up at him with sudden curiosity, and this curiosity was mixed inevitably with some anxiety too; for, when your son betrays an unjustifiable partisanship, what so natural as to feel that he must have "some motive"? "Of course I did not mean to be unjust. But I do not pretend to remember everything that came out on the trial. It was the mother and daughter that interested me. You should ask your cousin Mary; she recollects better than I do.

But have you heard anything about another? What did the poacher say? Had you a great deal of conversation with him? And don't you think it was rash to put yourself in the power of such a lawless sort of fellow? Thank God! you are safe and sound."

"What do you mean about putting myself in his power? Do you think I am not a match for him? He is not such a giant, mother. Yes, I am quite safe and sound. And we had a great deal of talk. I never met with anybody so interesting. He talked about everything; chiefly about 'the creatures,' as he calls them."

"What creatures?" said Lady Stanton, wondering and alarmed. There were "creatures" in the world, this innocent lady knew, about whom a vagabond was very likely to talk, but who could not be mentioned between her and her boy.

"The wild things in the woods, birds and mice, and such small deer, and all their ways, and what they mean, and how to make acquaintance with them. I don't suppose he knows very much out of books," said young Geoff; "but the bit of dark moor grew quite different with that wild fellow in it—like the hill in the *Lady of the Lake*, when all Clan

Alpine got up from behind the rocks and the bushes. Don't you remember, mother? One could hear 'the creatures' rustling and moving, and multitudes of living things one never gave a thought to. It felt like poetry, too, though I don't know any poem like it. It was very strange and interesting. That pleases me more than your clever people," said Geoff.

"Oh, my dear, I beg your pardon," said Lady Stanton, suddenly getting up and kissing her boy's cheek as she passed him. She went away to hide the penitence in her eyes. As for Geoff, he took this very easily and simply. He thought it was natural she should apologize to Bampfylde for not thinking well of him. He had not a notion of the shame of evil-thinking thus brought home to her, which scorched Lady Stanton's cheeks.

CHAPTER VIII.

COUSIN MARY'S OPINION.

GEOFF spent the remainder of this day at home, looking once more over the file of old newspapers in which the Musgrave case was printed at such length, the *Times* and the local papers, with all their little diversities of evidence, one supplementing another; but he could not make out any reference at all distinct to a third person in the story. The two suitors of the village beauty, one of whom she preferred in feeling, though the second of them had evidently made her waver in her allegiance by the attractions of his superior rank and wealth, were enough to fill up the canvas. They were so naturally and appropriately pitted against each other, that neither the curiosity of the period nor the art of the story-teller required any additional actor in the little tragedy. What more natural than that these two rivals should meet—should go

from angry words to blows—and that, in the frenzy of the moment, one should give to the other the fatal but unpremeditated stroke which made an end of his rivalry and his life? The public imagination is simple, and loves a simple story, and this was so well-constructed and well-balanced—perfect in all its parts. What more likely than that the humble coquette should hesitate and almost swerve from her faith to her accepted lover when the young lord, so much more splendid than the young squire, came on the scene? or that, when her wavering produced such fatal consequences, the poor girl, not being wicked, but only foolish, should have devoted herself with heroism to the man whom she had been the means of drawing into deadly peril? Geoff, however, with his eyes enlightened, could dimly perceive the traces of another person unaccounted for, who had appeared casually in the course of the drama. Indeed, the counsel for the prosecution had expressed his regret that he could not call this person as a witness, as he was supposed to have emigrated, and no trace could be found of him. His name, however, was not mentioned, though the counsel for the defence, evidently in complete ignorance, taunted his learned brother with the

non-appearance of this mysterious stranger, and defied him to prove, by the production of him, that there had ever been feelings of bitter animosity between Musgrave and Lord Stanton. "The jury would like to know more about this anonymous gentleman," the coroner had said. But no evidence had ever been produced. Geoff searched through the whole case carefully, making various notes, and feeling that he himself, anxious as he had been, had never before noticed, except in the most incidental way, these slight, mysterious references. Even now he was misty about it. He was so tired, indeed, that his mind was less clear than usual; and when good Mr. Tritton appeared in the afternoon, very red with perpetual sneezing, his eyes running as with tears, he found Geoff in the library, in a great chair, with all the papers strewed about, sleeping profoundly, the old yellow *Times* in his hand, and the *Dalesman's Gazette* at his feet. The young man jumped up when Mr. Tritton laid his hand on his shoulder, with quite unnecessary energy, almost knocking down his respected instructor. "Take care, take care, Geoff!" he cried; "I am not going to hurt you, my boy!" a speech which amused Geoff greatly, who could have picked Mr. Tritton up

and thrown him across his shoulder. This interruption of his studies stopped them for the time; but next morning—not without causing his mother some anxiety—he proposed to ride over once more to Elfdale, to consult cousin Mary.

"It is but two days since we left, my dear," Lady Stanton said, with a sigh, thinking of all she had heard on the subject of "elderly sirens"; but Geoff showed her so clearly how it was that he must refer his difficulties to the person most qualified to solve them, that his mother yielded; though she too began to ask herself why her son should be so much concerned about John Musgrave. What was John Musgrave to Geoff? She did not feel that it was quite appropriate that the person most interested about poor Walter's slayer should be Walter's successor, he who had most profited by the deed.

Geoff, however, had his way, and went to his cousin Mary with a great deal of caution and anxiety, to hear all that she knew, and carefully to conceal from her what he knew. He found her fortunately by herself, in the languor of the afternoon, even Annie and Fanny having left her for some garden game or other. Lady Stanton the younger was

much surprised to see her young cousin, and startled by his sudden appearance. "What is the matter?" she asked, with a woman's ready terror; and was still more surprised that nothing was the matter, and that Geoff was but paying her a simple visit. It may even be suspected that for a moment his mother's alarm communicated itself to Mary. Was it to see *her* the boy had come back so soon and so far? The innocent, kind woman was alarmed. She had known herself a beauty for years, and she knew the common opinion (not in her experience quite corroborated by fact) that for a beautiful face a man will commit any folly. Was she in danger ("at my age!") of becoming a difficulty and a trouble to Geoff? But Geoff soon relieved her mind, making her blush hotly at her own self-conceit and folly.

"I have come to ask you some questions," he said; "you remember the man, the poacher, whom you spoke to me about—the brother, you know?—Bampfylde, whom they call Wild Bampfylde?"

"I know," said Lady Stanton, with a suppressed shiver.

"I met him—the other night—and we got talking. I want you to tell me, Cousin Mary:

did you ever hear of—another of them—a brother they had?"

"Ah! that is it," said Lady Stanton, clasping her hands together.

"That is what? Do you know anything about him? I should like to find out; from something they—from something this poacher fellow said—he is not a bad fellow," said Geoff, in an undertone, with a kind of apology in his mind to the vagrant of whom he seemed to be speaking disrespectfully.

"Oh, Geoff, don't have anything to do with them, dear. You don't know the ways of people like that. Young men think it is fine to show that they are above the prejudices of their class, but it never comes to any good. Poor Walter, if he had never seen her face, might have been—and poor John—"

"But, Cousin Mary, about the brother?"

"Yes: he was their brother, but we did not find it out for a long time. He was very clever, they said, and a scholar, but ashamed to belong to such poor people. He never went there when he could help it. He took no notice, I believe, of the others. He pretended to be a stranger visiting the Lakes."

"Cur!" said Geoff.

"Ye—es: it was not—nice; but it must

be a temptation, Geoff, when a man has been brought up so differently. Some relation had given him his education, and he was very clever. I have never felt sure whether it was a happy thing for a boy to be brought so far out of his class. He met John Musgrave somewhere, but John did not know who he was. And just about the time it all happened he went away. I used to think perhaps he might have known something; but I suppose he thought it would all come out, and his family be known. Fancy being ashamed of your own mother, Geoff! But it was hard upon him too—an old woman who would tell your fortune—who would stand with her basket in the market, you know: and he, a great scholar, and considered a gentleman. It *was* hard; I don't excuse him, but I was sorry for him; and I always thought if he came back again, that he might know——"

Lady Stanton was not accustomed to speak so long and continuously. Her delicate cheeks were stained with red patches; her breath came quick.

"Do you mean to say he has turned up again—at last?" she added, with a little gasp.

"I have heard of him," said Geoff. "I wondered—if he could have anything to do with it."

"I will tell you all about him, Geoff. It was John Musgrave who met with him somewhere. Mary could tell you, too. She was John's only sister, and I her great friend; and I always took an interest. They met, I think, abroad—and he—was of use to John somehow—I forget exactly:—that is to say, Mr. Bampfield (he spelt his name differently from the others) did something for him—in short, John said he saved his life. It was among the Alps, on some precipice, or something of that sort. You see I can only give you my recollection," said Lady Stanton, falteringly conscious of remembering everything about it. "John asked him to Penninghame, but he would not come. He told us this new friend of his knew the country quite well, but no one could get out of him where he had lived. And then he came on a visit to some one else—to the Fieldings, at Langdale—that was the family; and we all knew him. He was very handsome; but who was to suppose that a gentleman visiting in such a house was old 'Lizabeth's son, or—or—that girl's brother? No one thought of such a thing. It was John who found it out at the very last. It was because of something about myself. Oh, Geoff, I was not offended—I was only sorry. Poor fellow! he was

wrong, but it was hard upon him. He thought he—took a fancy to me; and poor John was so indignant. No, I assure you not on that account," said Lady Stanton, growing crimson to the eyes, and becoming incoherent. "Never! we were like brother and sister. John never had such a thought in his mind. I always—always took an interest in *him*—but there was never anything of *that* kind."

Young Geoff felt himself blush too, as he listened to this confession. He coloured in sympathy and tender fellow-feeling for her; for it was not hard to read between the lines of Cousin Mary's humble story. John "never had such a thought in his mind;" but she "had always taken an interest." And the blush on her cheek and the water in her eyes told of that interest still.

Then Geoff grew redder still, with another feeling. The madman in the cottage had dared to lift his eyes to this woman so much above him.

"I don't wonder Musgrave was furious," he said.

"That is the right word," she said, with a faint smile; "he was furious; and Walter—your brother—laughed. I did not like that—it was insulting. We were all young people

together. Why should not he have cared for —me?—when both of *them*——. But we must not think of that—we must not talk of that, Geoff — we cannot blame your poor brother. He is dead, poor fellow; and such a death, in the very flower of his youth! What were a few little silly boyish faults to that? He died, you know, and all the trouble came. Walter had been very stinging—very insulting, to that poor fellow just the day before, and he could not bear it. He went off that very day, and I have never heard of him again. I don't think people in general even knew who he was. The Fieldings do not to this day. But Walter's foolish joking drove him away. Poor Walter, he had a way of talking—and I suppose he must have found the secret out—or guessed. I have often—often wondered whether Mr. Bampfield knew anything, whether if he had come back he would have said anything about any quarrel between them. I used to pray for him to be found, and then I used to pray that he might not be found; for I always thought he could throw some light—and, after all, what could that light be but of one kind?"

"Did any one ever—suspect—*him?*"

"Geoff! you frighten me. Him! whom?

You know who was suspected. I don't think it was intended, Geoff. I know—I know he did not mean it; but who but one could have done it? There could not, alas, be any doubt about that."

"If Bampfield had been insulted and made angry, as you say, why should not he have been suspected as well as Musgrave? The one, it seems to me, was just as likely as the other——"

"Geoff! you take away my breath! But he was away; he left the day before."

"Suppose it was found out that he did not go away, Cousin Mary? Was he more or less likely than Musgrave was to have done a crime?"

Lady Stanton looked at him with her eyes wide open, and her lips apart.

"You do not—mean anything? You have not—found out anything, Geoff?"

"I—can't tell," he said. "I think I have got a clue. If it were found out that Bampfield did not go away—that he was still here, and met poor Walter that fatal morning, what would you say then, you who knew them all?"

All the colour ebbed out of Lady Stanton's face. She kept looking at him with wistful

eyes, into which tears had risen, questioning him with an earnestness beyond speech.

"I dare not say the words," she said, faltering; "I don't venture to say the words. But, Geoff, you would not speak like this if you did not mean something. Do you think—really *think*—oh, it is not possible—it is not possible!—it is only a fancy. You can't—suppose—that it matters—much—to me. You are only—speculating. Perhaps it ought not to matter much to me. But oh, Geoff! if if you knew what that time was in my life. Do you mean anything—do you mean anything, my dear?"

"You have not answered my question," he said. "Which was the most likely to have done a crime?"

Lady Stanton wrung her hands; she could not speak, but kept her eyes upon him in beseeching suspense.

Geoff felt that he had raised a spirit beyond his power to calm again, and he had not intended to commit himself or betray so soon what he had heard.

"Nothing must be known as yet," he said; "but I think I have some reason to speak. Bampfield did not leave the country when you thought he did. He saw poor Walter

that morning. If Musgrave saw him at all——"

Lady Stanton gave a little cry—"You mean Walter, Geoff?"

"Yes; if Musgrave saw him at all, it was not till after. And Bampfield was the brother of the girl John was going to marry, and had saved his life."

"My God!" This was no profane exclamation in Mary's mouth. She said it low to herself, clasping her hands together, her face utterly colourless, her eyes wild with wonder and excitement. The shock of this disclosure had driven away the rising tears: and yet Geoff did not mean it as a disclosure. He had trusted in the gentle slowness of her understanding. But there are cases in which feeling supplies all, and more than all, that intellect could give. She said nothing, but sat there silent, with her hands clasped, thinking it over, piecing everything together. No one like Mary had kept hold of every detail; she remembered everything as clearly as if (God forbid!) it had happened yesterday. She put one thing to another which she remembered but no one else did: and gradually it all became clear to her. Geoff, though he was so much more clever, did not understand the process

by which in silence she arranged and perceived every point; but then Geoff had not the minute acquaintance with the subject nor the feeling which touched every point with interest. By and by Mary began to sob, her gentle breast heaving with emotion. "Oh, Geoff," she cried, "what a heart—what a heart! He is like our Saviour; he has given his life for his enemy. Not even his friend; he was not fond of him; he did not love him. Who could love him—a man who was ashamed of his own, his very own people? I—oh, how little and how poor we are! I might have done it perhaps for my friend; but he—he is like our Saviour."

"Don't say so. It was not just—it was not right; he ought not to have done it," cried Geoff. "Think, if it saved something, how much trouble it has made."

"Then it is all true!" she cried, triumphant. In perfect good faith and tender feeling Mary had made her comment upon this strange, sad revelation; yet she could not but feel all the same the triumph of having thus caught Geoff, and of establishing beyond all doubt that it was true. She fell a-crying in the happiness of the discovery. The moment it was certain, the solemnity of it blew aside, as do the mists

before the wind. "Then he will come home again; he will have his poor little children, and all will be well," she said; and cried as if her heart would break. It was vain for Geoff to tell her that nothing was as yet proved, that he did not know how to approach the subject; no difficulties troubled Mary. Her heart was delivered as of a load; and why should not everything at once be told? But she wept all the same, and Geoff had no clue to the meaning of her tears. She was glad beyond measure for John Musgrave: but yet while he was an exile, who had (secretly) stood up for him as she had done? But when he came home, what would Mary have to do with him? Nothing! She would never see him, though she had always taken an interest, and he would never know what interest she had taken. How glad she was! and yet how the tears poured down!

Geoff had a long ride home. He was half alarmed that he had allowed so much to be known, but yet he had not revealed 'Lizabeth's secret. Mary had required no particulars, no proof. The suggestion was enough for her. She was not judge or jury—but one to whom the slightest outlet from that dark maze meant full illumination. Geoff could not but

speculate a little on the surface of the subject as he rode along through the soft evening, in that unbroken yet active solitude which makes a long ride or walk the most pleasant and sure moment for "thinking over." Geoff's thoughts were quite superficial, as his knowledge was. He wondered if John Musgrave had "taken an interest" in Mary as she had done in him; and how it was that Mary had been his brother's betrothed, yet with so warm a sympathy for his brother's supposed slayer? And how it was that John Musgrave, if he had responded at all to the "interest" she took in him, could have loved and married Lily? All this perplexed Geoff. He did not go any deeper; he did not think of the mingled feelings of the present moment, but only of the tangled web of the past.

It grew dark before he got home. No moon, and a cloudy night disturbed by threatenings or rather promise of rain, which the farmers were anxious for, as they generally are when a short break of fine weather bewilders their operations, in the north. As he turned out of the last cross road, and got upon the straight way to Stanton, he suddenly became aware of some one running by him on the green turf that edged the road, and in the

shadow of the hedgerow. Geoff was startled by the first sight of this moving shadow running noiselessly by his side. It was a safe country, where there was no danger from thieves, and a "highwayman" was a thing of the last century. But still Geoff shortened his whip in his hand with a certain sense of insecurity. As he did so a voice came from the shadow of the hedge. "It is but me, my young lord." "You!" he cried. He was relieved by the sound, for a close attendant on the road in the dark, when all faces are alike undiscernible, is not pleasant. "What are you doing here, Bampfylde? Are you snaring my birds, or scaring them, or have you come to look after me?"

"Neither the one nor the other," said Wild Bampfylde. "I have other thoughts in my mind than the innocent creatures that harm no one. My young lord, I cannot tell you what is coming, but something is coming. It's no you, and it's no me, but it's in the air; and I'm about, whatever happens. If you want me, I'll aye be within call. Not that I'm spying on you; but whatever happens, I'm here."

"And I want you. I want to ask you something," cried Geoff; but he was slow in putting his next question. It was about his

cousin; and what he wanted was some one who would see, without forcing him to put them into words, the thoughts that arose in his mind. Therefore it was a long time before he spoke again. But in the silence that ensued it soon became evident to Geoff that the figure running along under the shadow of the bushes had disappeared. He stopped his horse, but heard no footfall. "Are you there, Bampfylde?" but his own voice was all he heard, falling with startling effect into the silence. The vagrant had disappeared, and not a creature was near. Geoff went on with a strange mixture of satisfaction and annoyance. To have this wanderer "about" seemed a kind of aid, and yet to have his movements spied upon did not please the young man. But Bampfylde was no spy.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SQUIRE AT HOME.

THE Squire went home after his game of ducks and drakes in the most curious, bewildered state of mind. The shock of all these recent events had affected him much more than any one was aware, and Randolph's visit and desire to make sure about "family arrangements," had filled up the already almost overflowing measure of secret pain. It had momentarily recalled, like a stimulant too sharp and strong, not only his usual power of resistance, but a force of excitement strong enough to overwhelm the faculties which for the time it invigorated; and while he walked about his woods after his first interview with his son, the Squire was on the edge of a catastrophe, his brain reeling, his strained powers on the verge of giving way. The encounter with little Nello on the lake-side had exercised a curious arresting power upon the old and worn edifice of the mind which

was just then tottering to its fall. It stopped this fall for the moment. The trembling old walls were not perhaps in a less dangerous state, but the wind that had threatened them dropped, and the building stood, shaken to its foundation, and at the mercy of the next blast, but yet so far safe—safe for the moment, and with all the semblance of calm about it. To leave metaphor, the Squire's mind was hushed and lulled by that encounter with the soft peacefulness of childhood, in the most curious, and to himself, inexplicable way. Not, indeed, that he tried to explain. He was as unconscious of what was going on in himself as most of us are. He did not know that the various events which had shaken him had anything more than pain in them—he was unaware of the danger. Even Randolph's appearance and the thought of the discussions which must go on when his back was turned, as to the things that would happen after his death—he was not aware that there was more in them than an injury against which his whole spirit revolted. He did not know that this new annoyance had struck at the very stronghold of vitality, the little strength left to him. Which of us does know when the *coup-de-grâce* is given? He only knew the hurt—the wound—and the

forlorn stand he had made against it, and the almost giddy lightness with which he had tried to himself to smile it down, and feel himself superior. Neither did he know what Nello had done for him. His meeting with the child was like the touch of something soft and healing upon a wound. The contact cooled and calmed his entire being. It seemed to put out of his mind all sense of wounding and injury. It did more; it took all distinctness at once from the moral and the physical landmarks round him. The harsher outlines of life grew blurred and dim, and instead of the bitter facts of the past, which he had so long determined to ignore, and the facts of the present which had so pushed themselves upon him, the atmosphere fell all into a soft confusion. A kind of happiness stole over him. What had he to be happy about? yet he was so. Sometimes in our English summers there is a mist of heat in the air, confusing all the lines of the landscape as much as a fog in winter—in which the hills and lakes and sky are nothing but one dazzle and faint glory of suppressed light and warmth—light confusing but penetrating: warmth perhaps stifling to the young and active, but consolatory to those whose blood runs chill. This was the mental condition in which the

Squire was. His troubles seemed to die away, though he had so many of them. Randolph, his middle-aged son, ceased to be an assailant and invader, and dropped into the dark like other troublesome things—not a son to be proud of, but one to put up with easily enough. John ? he did not remember much about John ; but he remembered very distinctly his old playfellow little Johnny, his little brother. "Eighteen months — only eighteen months between them :" he almost could hear the tone in which his mother said that long ago. If Johnny had lived he would have been—how old would he have been now ? Johnny would have been seventy-four or so had he lived—but the Squire did not identify the number of years. There was eighteen months between them, that was all he could remember, and of that he sat and mused, often saying the words over to himself, with a soft dreamy smile upon his face. He was often not quite clear that it was not Johnny himself, little Johnny, with whom he had been playing on the water-side.

This change affected him in all things. He had never been so entirely amiable. When Randolph returned to the assault, the Squire would smile and make no reply. He was no longer either irritated or saddened by any-

thing his son might say—indeed he did not take much notice of him one way or another, but would speak of the weather, or take up a book, smiling, when his son began. This was very bewildering to the family. Randolph, who was dull and self-important, was driven half frantic by it, thinking that his father meant to insult him. But the Squire had no purpose of any kind, and Mary, who knew him better, at last grew vaguely alarmed without knowing what she feared. He kept up all his old habits, took his walks as usual, dressed with his ordinary care—but did everything in a vague and hazy way, requiring to be recalled to himself when anything important happened. When he was in his library, where he had read and written and studied so much, the Squire arranged all his tools as usual, opened his book, even began to write his letters, putting the date—but did no more. Having accomplished that beginning, he would lean back in his chair and muse for hours together. It was not thinking even, but only musing; no subject abode with him in these long still hours, and not even any consistent thread of recollections. Shadows of the past came sailing—floating about him, that was all; very often only that soft, wandering

thought about little Johnny, occupied all his faculties.—Eighteen months between them, no more! He rarely got beyond that fact, though he never could quite tell whether it was the little brother's face or another—his son's, or his son's son's—which floated through this mist of recollections. He was quite happy in the curious trance which had taken possession of him. He had no active personal feelings, except that of pleasure in the recollection and thought of little Johnny—a thought which pleased and amused, and touched his heart. All anger and harm went out of the old man; he spoke softly when he spoke at all, and suffered himself to be disturbed as he never would done before. Indeed he was far too gentle and good to be natural. The servants talked of his condition with dismay, yet with that agreeable anticipation of something new which makes even a "death in the house" more or less desirable. "Th' owd Squire's not long for this world," the Cook and Tom Gardener said to each other. As for Eastwood, he shook his head with mournful importance. "I give you my word, I might drop a trayful of things at his side, and he wouldn't take no notice," the man said, almost tearfully; "it's clean

again nature, that is." And the other servants shook their heads, and said in their turn that they "didn't like the looks of him," and that certainly the Squire was not long for this world.

This same event of Randolph's visit had produced other results almost as remarkable. It had turned little Lilias all at once into the slim semblance of a woman, grown-up, and full of thoughts. It is perhaps too much to say that she had grown in outward appearance as suddenly as she had done in mind; but it is no unusual thing in the calmest domestic quiet, where no commotion is, nor fierce, sudden heat of excitement to quicken a tardy growth, that the elder members of a family should wake up all in a moment to notice how a child has grown. She had perhaps been springing up gradually; but now in a moment every one preceived it; and the moment was coincident with that in which Lilias heard with unspeakable wrath, horror, shame, pity, and indignation, her father's story —that he would be put in prison if he came back; that he dared not come back; that he might be—executed. (Lilias would not permit even her thoughts to say hanged—most ignominious of all endings—though Miss

Brown had not hesitated to employ the word.) This suggestion had struck into her soul like a fiery arrow. The guilt suggested might have impressed her imagination also; but the horrible reality of the penalty had gone through and through the child. All the wonderful enterprises she had planned on the moment are past our telling. She would go to the Queen and get his pardon. She would go to the old woman on the hills and find out everything. Ah! what would she not do? And then had come the weary pilgrimage which Geoff had intercepted; and now the ache of pity and terror had yielded to that spell of suspense which, more than anything else, takes the soul out of itself. What had come to the child? Miss Brown said; and all the maids and Martuccia watched her without saying anything. Miss Brown, who had been the teller of the story, did not think of identifying it with this result. She said, and all the female household said, that if Miss Lily had been a little older, they knew what they would have thought. And the only woman in the house who took no notice was Mary—herself so full of anxieties that her mind had little leisure for speculation. She said, yes, Lilias had grown; yes, she was

changing. But what time had she to consider Lilias' looks in detail? Randolph was Mary's special cross; he was always about, always in her way, making her father uncomfortable, talking at the children. Mary felt herself hustled about from place to place, wearied and worried and kept in perpetual commotion. She could not look into the causes of the Squire's strange looks and ways; she could not give her attention to the children; she could scarcely even do her business, into which Randolph would fain have forced his way, while her all-investigating brother was close by. Would he but go away and leave the harassed household in peace!

But Randolph for his part was not desirous of going away. He could not go away, he represented to himself, without coming to some understanding with his father, though that understanding seemed as far off as ever. So he remained from day to day, acting as a special irritant to the whole household. He had nothing to do, and consequently he roamed about the garden, pointing out to the gardener a great many imperfections in his work; and about the stables, driving well-nigh out of his wits the steady-going, respectable groom, who nowadays had things

very much his own way. He found fault with the wine, making himself obnoxious to Eastwood, and with the made dishes, exasperating Cook. Indeed there was nothing disagreeable which this visitor did not do to set his father's house by the ears. Finally sauntering into the drawing-room, where Mary sat, driven by him out of her favourite hall, where his comments offended her more than she could bear, he reached the climax of all previous exasperations by suddenly urging upon her the undeniable fact that Nello ought to go to school. "The boy," Randolph called him; nothing would have induced him to employ any pet name to a child, especially a foreign name like Nello—his virtue was of too severe an order to permit any such trifling. He burst out with this advice all at once. "You should send the boy to school; he ought to be at school. Old Pen's lessons are rubbish. The boy should be at school, Mary," he said. This sudden fulmination disturbed Mary beyond anything that had gone before, for it was quite just and true. "And I know a place—a nice homely, good sort of place, where he would be well taught and well taken care of," he added. "Why should not you get him ready at once? and I

will place him there on my way home." This was, to do him justice, a sudden thought, not premeditated—an idea which had flashed into his mind since he began to speak, but which immediately gained attractiveness to him, when he saw the consternation in Mary's eyes.

"Oh, thank you, Randolph," she said, faintly. Had not Mr. Pen advised—had not she herself thought of asking her brother's advice, who was himself the father of a boy, and no doubt knew better about education than she did? "But," she added, faltering, "he could not be got ready in a moment; it would require a little time. I fear that it would not be possible, though it is so very kind."

"Possible? Oh yes, easily possible, if you give your mind to it," cried Randolph; and he pointed out to her at great length the advantages of the plan, while Mary sat trembling, in spite of herself, feeling that her horror of the idea was unjustifiable, and that she would probably have no excuse for rejecting so reasonable and apparently kind a proposal. Was it kind? It seemed so on the outside; and how could she venture to impute bad motives to Randolph, when he offered to serve her? She did not know what reply to make; but her mind was thrown into

sudden and most unreasonable agitation. She got up at last, agitated and tremulous, and explained that she was compelled to go out to visit some of her poor people. "I have not been in the village since you came," she said, breathless in her explanations; "and there are several who are ill; and I have something to say to Mr. Pen."

"Oh, yes, consult old Pen, of course," Randolph had said. "I would not deprive a lady of her usual spiritual adviser because she happens to be my sister. Of course you must talk it over with Pen." This assumption of her dependence upon poor Mr. Pen's advice galled Mary, who had by no means elected Mr. Pen to be her spiritual adviser. However, she would not stay to argue the question, but hurried away anxiously with a sense of escape. She had escaped for the moment; yet she had a painful sense in her mind that she could not always escape from Randolph. The proposal was sudden, but it was reasonable and kind—quite kind. It was the thing a good uncle ought to do; no one but would think better of Randolph that he was willing to take so much trouble. Randolph for his part felt that it was very kind; he had no other meaning in the original suggestion; but

when he had thus once put it forth, a curious expansion of the idea came into his mind. Little Nello was a terrible bugbear to Randolph. He had long dwelt upon the thought that it was he who would succeed to Penninghame on his father's death—at first, perhaps, nominally on John's account. But there was very little chance that John would dare the dangers of a trial, and reappear again, to be arraigned for murder, of which crime Randolph had always simply and stolidly believed him guilty; and the younger brother had entertained no doubt that, sooner or later, the unquestioned inheritance would fall into his hands. But this child baffled all his plans. What could be done while he was there? though there was no proof who he was, and none that he was legitimate, or anything but a little impostor: certainly, he was as far from being a lawful and proper English heir—such as an old family like the Musgraves ought to have—such as his own boy would be—as could be supposed. And of course, the best that could be done for himself was to send him to school. It was only of Nello that Randolph thought in this way. The little girl, though a more distinct individual, did not trouble him. She might be legitimate enough—

another Mary, to whom, of course, Mary would leave her money—and there would be an end of it. Randolph did not believe, even if there had been no girl of John's, that Mary's money would ever come his way. She would alienate it rather, he felt sure—found a hospital for cats, or something of that description (for Mary was nothing but a typical old maid to Randolph, who regarded her, as an unmarried woman, with much masculine and married contemptuousness), rather than let it come to his side of the family. So let that pass—let the girl pass; but for the boy! That little, small, baby-faced Nello—a little nothing—a creature that might be crushed by a strong hand—a thing unprotected, unacknowledged, without either power or influence, or any one to care for him! how he stood in Randolph's way! But he did not at this moment mean him any harm; that is, no particular harm. The school he had suddenly thought of had nothing wrong in it; it was a school for the sons of farmers or poor clergymen, and people in "reduced circumstances." It would do Nello a great deal of good. It would clear his mind from any foolish notion of being the heir. And he would be out of the way; and once at school,

there is no telling what may happen between the years of ten and twenty. But of one thing Randolph was quite sure—that he meant no harm, no particular harm, to the boy.

When Mary left him in this hurried way, he strolled out in search of something to amuse or employ the lingering afternoon. Tom Gardener now gave him nothing but sullen answers, and the groom began to dash about pails of water, and make hideous noises as soon as he appeared, so that it did not consist with his dignity to have anything more to say to these functionaries; so that sheer absence of occupation, mingled with a sudden interest in the boy, on whose behalf he had thus been suddenly "led" to interfere, induced Randolph to look for the children. They were not in their favourite place at the door of the old hall, and he turned his steps instinctively to the side of the water, the natural attraction to everybody at Penninghame. When he came within sight of the little cove where the boats lay, he saw that it was occupied by the little group he sought. He went towards them with some eagerness, though not with any sense of interest or natural beauty such as would have moved most people. Nello was

seated on the edge of the rocky step relieved against the blue water; Lilias placed higher up, with the wind ruffling her brown curls, and the slant sunshine grazing her cheek. The boy had a book open on his knees, but was trying furtive ducks and drakes under cover of the lesson, except when Lilias recalled him to it, when he resumed his learning with much demonstration, saying it over under his breath with visibly moving lips. Lilias had got through her own portion of study. Mr. Pen's lessons were not long or severe, and she had a girl's conscientiousness and quickness in learning. Her book was closed on her knee; her head turned a little towards that road which she watched with a long dreamy gaze, looking for some one—but some one very visionary and far away. Her pensive, abstracted look and pose, and the sudden growth and development which had so suddenly changed Lilias, seemed to have charmed the little girl out of childhood altogether. Was she looking already for the fairy prince, the visionary hero? And to say the truth, though she was still only a child, this was exactly what Lilias was doing. It was the knight-deliverer, the St. George who kills the dragon, the prince with shoes of swiftness and invisible coat, brought down to

common life, and made familiar by being entitled "Mr. Geoff," for whom, with that kind of visionary childish anticipation which takes no note of possibilities, she was looking. Time and the world are at once vaster, and vaguer, and more narrow at her age than at any other. He might come *now*, suddenly appearing at any moment; and Lilias could not but feel vaguely disappointed every moment that he did not appear. And yet there was no knowing when he would come, to-morrow, next year, she could not tell when. Meanwhile she kept her eyes fixed on the distance, watching for him. But Lilias was not thinking of herself in conjunction with "Mr. Geoff." She was much too young for love; no flutter of even possible sentiment disturbed the serenity of her soul. Nevertheless her mind was concentrated upon the young hero as entirely as the mind of any dreaming maiden could be. He was more than her hero; he was her representative, doing for her the work which perhaps Lilias was not old enough or strong enough to do. So other people, grown-up people, thought at least. And until he came she could do nothing, know nothing. Already, by this means, the child had taken up the burden of her womanhood. Her eyes "were busy in the

distance shaping things," that made her heart beat quick. She was waiting already, not for love to come, of which at her age she knew nothing, but for help to come, which she would have given her little life to bestow, but could not, her own hand being too slight and feeble to give help. This thought gave her a pang, while the expectation of help kept her in that woman's purgatory of suspense. Why could not she do it herself? but yet there was a certain sweetness in the expectation which was vague, and had not existed long enough to be tedious. And yet how long, how long it was even since yesterday! From daylight to dusk, even in August, what a world of time. Every one of these slow, big round hours, floated by Lilias like clouds when there is no wind, moving imperceptibly; great globes of time never to be done with. Her heart gave a throb whenever any one appeared. But it was Tom Gardener, it was Mr. Pen, it was some one from the village, it was never Mr. Geoff; and finally here was some one quite antagonistic, the enemy in person, the stranger whom people called Uncle Randolph. Lilias gave her little brother a note of warning; and she opened her own book again.

When Randolph approached, they had thus

the air of being very busily employed, both ;—Lilias intent upon her book, while Nello, furtively feeling in his pocket for the stones which he had stored there for use, busied himself, to all appearance, with his lesson, repeating it to himself with moving lips. Randolph had taken very little notice of the children, except by talking at them to his sister. He came to a pause now, and looked at them with curiosity —or at least he looked at Nello ; for after all, it did not matter about the girl. She might be John's daughter, or she might not ; but in any case she was not worth a thought. He did not see the humour of the preternatural closeness of study which the children exhibited; but it afforded a means of opening communications.

"Are these your lessons for Mr. Pennithorne ?" he said.

Nello, to whom the question was addressed, made no answer. Was he not much too busy to answer ? his eyes were riveted upon his book. Lilias kept silence too as long as politeness would let her ; but at last the rudeness of it struck her acutely. This might be an enemy, but children ought not to be rude. She therefore said timidly, "Yes ;" and added, by way of explanation, "Nello's is Latin ; but me, it is only English I have."

"Is it hard?" said Randolph, still directing his question to the boy.

Nello gave a glance out of the corner of his eyes at his questioner, but said nothing, only learned harder than ever; and again it became needful, for the sake of courtesy, that Lilias should answer.

"The Latin is not hard," she said; "oh, not near so hard as the English. It is so easy to say; but Mr. Pen does not know how it goes; he says it all wrong; he says it like English. I hope Nello will not learn it that way."

Randolph stared at her, but took no further notice. "Can't you speak?" he said to Nello, "when I ask you a question? Stop your lesson and listen to me. Shouldn't you like to go to school?"

Nello looked up with round astonished eyes, and equally roundly, with all the force of the monosyllable, said "No," as probably he would have answered to any question.

"No? but you don't know what school is; not lessons only, but a number of fellows to play with, and all kinds of games. You would like it a great deal better than being here, and learning with Mr. Pennithorne."

"No," said Nello again; but his tone was less sure, and he paused to look into his

questioner's face. "Would Lily come too?" he said, suddenly accepting the idea. For from No to Yes is not a very long way at eight years old.

"Why, you don't want to drag a girl with you," said Randolph, laughing; "a girl who can't play at anything, wherever you go?"

This argument secured Nello's attention. He said, "N—no," reddening a little, and with a glance at Lilias, against whose sway he dared scarcely rebel all at once; but the sense of superiority even at such an early age is sweet.

"He must not go without me," cried Lilias, roused. "I am to take care of him *always!* Papa said so. Oh, don't listen, Nello, to this —gentleman! You know what I told you—papa is perhaps coming home. Mr. Geoff said—Mr. Geoff knows something that will make everything right again. Mr. Geoff is going to fetch papa——"

"Oh!" cried Nello, reproachfully, "you said I was not to tell; and there, you have gone and told yourself!"

"What is that? what is that?" asked Randolph, pricking up his ears.

But the boy and girl looked at each other and were silent. The curious uncle felt that

he would most willingly have whipped them both, and that amiable sentiment showed itself in his face.

"And, Lily," said Nello, "I think the old gentleman would not let me go. He will want me to play with; he has never had anybody to play with for—I don't know how long—never since a little boy called little Johnny: and he said that was my name too——"

"Oh, Nello! now it is you who are forgetting; he said (you know you told me) that you were never, never to tell!"

Randolph turned from one to another, bewildered. What did they mean? Had they the audacity to play upon his fears, the little foundlings, the little impostors! He drew a long breath of fury, and clenched his fist involuntarily. "Children should never have secrets," he said. "Do you know it is wicked, very wicked? You ought to be whipped for it. Tell me directly what you mean!"

But this is not the way to get at any child's secret. The brother and sister looked at each other, and shut fast their mouths. As for Nello, he felt the edges of that stone in his pocket, and thought he would like to throw it

at the man. Lilias had no stone, and was not warlike; but she looked at him with the calm of superior knowledge. "It would be dishonourable," she said, faltering over the pronunciation, but firm in the sentiment, "to tell what we were told not to tell."

"You are going to school with me — on Saturday," said Randolph, with a virulence of irritation which children are just as apt to call forth as their elders. "You will be taught better there; you will not venture to conceal anything, I can tell you, my boy."

And he left them with an angry determination to carry out his plans, and to give over Nello to hands that would tame him effectually, "the best thing for him." The children, though they had secretly enjoyed his discomfiture, were a little appalled by this conclusion. "Oh, Nello, I will tell you what he is—he is the wicked uncle in the *Babes in the Wood*. He will take you and leave you somewhere, where you will lose yourself and starve, and never be heard of. But I will find you. I will go after you. I will never leave you!" cried Lilias with sudden tears.

"I could ask which way to go," said Nello,

much impressed, however, by this view. "I can speak English now. I could ask the way home; or something better!—listen, Lily—if he takes me, when we have gone ten miles, or a hundred miles, I will run away!"

CHAPTER X.

A NEW VISITOR.

NOTWITHSTANDING her dislike to have it supposed that Mr. Pen was her spiritual adviser, Mary did make a hurried visit to the Vicarage to ask his advice. Not that she had much confidence in the good vicar's advice; but to act in such a case, where experience fails you altogether, entirely on your own judgment without even the comfort of "talking it over," is a hard thing to do. "Talking it over" is always an advantage. The for and against of any argument are always clearer when they are put into words and made audible, and thus acquire, as it were, though they may be your own words, a separate existence. Thus Mary became her own adviser when she consulted Mr. Pen, and there was no one else at hand who could fulfil this office. They talked it over anxiously, Mr. Pen being, as she knew he would be, entirely on Randolph's side. To

him it appeared that it would be a great advantage for Nello to be taken to school by his uncle. It would be "the right thing to do"—better than if Mary did it—better than Mr. Pen himself could do it. Mary could not find any arguments to meet this conventional certainty. She retained her distrust and fear, but she could not say anything against the fact that it was kind of Randolph to propose this, and that it would be injurious and unkind on her part to reject it. She went home dispirited and cast down, but set to work at once with the practical preparations. Saturday was the day on which Randolph had said he must go—and it was already Thursday—and there was not a moment to lose. But it was not till the Friday afternoon, the eve of separation, that Miss Musgrave could screw her courage to the point of informing the children what lay before them. The afternoon was half over, and the sun beginning to send long rays aslant from the west. She came in from the village, where she had gone in mere restlessness, feeling that this communication could be delayed no longer; but she disliked it so much herself that the thought of Nello's consternation and the tears of Lilias was almost more than their tender guardian could bear.

But when she came in sight of the old hall door, a group encountered her which bewildered Mary. A young man on horseback had drawn up at the side of the ascent, and with his hat off, and the sun shining upon his curling hair and smiling countenance, was looking up and talking to little Lilias, who leaned over the low wall, like a lady of romance looking over her battlements. The sun gleamed full upon Lilias too, lighting up her dark eyes and warmly-tinted cheek and the hair which hung about her shoulders, and making a pretty picture. Her face was full of earnest meaning, grave and eager and tremulous. Nello, at the hall door, above this strange pair, contemplated them with a mixture of jealousy and wonder. Mary had come upon them so suddenly that she could hear the young man answering something to the eager demands of the little girl. "But, you are sure, quite sure? Oh, are you certain, Mr. Geoff?"

"Quite sure," he was saying. "But you must think of me all the time, Lily; you must think of nothing but me—promise me that, and I shall not be afraid."

"I promise!" cried Lilias, clasping her hands. Mary stood and listened altogether confounded, and Nello, from above, bewildered and only

half satisfied, looked on. Who was the young man? It seemed to Miss Musgrave that she had seen him before. And what was it that had changed Lilias into this little princess, this small heroine? The heroic aspect, however, gave way before Mary could interfere, and the child murmured something softer, something less unlike the little girl with all whose ways Mary was familiar.

"But I always think of you," she said; "always! since *that* day."

"Do you, indeed, my little Lily? That makes me happy. You must always keep up so good a custom."

And the young man smiled, with eyes full of tenderness, and took the child's hand and held it in his own. Lilias was too young for any comment or false interpretation, but what did it mean? The spectator behind, besides, was too much astonished to move.

"Good-bye, my Lily; good-bye, Nello," cried the young man, nodding his head to the children. And then he put on his hat and rode round the corner towards the door.

Lilias stood looking after him, like a little saint in an ecstasy. She clasped her hands again, and looked up to the sky, her lips moving, and tears glittering in her eyes.

"Oh, Nello, don't you think God will help him?" she said, one tear overbrimming suddenly, and rolling down her cheek. She started when Mary, with tones a little sharpened by consternation, called her. Lilias had no sense of shame in her innocent mind, but as there is no telling in what light those curious beings called grown-up people might regard a child's actions, a little thrill of alarm went through her. What might Mary say? What would she think when she knew that Mr. Geoff "had come to set everything right about papa"? Lilias felt instinctively that Geoff's mission would not appear in exactly the same light to Mary as it did to herself. She turned round with a sudden flush of surprise and agitation on her face. It looked like the blush of a maturer sentiment to Mary.

"At twelve years old!" she said to herself. And unconsciously there glanced through her mind a recollection of the first Lily—the child's mother—she who had been the beginning of all the trouble. Was it in the blood?

"Who is that gentleman?" Mary asked, with much disturbance of mind. "Lilias! I could not have expected this of you."

Lilias followed into the hall, very still and pale, feeling herself a culprit, though she did

not know why. Her hands dropped straight by her side, after the manner of a creature accused; and she looked up to Mary, with eyes full of vague alarm, into which the tears were ready to come at a moment's notice.

"I have not done anything wrong?" she said, turning her assertion into a faltering question. "It was Mr. Geoff."

"Mr. Geoff!—who is Mr. Geoff?"

"He is—very kind—oh, very kind, Mary; he is—some one who knows about papa: he is—the gentleman who once came with two beautiful horses in a carriage (oh, don't you remember, Nello?) to see *you*."

"Yes," said Nello, with ready testimony; "he said I should ride upon them. They were two bay horses, in one of those high-up funny carriages, not like Mary's carriage. I wonder if I might ride upon his horse now?"

"To see *me*?" Mary was entirely bewildered. "And what do you mean about your father?" she said. "Knows about papa! Lilias! come here; I am not angry. What does he know about papa?"

Lilias came up slowly to her side, half unwilling to communicate her own knowledge on this point. For Mary had not told her

the secret, she remembered suddenly. But the confusion of Lilias was interrupted by something more startling and agitating. Eastwood came into the hall, with a certain importance and solemnity. "If you please, ma'am," he said, "my Lord Stanton has just come in, and I've shown him into the library —to my master. I thought you would like to know."

"Lord Stanton—to my father, Eastwood? my father ought not to be troubled with strangers. Lord Stanton!—to be sure it was that boy. Quick, say that I shall be glad to see him up stairs."

"If you please, ma'am, his lordship asked for my master; and my master—he said, 'Yes, certainly.' He was quite smiling like, and cheerful. He said, 'Yes; certainly, Eastwood.' So, what was I to do? I showed his lordship in—and there they are now—as friendly—as friendly, if I may venture to make a comparison: His lordship," said Eastwood, prudently pausing before he committed himself to metaphor, "is, if I may make bold to say so, one of the nicest young gentlemen!"

Mary had risen hastily to interrupt this dangerous interview, which alarmed her. She

stood, paying no attention to Eastwood while the man was talking, feeling herself crowded and pressed on all hands by a multitude of thoughts. The hum of them was in her ears, like the sound of a throng of people. Should she go to the library, whatever her father might think of the interruption? Should she stop this meeting at all hazards? or should she let it go on, and that come which would? All was confusion around her, her heart beating loudly in her ears, and a hundred suggestions sounding through that stormy throbbing. But when Eastwood's commonplace voice, to which she had been paying no heed, stopped, Mary's thoughts came to a stop also. She grew faint, and the light seemed to vanish from her eyes.

The Squire had been sitting alone all day. He had seemed to all the servants (the most accurate of observers in such a case) more feeble than usual. His daughter, agitated and full of trouble about other things, had not remarked any change. But Eastwood had shaken his head down stairs, and had said that he did not like the looks of master. He had never been so gentle before. Whatever you said to him he smiled, which was not at all the Squire's way. And though he

had a book before him, Eastwood had remarked that he did not read. He would cast his eyes upon his book when any one went in, but it was always the same page. Eastwood had made a great many pretences of business, in order to see how his master was —pretences which the Squire in his usual health would have put a stop to summarily, but which to-day he either did not observe at all, or received smilingly. In this way Eastwood had remarked a great many things which filled him with dismay; for he liked his old master, and the place suited him to perfection. He noticed the helpless sort of way in which Mr. Musgrave sat; his knees feebly leaning against each other, his fingers falling in a heap upon the arm of his chair, his eyelids half covering his eyes. It was half the instinct of obedience, and half a benevolent desire to rouse his master, which made Eastwood introduce the visitor into the library without consulting Miss Musgrave. Judging by his own feelings, the man felt that nothing was so likely to stimulate and rouse up the Squire as a visit from a lord. There were not too many of them about; visitors of any kind, indeed, were not over plentiful at Penninghame; and a nice, cheerful,

affable young lordship was a thing to do anybody good.

And Geoff went in, full of the mission he had taken in hand. It was a bold thing to do, after all he had heard of the inexorable old Squire who had shut his heart to his son, and would hear nothing of him, as everybody said. But it seemed to Geoff, in the rash generosity of his youth, that if he, who was the representative of the injured family, were to interfere, the other must be convinced—must yield, at least, to reason, and consent to consider the subject. But he did not expect a very warm reception, and went in with a beating heart.

Mr. Musgrave had risen up to receive him; he had not failed in any of his faculties. He could still hear as well as he did twenty years before, and Lord Stanton's name was unusual enough to call his attention for the moment. He had raised himself from his chair, and stood leaning forward, supporting himself with both hands upon the writing-table before him. This had been a favourite attitude, when he had no occasion for support; but now the feeble hands leaned heavily with all the weight of his frame upon them. He said the name that had been announced to him

with a wavering of suspicion in his tone, "Lord Stanton!" then pointed with a tremulous sweep of his hand to a seat, and himself dropped back into his chair. He was not the stern old chief whom Geoff expected to find in arms against every suggestion of mercy, but a feeble old man, smiling faintly, with a kind of veiled intelligence in his eyes. He murmured something about "an unusual pleasure," which Geoff could not make out.

"I have come to you, sir, about important business. I hope you will not think I am taking too much upon myself. I thought, as I was—the chief person on one side, and you on the other, that you might allow me to speak?"

Geoff was as nervous as a child; his colour went and came. It awed him, he could scarcely tell why, to see the feebleness of the old figure, the dreary, abstracted look in the old face.

"Surely—surely," said the old man. "Why should you not speak to me? Our family is perhaps better known; but yours Mr. —— I mean, my Lord Stanton, yours is—"

He half forgot what he was saying, getting slower and slower, and now stopped all at once. Then, after a moment, rousing himself,

resumed, with a wave of his hand, "Surely—you must say—what you have to say."

This was worse for Geoff than if he had forbidden him altogether. What could he do to rouse interest in the old man's breast?

"I want to speak, sir," he said, faltering, "of your son."

"My son?—ah! yes, Randolph is here. He is too old for me—too old—not like a son. What does it matter who is your father when it comes to that age?"

"It was not Randolph, sir. I did not know him; but it is your other son—your eldest son, I mean—John."

"Eh?" The old man roused up a little. "John—that was my little brother; we called him Johnny—a delightful boy. There is just such another in the house now, I believe. I think he is in the house."

"Oh, sir!" said Geoff, "I want to speak to you—to plead with you for some one who is not in the house—for your son John—John who has been so long away. You know—don't you know whom I mean?—your eldest son, Mr. Musgrave—*John*, who left us and left everything so many years ago."

A wavering light came over the old man's face. He opened his eyes wide and gazed at

Geoff, who, for his part, was too much troubled and alarmed to know what to do.

"Eh!" he said again, with a curious blank stare, "my—what? Son? but not Randolph. No more about sons, they are a trouble and a sorrow. To tell the truth I am drowsy rather. I suppose—I have not been very well. Have you seen the little boy?"

"The little boy?—your grandson, sir?

"Eh! you call him that! He is just such another as little Johnny, my little brother, who was eighteen months younger than I. You were saying something else, my—my—friend! But to tell the truth, this is all I am good for now. The elders would like to push us from the scene; but the little ones," said the Squire, with a curious sudden break of laughter, which sounded full of tears, "the little ones—are fond of old people; that is all I am good for nowadays—to play with the little boy——"

"Oh, sir!" said Geoff in his eagerness, "it is something very different that is expected of you. To save the little boy's father—your son—to bring him back with honour. It is honour, not shame that he deserves. I who am a stranger, who am the brother of the man who was killed, I have come to entreat you to do John Musgrave justice. You know how

he has been treated. You know, to our disgrace, not his, that there is still a sentence against him. It is John Musgrave—John Musgrave we ought to think of. Listen to me—oh, listen to me! Your son—"

The old man rose to his feet, and stood wavering, gazing with troubled wide-open eyes, full of the dismal perplexity of an intelligence which feels itself giving way. "John Musgrave!" he said, with pale lips which trembled and dropped apart; and a thrill and trembling came over his whole frame. Geoff sprang up and came towards him in alarm to support him, but the Squire waved him away with both his tremulous hands, and gave a bewildered look round him as if for some other prop. Suddenly he caught sight of the little carved oak cupboard against the wall. "Ah!" he said, with an exclamation of relief. This was what he wanted. He turned and made a feeble step towards it, opened it, and took from it the cordial which he used in great emergencies, and to which he turned vaguely in this utter overthrowal of all his forces now. But then ensued a piteous spectacle; all his strength was not sufficient to pour it out. He made one or two despairing efforts, then put the bottle and glass down upon the table with

a low cry, and sank back into his chair. He looked at Geoff with the very anguish of feebleness in his eyes. "Ah!" he faltered, "it is true—they are right. I am old—old—and good for nothing. Let them push me away, and take my place." A few sobs, bitter and terrible, came with the words, and two or three tears dropped down the old man's grey-pale cheeks. The depth of mortal humiliation was in this last cry.

Geoff almost wept too in the profound pity of his generous young soul—it went to his very heart. "Let me help you," he cried, pouring out the cordial with anxious care. It was all the Squire could do to put it to his lips. He laid one of his trembling hands upon Geoff's shoulder as he gave back the glass, and whispered to him hoarsely, "Not Randolph," he said; "don't let Randolph come. Bring me—do you know?—the little boy."

"Yes, sir, yes," cried Geoff; "I understand."

The old Squire still held him with a hand which was heavy as lead upon his arm, "God bless you, my lad," he said. He did not know who Geoff was; but trusted to him as in utter prostration we trust to any hand held out to us. And a little temporary ease came with the

potion. He smiled feebly once more, laid back his head, and closed his eyes. "My little Johnny!" he said; and his hands fell as Eastwood had described them, the fingers crumpled together all in a heap, upon the arms of his chair.

Geoff rushed out of the room with a beating heart, feeling himself all at once thrust into a position of importance in this unknown house. He had never seen death or its approach, and in his inexperience did not know how difficult it was to shuffle off the coils of mortality. He thought the old man was dying. Accordingly, he rushed up the slope to the old hall like a whirlwind, where Mary and the children were. "Come, come," he cried; "he is ill, very ill!" and snatching Nello's reluctant hand, ran back, dragging the child with him, who resisted with all his might. "Come, your grandfather wants you," cried Geoff. Mary followed, alarmed, and wondering, and—scarcely knowing where she went in her agitation—found herself, behind the young man and the boy, at the door of that sacred library which the children had never entered, and where their very existence was ignored. Her father was lying back in his great chair; Eastwood, whom Geoff had hastily summoned, standing behind. The old

man's heavy eyes were watching the door, his old limbs huddled together in the chair, like something inanimate thrown down in a heap, and lying as it fell. At sight of this awful figure, little Nello gave a loud cry of childish terror, and turning round, would have fled but for Geoff, who stood behind him. At the sound of the child's voice, the old man roused himself feebly; he moved his arms—extending them in intention at least—and his lips with inaudible words. "Go to him, go to him!" cried Geoff in an imperative whisper. Little Nello was not without courage, though he was afraid. Finding the way of escape blocked up, he turned round again, stood irresolute for a moment, and then advanced with the strength of desperation. The old man, with a last effort, put out his arms, and drew the child between his knees. "My little Johnny!" he said, with an only half-articulate outbreak of crying and strange laughter. Then his arms fell powerless; his head drooped on his breast. Nello broke out wildly into crying; but stood fascinated between the feeble knees.

Was he dead? Geoff thought so in his simplicity as he led the child away, and left Mary and the servants, whom he had sum-

moned, in this death-chamber. He led Nello back to the hall, and sat down beside the children and talked to them in low tones. His mind was full of awe and solemn feeling; his own youth, and strength, and happiness seeming a kind of insult to the old and dying. He went back after a while very grave and humble, to ask how it was, and what he could do. But the Squire was not dead. He was stricken by that *avant-courier* of the great king, who kills the mind before the body dies. It was "a stroke," Eastwood said, in all the awe, yet importance, of so tragic an event. He had seen it coming for weeks before, he said.

CHAPTER XI.

IN SUSPENSE.

RANDOLPH MUSGRAVE was extremely annoyed at the turn things had taken. On the day of his father's seizure indeed a kind of serene solemnity came over him. He would not have been so indiscreet or indecorous as to admit that he was glad of the "stroke" which might terminate the Squire's life; such an evil sentiment was far from him. Still if his dear father was indeed in the providence of God to be taken away from this mortal scene, there was a sad satisfaction in having it happen while he was still at the Castle and ready to be of use. As the only male member of the family, it was indeed very important that he should be there on such a melancholy occasion. Mary would have enough on her hands with the nursing and the strictly feminine duties, and he was the only one to turn to, the only one who could do anything.

He telegraphed to his wife what the sad occasion was that detained him, and went to bed with a comfortable sense that his visit had not been in vain. It was melancholy to think that all might be over before the morning; but yet he could do no good by staying up and wearing himself out. If it should so happen that his own sad prognostications were correct, why then he had occasion for all his strength, for he it would be who must do everything. And no martyr could have contemplated the stake with more elevated resignation and satisfaction than Randolph looked at the labours and troubles he would have to take upon him. He lay down, solemnly going over them in his mind—the details of the funeral, the reading of the will, the taking possession of the estate. He resolved that he would take possession in his brother's name. No one knew where John was; he could not be called at a moment's notice like respectable men. Nor, indeed, would it be kind to think of such a thing as bringing him here to the endangerment of his life. No, he would take possession for his brother. He would put his brother's little son to school. The girl of course would go with Mary, who for her part must, he supposed, have the house on the way

to Pennington, which was called the Dower-house, though he did not think an unmarried sister had any real right to a place which was intended for the widow of the previous Squire. But that might pass: Mary had been accustomed to have everything her own way, and she should have the Dower-house by grace at least, if not by right. He fell asleep as he was arranging all these things with a great deal of serious satisfaction. Of course it was sad: what is there in this vale of tears that is not mixed with sadness? But it was not (he said to himself) as if his father were a young man, or carried off in the midst of his work. He was old, he had lived out the life of man, he had arrived at the time when a man has a right to expect that his day is over, and must know that in the course of nature he ought to give place to his successors. And as things were to take such a serious turn, how well it was that he, Randolph, should be on the spot to do everything! His satisfaction in this was really the foremost feeling in his mind.

But all was not over in the morning, as Randolph had so certainly anticipated. He got up in the same solemnized but resigned and serene condition, and wondered a little

to see how late it was. For indeed the turn things had taken, though so serious, had been peace-inspiring, removing anxiety from his mind, and he had slept later than usual in consequence. And it was clear that as yet there had been "no change." Eastwood, who was late too, having stayed up late on the previous night indulging the solemn excitement which was natural to this crisis, came in with profound seriousness and an air as solemn as Randolph's. "Just the same, sir," he said; "the doctor is with him now." Randolph could not help a slight sensation of disappointment. He had made up his mind so distinctly what was to happen, and there are cases in which even good news are out of place. It was with less resignation and more anxiety that he hurried out to hear what the doctor said.

And he was much provoked and annoyed when a week later there was still no progress made, and it became apparent that no such easy solution of all difficulties as he had expected was to be looked for. The Squire was in much the same state on the next Saturday and the next, and it was apparent that the illness was to be a lingering and tedious one—the kind of thing which wears

out everybody round. When people are going to die, what a pity that they should not do it speedily, relieving both themselves and others! But nature, so often acting in a manner contrary to all prognostications, was not to be hurried. To jog her gently on, and relieve the sufferer authoritatively from his troubles, is not yet permissible in England. On the contrary, medical science acts just the other way, with questionable mercy, prolonging lives in which there is nothing but suffering, and stimulating the worn-out machinery of the frame to go on a little longer, to suffer a little more, with all that wheezing and creaking of the rusty wheels which bears witness to the unnaturalness of the process. This was what Randolph felt with much restrained warmth of annoyance. It was unnatural; it was almost impious. Two doctors, a professional nurse, and Mary, who was as good, all labouring by every possible invention to keep mere life in their patient. Was it right to do so? Providence had evidently willed to release the old man, but science was forcing him to remain imprisoned in the flesh. It was very hard upon the Squire, and upon Randolph too, especially as the latter could not venture to express his real sentiments on this matter, but was compelled

to be glad of every little sign of tenacity and vitality which the patient gave. If it had been recovery indeed, he said to himself, there might have been some reason for satisfaction; but as it was only holding by life, mere existing and nothing more, what ground was there for thankfulness? It would be better for the sufferer himself, better for everybody, that it should be over soon. After this state of things had lasted for a fortnight, Randolph could not bear it any longer. He sent for Mary from the sick-room, and gave her to understand that he must go.

"Had I expected he would last so long," he said, "I should have gone last week. Of course it does not matter for you who have nothing else to do; but my work and my time are of importance. If anything were likely to happen directly, of course I should think it my duty to stay; but, so far as I can see, nothing is likely to happen," said Randolph in an aggrieved tone. Mary was too sad to laugh and too languid to be angry, but there came a gleam of mingled resentment and amusement into her eyes.

"It is not for us to wish that anything should happen," she said.

"Wish? Did I talk of wishing? I stated a fact. And in the meantime my parish is being neglected and my work waiting for me. I cannot hang on here for ever. Of course," Randolph added, "if anything should happen, you have only to telegraph, and I will come."

"I don't see that it is necessary, Randolph. My father may rally, or he may linger for months, the doctors say; and whatever happens—of course you shall hear immediately; but so far as I am concerned, it does not seem necessary to disturb your work and unsettle your parish——"

"That is ridiculous; of course I shall come the moment I am summoned. It is quite essential that there should be some man to manage matters. And the boy is all ready," he added; "you had his outfit prepared before my father's attack came on. Let them pack up for him, and on Friday we shall go."

"The boy! How could I send him away now, when my father might recover his consciousness, and want him?"

"My father want him? This is too much," said Randolph—"my father, from whom you concealed his very existence—who never cared for children at any time. My *father*? What could he possibly want with the boy? He

should have gone a fortnight ago. I wrote to enter his name of course, and the money is running on. I can't afford to pay for nothing whatever you may do, Mary. Let his things be packed up, and let him go with me."

"I think your brother is right," said the Vicar, who was present. "Nello is doing no good with me. We have been so much disturbed with all that has taken place; and Emily has been so poorly—you know how poorly she has been—and one feels with one's own children the time can always be made up somehow. That is the worst of lessons at home," said Mr. Pen, with a sigh.

"But my father sent for him—wanted him; how can I send the child away? Mr. Pen, you know, if Randolph does not, that he is the heir, and his grandfather has a right to have him close at hand."

"It is no use arguing with women," said Randolph, white with rage. "I don't understand this nonsense about my father wanting him. I don't believe a word of it. But I tell you this, Mary, if he is the heir, I am his uncle, his next friend; and I say, he sha'n't lose his time here and get ruined among a pack of women. He must go to school. Supposing even that my father did want him (which is absolute

absurdity; why, my father pretends not to know of his existence!) would you put a selfish old man's fancy against the boy's good?"

"Randolph! how do you dare, when he is so ill," cried Mary, with trembling lips, "to speak of my father so!"

"It is true enough anyhow," said the undutiful son. "When he is so ill! Why, that is the reason I can speak freely. One would not hurt his feelings if he could ever know it. But he was always known to be selfish. I did not think there was any doubt about that. The boy must not be ruined for an old man's whim, even if it is true."

"It is dreadful to go against you," said the Vicar, looking at her with piteous eyes, beseeching her forgiveness; "but Randolph is in the right. Nello is losing his time; he is doing no good; he ought to go to school."

"You too!" cried Mary. She could not but smile, though the tears were in her eyes. And poor Mr. Pen's dissent from her cost the good man so much. He looked at her, his eyes too filling, with deprecating, beseeching, wistful looks, as a dog does. When he thus took part so distinctly against Mary, conscience, it was clear, must have been strong within Mr. Pen. He had tried hard for her sake to

overcome the habit of irregular hours and desultory occupation which had grown upon him, and to give the children their lessons steadily, at the same hours, day by day. But poor Mr. Pen had not known how hard it would be to accomplish this. The idea of being able to make up the failing lessons at any odd moment which made the children at the Vicarage so uncertain in their hours, had soon returned after the first bracing up of duty towards Lilias and Nello had come to an end. And then Mrs. Pen had been ill, and could not bear the noise of the children; and then the Squire had been ill, upsetting everybody and everything; and then — the Vicar did not know what more to say for himself. He had got out of the way of teaching, out of the habit of exact hours, and Emily had been very poorly, and, on the whole, Randolph was right, and the boy ought to go to school.

Several of these discussions, however, took place before Mary gave way. The account Randolph had heard of the last scene in the library, before the Squire had his "stroke," had not been at all satisfactory to his mind. He sincerely believed (though with an uneasy sense of something in it that sounded like

truth) that this story was a fabrication to suit a purpose. But, on the other hand, his own intentions were very distinct. The mere fact that such a story had been invented showed the meaning on the other side. This boy was to be foisted into the place which, for years, he had supposed himself to occupy. John not being possible, who but Randolph could fill that place? Another heir was ridiculous, was shameful, and a wrong to him. He would not suffer it. What right had John, an outlaw and exile, to have a son, if it came to that? He would not allow the child to stay here to be petted and pampered, and made to believe himself the heir. For, in the end, Randolph had made up his mind that the boy could not and should not be admitted to the advantages of heirship without a very different kind of proof of identity from any they possessed. And it would be ruin to the child to be allowed to fill such a false position now. The mere idea of it filled him with suppressed rage. He did not mean the boy any harm—not any real harm. On the contrary, it would be a real advantage to him in any case to be bred up frugally and industriously; and this he would insist upon, in spite of every resistance. He would not leave the child here to have him

wormed into the old man's affections, made a tool of by Mary in John's interests, and to his own detriment. He was determined to get rid of Nello, whatever it cost him : not to do him harm, but to get him out of the way. This idea began to possess him like a mania—to get rid of the child who was more dangerous, a great deal more dangerous, than John himself. And all the circumstances of the house favoured his removal at this moment, when the Squire's illness occupied everybody's attention. And then it was a great point to have enlisted on his side the reluctant and abashed, yet conscientious support of Mr. Pen.

As for the children themselves, a subtle discomfort had stolen into their life. The old gentleman's illness, though it did not affect them, affected the house. The severe and dangerous illness of an important member of any household has always a confusing influence upon domestic life. It changes the centre of existence, so that everything, which once radiated from the cheerful hearth becomes absorbed in the sick-chamber, making of it the temporary and fictitious centre of the dwelling. In this changed orbit, all the stars of the household firmament shine, and beyond it everything is left cold, and sunless, and

neglected. Children are always the first to feel this atmospheric change, which affects them more than it does the watchers and nurses, whose time and minds are absorbed in the new occupation. It was as if the sun had gone out of the sky to the children at Penninghame. They were left free indeed, to go and come as they liked, nobody attempting to hustle them out of the way, to say, "Run, children, some one is coming." All the world might go and come, and it did not matter. Neither did it matter to them now where they went, for every room was equally dreary and empty. Mary, who meant home to them, and to whom they carried all their grievances and pleasures, had disappeared from their view; and Miss Brown, who was their directress in minor matters, had become invisible too, swallowed up by that sick-room, which absorbed everything. It was no pleasure to roam about the drawing-room, generally forbidden ground, and even through and through the passages from the hall to the dining-room, though they had so often longed to do it, when nobody was to be found there, either to laugh with them, or to find fault. Even Eastwood was swept up in the same whirlpool; and as for Mary, their domestic

divinity, all that was seen of her was when she passed from one room to another, crossing the corridor, disappearing within the door of the mysterious chamber, where doctors and nurses, and every sort of medicine, and drinks, and appliances of all kinds, were being taken. How could the old gentleman want so much? Twice over a new kind of bed was taken into that strange gulf of a sick-room, and all so silently—Eastwood standing on the stairs; deprecating with voice and gesture, "No noise, no noise!" That was what everybody said. Mary would smile at them when she met them, or wave her hand from the end of the corridor, or over the stairs. Sometimes she would pause and stoop down and kiss them, looking very pale and worn out. "No, dear, he is no better," she would say. Except for these encounters, and the accounts which the servants gave them of their grandfather's state,—how he was lying, just breathing, knowing nobody, not able to speak,—accounts which froze the children's blood in their veins—they had no life at all; only dull meals which they ate under this shadow, and dull hours in which, having nothing to do, they huddled together, weary and lonely, and with nothing before them but to go to bed. Out of doors it was

not much better. Mr. Penn had fallen into all the old disorder of his ways, out of which he had made a strenuous effort to wake for their benefit. He never was ready for them when they went with their lessons. "I will hear you to-morrow," he would say, looking at them with painful humility, feeling the grave countenance of Lilias more terrible than that of any judge; and when to-morrow came, there were always a hundred excuses. "Go on to the next page and learn the next lesson. I have had such a press of work—and Mrs. Pennithorne is so poorly," the poor man would say. All this shook the pillars of the earth to Lilias and Nello. They were shaken out of everything they knew, and left to blunder out their life as best they could, without any guide.

And this was hardest upon the one who understood it least. Lilias, whose mind was open to everything, and who sat looking out as from a door, making observations, keenly interested in all that went on, and at the same time with a reserve of imagination to fall back upon, was fully occupied at least if nothing more. Every day she watched for "Mr. Geoff" with news of her father. The suspense was too visionary to crush her with that sicken-

ing depression which affects elder minds. All had a softening vagueness and confusion to the child. She hoped and hoped, and cried with imaginative misery, then dried her eyes and hoped again. She thought everything would come right if Mr. Geoff would only bring papa; and Mr. Geoff's ability sooner or later to find and bring papa she never doubted. It was dreadful to have to wait so long—so long; but still every morning, any morning he might come. This hope in her mind absorbed Lilias, and made her silent, indisposed for play. At other times she would talk eagerly, demanding her brother's interest and response to things he did not understand. Children can go on a long time without understanding, each carrying on his or her monologue, two separate streams, which, flowing tranquilly together, feel like something mutual, and answer all the ends of intercourse; and in this way neither of them was aware how far apart they were. But Nello was dull; he had so little to do. He had no pony, he could not play cricket as Johnny Pen did with the village boys. He was small, even for his age, and he had not been educated in the art of knocking about as English boys are. He was even a little timid of the water and the boats, in which other

boys might have found solace. Half of his time he wandered about, listless, not knowing what to make of himself.

This was the condition of mind in which Randolph met him on one of these lingering afternoons. The child had strayed out all by himself; he was standing by the water-side at his old amusement, but not enjoying it this time. "What are you doing?" said his uncle, calling out to him as he approached. Randolph was not a favourite with the children; but it was half an amusement to see any one coming near, and to have to answer a question. He said "Nothing," with a sigh; not a single skip could he get out of those dull slates. The water would not carry them; they would not go; they went to the bottom with a prosaic splash and thud. How different from that day with the old gentleman, when they flew as if they had been alive! Perhaps this new comer might have luck, and do as well as the old gentleman. "Will you have a try?" he said; "here is a good one—it ought to be a good one; but I can't make them go to-day."

"I—have a try?" Randolph was startled by the suggestion. But he was anxious to conciliate the little fellow whom he wanted so much to get rid of. And it was only for once.

He took suspiciously (for he was always suspicious) the stone Nello held out to him, and looked at it as if it might be poison—or it might be an attempt on his dignity got up by somebody. When he had satisfied himself that it was a common piece of slate, he took courage, and, with a smile that sat very awkwardly upon his face, threw it, but with the most complete unsuccess.

"Ah! you are not good, like the old gentleman; his skipped seven times! He was so clever at it! I wish he was not ill," said Nello, checking an incipient yawn. It was, perhaps, the first time any one had uttered such a wish. It had been taken for granted, even by his daughter, that the Squire's illness was the most natural thing in the world.

"Did he really come and play with you? But old men are no better than children," said Randolph. "I suppose he had nothing else to do."

"It is very nice to have somebody to play with when you have nothing else to do," said Nello, reflectively. "And he was clever. You —you don't know even how to throw; you throw like a girl—like this. But this is how the old gentleman did," cried Nello, suiting the action to the word, "and so do I."

"Do you know nothing but these baby-games? I suppose you never played cricket?" said Randolph, with, though he was a man, a pleasurable sense of being thus able to humiliate the little creature beside him. Nello coloured to the roots of his hair.

"I do not like cricket. Must every one like the same things? It is too hot; and one cannot play by oneself," the boy added with a sigh.

"You ought not to play by yourself, it is not good for you. Have you no one to play with, little boy?"

"Nobody," said Nello, with emphasis; "not one person. There is Lily; but what does it matter about a girl? And sometimes Johnny Pen comes. He is not much good; he likes the green best, and all the village boys. Then they say I am too little;—and I don't know them," the boy added with a gleam of moisture in his eyes. The village boys had not been kind to Nello; they had laughed at him for a little foreigner, and made remarks about his hair, which was cut straight across his forehead. "I don't want to know them." This was said with vehemence; for Nello was sore at the want of appreciation which had been shown him They did not care for *him*, but they made a great deal of Johnny Pen!

"You should go to school; that is where all boys should go. A boy should not be brought up like a little girl; he should learn to use his hands, and his fists even. Now, what should you do if there was a fight?"

"A fight?" Nello grew pale and then grew red. "If it was—some one else, I would walk away; but if it was me—if any one touched me, I should kill him!" cried the child, setting his little white teeth.

Randolph ought professionally to have improved the occasion; but he only laughed—that insulting laugh which is offensive to everybody, and specially exasperates a child. "How could you kill him? That is easier said than done, my boy."

"I would get a gun, or a sword; but first," said Nello, calming down, "I would tell him to go away, because I should not *wish* to kill him. I have seen people fighting with guns and swords—have you?"

Here Randolph, being obliged to own himself inferior, fell back upon what was right, as he ought to have done before.

"Fighting is very wrong," he said. "It is dreadful to think of people cutting each other to pieces, like wild beasts; but it is not so bad if you defend yourself with your fists. Only

foreigners fight with swords; it is thoroughly un-English. You should never fight; but you would have to defend yourself if you were at school."

Nello looked at his uncle with an agreeable sense of superiority. "But I have seen *real* fighting," he said; "not like children. I saw them fighting the Austrians—that was not wrong. Papa said so. It was to get back their houses and their country. I was little then, and I was frightened. But they won!" cried the boy, with a gleam in his dark eyes. What a little savage he was! Randolph was startled by the sudden reference to "papa," and this made him more warm and eager in his turn.

"Whoever has trained you to be a partisan has done very wrong," he said. "What do you know about it? But look here, my little man. I am going away on Friday, and you are to come with me. It will be a great deal better for you than growing up like a little girl here. You are exactly like a little girl now, with your long hair and your name which is a girl's name. You would be Jack if you were at school. I want to make a man of you. You will never be anything but a little lady if you don't go to school. Come; you have only to

put on a frock like your sister. Nelly! Why, that's a girl's name! You should be Jack if you were at school."

"I am not a girl!" cried Nello. His face grew crimson, and he darted his little brown fist—not so feebly as his size promised—in his uncle's face. Randolph took a step backwards in his surprise. "I hate you!" cried the child. "You shall never, never come here when I am a man. When the old gentleman is dead, and papa is dead, and everything is mine, I will shut up all the doors, I will turn out the dogs, and you shall never come here. I know now it is true what Lily says—you are the bad uncle that killed the babes in the wood. But when I am a big man and grown up, you shall never come here!"

"So!" said Randolph, furious but politic; "it is all to be yours? I did not know that. The castle, and the woods, and everything? How do you know it will be yours?"

"Oh! everybody knows that," said Nello, recovering his composure as lightly as he had lost it; "Martuccia and every one. But first the old gentleman must be dead, and, I think, papa. I am not so sure about papa. And do you think they would teach me cricket at school, and to fight? I don't really care for

cricket, not really. But Johnny Pen and the rest, they think so much of it. I should like to knock down all their wickets, and get all the runs; that would teach them! and lick them after!" said the bloodthirsty Nello, with gleaming eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

AN APPARITION.

THUS Randolph overcame Nello's opposition to school, to his own extreme surprise. Though he had a child of his own, and all the experiences of a middle-aged clergyman, he had never yet learned the A B C of childhood. But it may be supposed that the conversation generally had not made him love his nephew more dearly. He shook his fist at the boy as he ran along the water-side, suddenly seized by the delight of the novelty and the thought of Johnny Pen's envy. "If I had you, my boy!" Randolph said, between his teeth, thinking grimly of the heirship which the child was so sure of. Pride would have a fall in this as in other cases. The child's pretensions would not count for very much where he was going. To be flogged out of all such nonsense would be far the best thing for him; and a good flogging never did a boy much harm. Randolph,

though he was not a bad man, felt a certain gratification in thinking of the change that would occur in Nello's life. There was nothing wrong about the school; it was a very humble place, where farmers' sons were trained roughly but not unkindly. It would make a man of the delicate little half-foreign boy, who knew nothing about cricket. No doubt it would be different from anything he was used to; but what of that? It was the best thing for him. Randolph was not cruel, but still it gave him a little pleasure to think how the impudent little wretch would be brought to his senses; no harm done to him—no *real* harm—but only such a practical lesson as would sweep all nonsense out of his head. If Nello had been a man of his own age, a rival, he could not have anticipated his humiliation with more zest. He would have liked to be a boy himself to fag the little upstart. There would be probably no fagging at the farmers' school, but there would be—well! he smiled to himself. Nello would not like it; but it would bring the little monkey to his senses, and for that good purpose there was no objection to be taken to the means.

And as he walked through the Chase, through the trees, seeing in the distance before

him the blunt turret-chimneys, all veiled and dignified with ivy, of the old house, many thoughts were in Randolph's heart. He was a Musgrave, after all, if not a very fine example of the race. His wife was well off. If it had not been for John, who was a criminal, and this boy—what he would have done for the old place! What he might do still, if things went——well! Was that, perhaps, the word to use—well? That is, if John could be somehow disposed of, prevented from coming home, and the boy pushed quietly to one side. As for John, he could not come home. It would be death—perhaps; certainly renewed disgrace. He would have to stand his trial, and, if he fled from that trial once, how was he likely to be able to face it now? He would stay abroad, of course—the only safe place for him. If he could but be communicated with, wherever he was, and would send for his son and daughter, some arrangement might be made: a share of the income settled upon him, and the family inheritance left for those who could enjoy it. This would be, in every way, the best thing that could be done; best for John himself; best for the house which had been always an honourable one, and never connected with disgrace. It is so easy to believe what

one wishes that Randolph, after a while, going over the subject in his mind, succeeded in smoothing away all difficulties, except, indeed, the initial one of getting into correspondence, one way or another, with John. If this could be done, surely all the rest was smooth enough! John was not a fool; he must see that he could not come home. He must see how difficult it would be to prove his marriage and his son's birth, and make everything clear (though why this should be so difficult Randolph did not explain even to himself). Then he must see equally well that, to put the property and the old castle into the hands of a man with money, who could really do something to improve them, would be far better for the family than to go on as he (John) must do, having no money, if even he could come lawfully into possession. All this was so evident, no man in his senses could refuse to see it. And as for communicating with John: there was, of course, one way, which seemed the natural way, and which surely must be infallible in that case as in most other cases—the *Times*. However far out of the world John might be, surely he would have opportunities from year to year of seeing the *Times!* No Englishman, even though banished, could

live without that. And, sooner or later, if often enough repeated, the advertisement must reach him. Suppose it to be put something in this form:—"J. M., of P.—His brother R. wishes to communicate with him on urgent business connected with the death of their father." This would attract no particular attention from any one, and John could not fail to perceive that he was meant. Thus he had, to his satisfaction, made everything clear.

It was just when he came to this satisfactory settlement of the difficulty, so perfectly easy in theory, though no doubt there might be certain difficulties about carrying it out, that Randolph suddenly saw, a little way before him, some one making his way through the trees. The Chase was private, and very few people had the right of coming here; neither did Randolph see whence this unexpected passenger had come, for there was no tributary path by which he might have made his way down to the foot-walk through the elms and oaks. He was within easy sight, obscured a little by the brushwood, and with his back to the spectator; but the sight of him gave Randolph a great start and shock, which he could not very well explain. The man was in dark clothes, with a broad felt hat, quite unlike

anything worn in this district; and there was something about his attitude and walk (no doubt a merely fantastic resemblance, or some impression on his mind from his pre-occupation with the idea of John) which recalled his brother to Randolph's mind. He was more startled than words could say. For a moment he could not even think or move, but stood open-mouthed, staring at the figure before him, which went on straight, not turning to the right or to the left.

When Randolph came to himself, he tried to laugh at his own folly—then coughed loudly and meaningly, by way of catching the stranger's attention, and seeing who it was. But his cough attracted no manner of attention from the wayfarer, who went on pushing through the trees, like one who knew every turn and winding. Randolph was at the end of his invention. If he called out "Hi!" it might turn out to be somebody of importance. If he spoke more politely, and called the stranger to halt, he might be a nobody—if indeed it was not——. A vague impression, half of fear, came upon him. What nonsense it was! In broad daylight, in so well-known and familiar a place. Had it been in the dark, in any of the ghostly

passages of the old house! but out here in the sunshine, in the open air!

Randolph took off his hat, to let the air blow freely about him, for he had grown hot and uncomfortable. His hand with the hat in it dropped for a moment between him and the other who was so near him. When he raised it again there was no one there. He rubbed his eyes, looked again, and darted forward to see whether the man was hiding among the trees; but there was no one there. Randolph took off his hat once more, to wipe his streaming forehead; his hand trembled so that he could scarcely do it. What did it mean? When he had convinced himself there was no one to be seen, he turned and hurried away from the place, with his heart beating loudly in his breast. He never looked behind him, but hastened on till he had got to the broad road, where there was not a bush to hide an apparition. Then he permitted himself to draw breath.

It would be doing Randolph injustice to suppose that after he was out of the shadow of the trees, and in safety, with a broad level bit of road before him, on which everything was distinctly visible all round, he could be capable of believing that he had seen a ghost.

Nothing of the kind. It must have been one of the people about the place, poking among the bushes, who had disappeared under the branches of the trees, and whom he thought like John only because he had been thinking of John—or perhaps his thought of John had produced an optical delusion, and imagination had painted some passing shadow as a substantial thing, and endued it with his brother's image. It might have been merely an eccentric tree, on the outline of which fancy had wrought, showing a kind of grotesque resemblance. It might be, and probably was, just nothing at all. And it was supremely ridiculous that his heart should so thump for such an absurd delusion; but thump it did, and that in the most violent manner. He was out of breath, though he had made no exertion. And he could not pick up his thoughts where he had dropped them, when he saw that—figure. A thrill as of guilt was in his soul; he was afraid to begin again where he had left off. He found himself still rather breathless before the house, looking up at the veiled windows of his father's room. For the first time Randolph thought with a little awe of his father lying there between life and death. He had not thought of him at all in his own person, but rather of

the Squire officially, the old life who kept a younger generation out of the estate. It was time the elders were out of the way, and age superseded by middle age. But now for a moment he realized the man lying helpless there, in the very pathway of death—not freed by the Great Deliverer, but imprisoned by Him, all his senses and faculties bound up, a captive tied hand and foot by the grim potency who conquers all men. Randolph was frightened altogether by the mysterious encounter and impressed with awe. If there had been daily service he would have gone to church, but as there was nothing of the sort in Penninghame, he went into the library to read a good book, as the next best thing to do. But he could not stay in the library. The silence of it was awful. He seemed to see his father, seated there in his usual chair, silent, gazing at him with eyes of disapproval that went through and through him. After five minutes he could stand it no longer. He took his good book, and went out to the side of the water, within sight of the road where people were coming and going. It was a comfort to him to see even the doctor's boy with his phials, and the footman who came with his mistress's card to inquire how the

Squire was. And he looked out, but looked in vain, with mingled eagerness and fear for the broad hat he had seen so mysteriously appearing and disappearing. Who could it be?—some stranger astray in the Chase—some one of the many tourists who wander everywhere—or—Randolph shuddered in spite of himself.

It is generally people without imagination, or with the most elementary and rude embryo of that poetic faculty, who see ghosts. This sounds like a paradox, yet there is reason in it. The people who are literal and matter-of-fact in mind, are those to whom wonders and prodigies come naturally; those who possess the finer eye of fancy do not need those actual revelations. Randolph's was as stolid a mind as ever asked for a sign—and he had not asked for a sign in this case, nor felt that anything of the kind was necessary; but his entire mental balance was upset by what he had seen, or supposed himself to have seen; and he could not free his mind from the impression. As he sat and read, or rather pretended to read, his mind kept busy with the one question—What was it? Was it a real person, a stranger who had got astray, and stumbled into some copse or brushwood,

which Randolph had forgotten—a man with a chance resemblance to John, heightened by the pre-occupation and previous reference to John in Randolph's mind? or was it John himself, come to look after his own interests —John—in the body, or out of the body, who could tell?

As for Nello, he ran home by the water-side, his mind possessed by the new thing that was about to be accomplished—school! Boys to play with, novelty of all kinds, and then that cricket, which he pretended to despise, but secretly admired and desired with all his heart —the game which came to Johnny Pen by nature, but which the little foreign boy could not master; all this buzzed through his little head. When he came home from school he would know all about it; he would have played with much better players than Johnny Pen ever saw. The revolution in his thoughts was great and sudden. But as he ran home, eager to tell Lilias about the change in his fortunes, Nello too met with a little adventure. He came suddenly, just as he emerged from the woods upon the water-side where it was open to the road, on a man whom he had repeatedly seen before, and who was generally accompanied by a dog, which was Nello's

admiration. The dog was not with his master now; but he took a something white and furry out of his great pocket, which stopped Nello even in the hot current of his excitement.

"Would you like to have this, my little gentleman?" the man said.

It was a white rabbit, with the biggest ears that Nello had ever seen. How his eyes danced that had been all aglow before!

"But I have no money," he said, disposed to cry in disappointment as sudden as his delight.

"It's not for money, it's a present," said the stranger, with a smile, "and I'll give you another soon. They tell me you're going to school, my young gentleman; is that true?"

"Am I to have it all for myself, or will you come back again for it, and take it away? Oh yes, I'm going to school," said Nello, dropping into indifference. "Will it eat out of my hand? Has it got a name? And am I to have it all for myself?" The rabbit already had eclipsed school for the moment in Nello's mind.

"It's all for you, and better things than that —and what day are you going, my bonnie little lad?"

"To-morrow; oh give it me! I want to show it to Lily," cried the child. "Thank you

very much. Let me run and show it to Lily. We never, never had a rabbit before."

The man stood and looked after Nello with a tender illumination of his dark face. "The old woman likes the other best; but this one is mine," he said to himself. As for Nello, he flew home with his precious burden, out of breath. He said a man had given it to him; but thought of the donor no more.

Randolph spent this, his last evening at home, in anything but an agreeable way; he was altogether unhinged, nervous, and restless, not caring to sit alone. In this respect he was in harmony with the house, which was all upset, tremulous, and full of excitement and expectation. Human nature is always impatient of the slow progress of fate. After the thunderclap of a great event, it is painful to relapse into stillness, and feel the ordinary day resuming its power without any following out of the convulsion. But dramatic sequence, rapidity, and completeness are rare in human affairs. All the little crowd of lookers-on outside the Squire's room watched eagerly for some change. Two or three women were always hanging about the passages, ready, as they said, to run for anything that might be wanted, and always in the way to learn if

anything occurred. They kept a little lamp burning on the table against the wall, at either end of which was a chair, on which sometimes Cook herself, sometimes lesser functionaries, would be found, but always two together, throwing exaggerated shadows on the wall, and talking in whispers of their own fears, and how well they had perceived what was coming. There was not one of them that had not intended, one time or other, to make so bold as to speak to Miss Mary. "But trouble is always soon enough when it comes," they said, shaking their heads. Then Eastwood would come and join them, his shadow wavering over the staircase. When the privileged persons who had the *entrée* went or came, Miss Brown or the nurse, or even Mary herself, there was a little thrill and universal movement.

"Change! no, there's no change—there never will be but one change," Miss Brown said, standing solemnly by the table, with the light on her grave face; and it was upon this Rembrandtish group that Randolph came, as he wandered about in a similar frame of mind, glad to find himself in company with others, though these others were only the maids of the house.

"Is my father worse?" he asked, pausing, with his arm upon the bannisters. Such a group of eager, pale faces! and the darkness all round in which others still might be lurking unseen.

"No change, sir," said Miss Brown, shaking her head. She was impatient too, like the rest, but yet felt a sort of superior resignation, as one who was in the front of affairs. And she had something to say besides. She gave a glance at the other women, who responded with secret nods of encouragement, then cleared her throat and delivered her soul—"Mr. Randolph, sir, might I make so bold as to say a word?"

"Say whatever you like," said Randolph. He could not help but give a little glance round him, to make sure that there was no one else about.

"It is just this, sir—when you see him lying there, that white, as if he was gone already, and know that better he can't be—oh, it brings a many thoughts into the mind! I've stood by dying beds before now, and seen them as were marked for death, but I never saw it more clear. And oh, Mr. Randolph, if there were things that might lie on his mind, and keep him from going quiet, as an old

gentleman ought! If there were folks he ought to see afore all's over——!"

"I don't see what you are driving at," Randolph said, hastily. "Speak out, if you've anything to say."

"Oh, sir," said Miss Brown, "don't you think ——. I am not one that likes to interfere, but I am an old servant, and when a body has been long about a place, it's natural to feel an interest. If it wasn't your family at all—if it was another that your advice was asked for—shouldn't you say that Mr. John ought to know?"

This appeal startled Randolph. He had not been looking for it; and he gave an uncomfortable look round him. Then he felt a strange irritation and indignation that were more easy to express. "Am I my brother's keeper?" he said. "I don't know where Mr. John is, that I should go and hunt for him to let him know."

"Oh, sir," said Miss Brown, "don't you be angry! Cook here is like me: she thinks it's only his due. I would say it to Miss Mary, not troubling you that are 'most a stranger, but she's night and day, she never will leave her father; she has a deal upon her. And a gentleman knows ways that womanfolk don't

think of. If you would be but that kind, Mr. Randolph! Oh, where there's a will there's always a way!"

"It is none of my business," said Randolph; "and I don't know where he is," he added, looking round him once more. He might be here already in the dark, waiting till the breath was out of his father's body—waiting to seize possession of the house, felon as he was. And if Randolph was the means of betraying him into the hands of justice, what would everybody say? He went abruptly away down the uncarpeted, polished stairs, on which his hasty step rang and slid. John, always John! he seemed to be in the air. Even Eastwood, when he attended him with his bed-candle, could not refrain from adding a word. "The doctor looks very serious, sir," Eastwood said; "and if there's any telegraph to be sent, I'll keep the groom ready to go at a moment's notice. 'It would be well to send for all friends,' the doctor said."

"I don't know any one to send for," said Randolph peremptorily; "let the groom go to bed." And he went to bed himself sooner than usual, to get rid of these appeals and of equally imperative thoughts. He went to bed, but he could not go to sleep, and kept his

candle burning half the night. He heard the watchers moving about in his father's room, which was over-head, all the night through. Sometimes there would be a little rush of steps, and then he held his breath, thinking this might be at last the "change" which was looked for. But then everything grew still again, and he dozed, with the one poor candle, feeble but steadfast watcher, burning on till it became a pale intruder into the full glory of day.

Randolph, however, slept deeply in the morning, and got up with the greater part of those cobwebs blown away. John lost his hold upon the imagination in daylight, and he was able to laugh at his foolish alarm. How could it be John whom he had seen? He durst not show himself in the country where still his crime was so well remembered, and the sentence out against him. And as for the appearance being anything more than mortal, or less than human, Randolph laughed at the state of his own nerves which rendered such an idea tenable for a moment. He was a materialist by nature—as so many are; though he said his creed without any intrusive doubts; and the absurdity was too patent after he had slept and been refreshed. But no doubt it was bad for his health, bad for his *morale*, to stay here.

There was something in the atmosphere that was demoralizing; the air had a creeping sensation in it as of something more than met the eye. Death was in it; death, creeping on slowly, silently—loitering about with faint odours of mortality and sickening stillness. Randolph felt that he must escape into a more natural and wholesome air before further harm was done.

As for Mary, the occupations of the sick-room, and the sudden problems of the hereafter thus thrust upon her, were enough to fill her mind, and make her even comparatively indifferent to the departure of Nello, though it was against her judgment. It was not the hereafter of the spirit, which thus lay death-bound on the verge of the unseen, which occupied her. We must all die, everybody knows; but who thinks it true in their own case until it comes? Mary had known very well that a man much over seventy could not live very much longer; but it was only when her father fell back in his chair unconscious, his body motionless, his mind veiled within blinding mists, that she felt the real weight of all that was to follow. It was for her to act as soon as the breath should be out of his body. She did not trust her younger brother, and she did not know

what to do for her elder brother. The crisis had arrived while she was still unprepared. She went down mechanically to see Randolph go away, her eyes seeing many other things more clearly than she saw the two figures actually before her; the man suspicious as usual, and putting no faith in her—the boy in a subdued excitement, his eyes sparkling with the light of novelty and adventure. Randolph had gone into his father's room that morning, and had walked suspiciously round the bed, making quite sure that the "no change" was true. "I suppose he may last like this for weeks yet?" he said, in a querulous undertone—and yet not so low but that everybody heard it—to the doctor. "Oh, hush, for Heaven's sake, Randolph! How can you tell that he does not hear?" said Mary. "Pshaw! how can he hear?" Randolph replied, turning with a certain contempt from the helpless and powerless frame which lay there making no sign, yet living when it would be so much better that he should die. The awe of such a presence gives way to familiarity and weariness even with the most reverent watcher; but Randolph, though he had no desire to be indecorous, could not help feeling a certain irritation at his father, who balked him by this insensibility just as he

had balked him while yet he had all his wits about him. It seemed incredible that this half-dead, half-living condition, which brought everything to a standstill, should not be more or less a man's own fault.

Thus he went away, irritated and baffled, but still full of excitement; the moment which must decide all could not be very far off. He left the strongest charges upon the household, from his sister to Eastwood, to send for him instantly when "any change" occurred. "If it should be to-morrow," he said; "I shall hold myself always ready." He kept his eyes fixed on the Castle as long as he could see it, feeling that even now there might be a sign recalling him. And he thought he had made up his mind what to do. He would bring his wife with him and take possession at once. Mary would not be able to look after everything; or, at least, if she should be, she ought not to be; no really delicate-minded woman, no *lady* should be able to make any exertion at such a moment. He would come with his household, as a kindness to Mary, and take possession at once.

As for Nello, he took leave very cavalierly of Lilias, who cried, yet would not cry, angry at his desertion and deeply wounded by his

indifference, at the door. Poor little Lilias, it was her first disappointment in life. He was not thinking of her, but a great deal of his new portmanteau and the sandwiches put up for him, and the important position as a traveller in which he stood—but neither was Nello unkind. He took pains to console his sister.

"Don't cry," he said, "Lily; I shall come back in the holidays, and sometimes I will write you letters; and there is always the white rabbit I gave you, and little Mary Pen for you to play with."

"I don't want to play," said Lilias, with a burst of tears; "is play everything? I am too old for that. But oh, Nello, you are going to leave me, and you don't care. You do not care for Mary, or Martuccia, or any one. Me, I should not mind—but you do not love *any one*. You care for nobody but yourself."

"Oh yes I do," said Nello, "everybody," and he cracked the coachman's whip which was placed in readiness; "but boys have to go out and see the world; Eastwood says so. If I don't like being at school I shall come back and stay at home, and then you will have me again; but I hope not, and I don't think so,

for school is jolly, very jolly, so Uncle Randolph says."

"You can go with Uncle Randolph," cried Lilias, in a blaze of sharp anger, "and I hope you will not come back. I hope you will always stay away, you cruel, cruel boy!"

This bewildered Nello for a moment, as did the hurried wiping of Lilias' eyes and the tremulous quiver of her lip with which it was accompanied; but there was no time for more. He laughed and waved his hand to her as he was hurried into the carriage. He had scarcely ever looked so gay before. He took off his hat and waved it as he went out of sight. Hurrah! they heard his shrill little voice shouting. Lilias sat down on the ground and cried her heart out. It was not only that he was unkind—but Nello thus showed himself wanting to all the needs of the situation. No little hero of a story had ever gone away without a tribute to the misery of parting. This thought contracted her heart with a visionary pang more exquisite than the real. Nello was no hero, nothing but a little cruel, common, vulgar boy, not fit to put into any story, to go away so.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOVES OF THE ANGELS.

WHILE these events were going on at the Castle, Lord Stanton, for his part, had come to a standstill in the matter which he had been drawn into so inadvertently, and which had become so very serious an occupation in his life. He was young, and unacquainted with the ways of the world, and he did not know what step to take next. And he too was paralyzed by the sudden catastrophe which had happened to the Squire. Was it his fault? He could scarcely help an uneasy sense that by agitating him unduly he had helped to bring on the sudden attack, and thus he had left the Castle that evening with a heavy burden on his mind. And Geoff, with entire unconsciousness of the lingering pangs of life and the tenacity of the human frame, believed, without any doubt, that Mr. Musgrave would die, and did not know what was to be done

about the exile, whose condition would thus be completely changed. In the meantime it seemed to him necessary to wait until the issue of this illness should be known. Thus his doubtfulness was supplanted by an apparent necessity, and the time went on with nothing done.

He went at first daily to inquire for the old man, and never failed to see Lilias somewhere waiting for him with serious, intent face, and eyes which questioned even when the lips did not speak. Lilias did not say much at any time. She examined his face with her eyes and said "Papa?" with a voice which trembled; but it became by degrees less easy to satisfy Lilias by telling her, as he did so often, that he had not forgotten, that he was doing everything that could be done, smoothing the way for her father's return, or waiting till he could more successfully smooth the way. "You do not believe me, Lily," Geoff said, with a sense of being doubted, which hurt him sadly. "Yes; but he is not your papa, Mr. Geoff, and you are grown up and don't want any one," Lilias said, with her lip quivering. The visionary child was deeply cast down by the condition of the house and the recollection of the melancholy rigid figure

which she had seen carried past, with a pang of indescribable pain and terror. Lilias seemed to see him lying in his room, where Mary now spent almost all her time, pale with that deadly ashen paleness, his faded eyes half open, his helpless hands lying like bits of rag, all the grey fingers huddled together. Fright and sorrow together brought a sob out of her heart whenever she thought of this; not moving, not able to speak, or turn round, or look up at those who watched him; and still not dead! Lilias felt her heart stand still as she thought of her grandfather. And she had no one to take refuge with. Martuccia was frightened too, and would not go up or down stairs alone. Lilias, for her part, did all she could, out of pride, and shame of her own weakness, to conceal her terror; but oh, to have papa nigh to creep close to, to feel safe because he was there! A few tears dropped from her eyes. "You are grown up and you don't want any one." This went to Geoff's heart.

"Oh Lily, don't you think they would let you come to my mother?" he cried; "this is too sad for you, this dismal house; and if Nello goes away as you said——"

"Do you think I would go and leave Mary

all alone? Nobody is sorry for Mary except me—and Mr. Pen. When she comes out of her room I go and I kiss her hand, and she cries. She would be more ill and more weary," said Lilias, with a precocious understanding, "if there was not some little thing to give her an excuse and make her cry."

"My little Lily! who taught you all that? it must have been the angels," cried Geoff, kissing in his turn the little hand.

But this touch had the same effect upon Lilias that her own kiss had on Mary. She cried and sobbed and did her best to swallow it down. "Oh, Mr. Geoff! I want papa!" she cried, with that little convulsive break in her voice which is so pitiful in a child. She was seated on Mary's chair at the door of the hall, and he on the threshold at her feet. Geoff did not know what kind of half-admiring, half-pitying sentiment he had for this child. He could not admire her enough, or wonder at her. She was but a child, not equal to him in his young manhood; and yet that very childhood in its unconsciousness was worlds above him, he thought. He felt like the man in the story who loved the fairy maiden—the young Immortal; would she give up her visionary paradise for his sake and learn

to look at him, not as an angel but as a woman? but for that she must be a woman first, and at present she was but a child. When he kissed her hand it cost Lilias no blush. She accepted it with childish, angelical dignity. "She took the kiss sedately—" and the dark fountains of her eyes filled full, and two great tears tumbled over, and a piteous quiver came to her lips, and she said, "Oh, Mr. Geoff, I want papa!"

This was when the Squire had been ill about a week, six or seven days before Randolph took Nello away. Geoff went home riding, very full of thought. What could he do to please his little Lily? He preferred that she should creep close to himself and tell him her troubles, but he could not resist that plaint, and even though it should be against himself he must try what he could do to bring her father to her. Geoff thought a great deal on this subject, but it was very fatiguing and unsatisfactory, for he did not know what to do, and after a while he relapsed into the pleasanter path, and began to think of Lily. "Because of the angels," he said to himself as he jogged softly along, much more slowly and reflectively than his horse liked to go. He forgot where he was going and the engagements he had, and

everything that was practical and important, as he rambled on. The day was sweet in early autumn, the lake rippling musically upon the beach, the sky blue and crossed by floating atoms of snowy cloud. Everything in the world was sweet and pleasant to the young man. "Because of the angels;" he had never been quite clear what these words meant, but he seemed to see quite plainly now, though he could no more have explained than he could have written *Hamlet*. "Because of the angels!" He seemed to make a little song of it as he went on, a drowsy, delicious burden like the humming of the bee. It was not he that said it, he thought, but it murmured all about him, wrapping him in a soft enchantment. Such a visionary love as his, perhaps, has need of those intoxications of ethereal fancy: for nothing can be so like the love of an angel as that of a young man possessed by a tender visionary passion for a child.

Geoff was so rapt in his own thoughts that he did not see for some time the beckonings and signals that were coming to him from a carriage drawn up on the road to which the path descended, along which he was moving so gently. When his attention was at last caught, he saw it was his Cousin Mary,

leaning half out of the window in her eagerness.

"Give your horse to the footman and come in here—I have so much to say to you," she said.

But when he had done as she told him and taken his seat beside her, Lady Stanton kept looking at her young cousin.

"What is it?" she said; "you keep on smiling, and there is a little drowsy, dreamy, intoxicated air about you; what has happened, Geoff?"

"Nothing; and it is unkind to say I look intoxicated. Could you not find a prettier word?"

"I believe you are really, really!—Geoff, I think I know what it means, and I hope it is somebody very nice. Tell me, who is she?"

"This is strange," said Geoff; "indeed, it is true, I have been visiting a lady; but she is only twelve years old," he said, turning to her with a vivid blush.

"Oh, Geoff!" Mary's brow contracted, "you do not mean *that* little girl?"

"Why shouldn't I mean her? I will make you my confessor, Cousin Mary. I don't think I shall ever marry any one but little Lily. Of course she is very little, and when she is

grown up she will probably have nothing to say to me; but I shall never care for any one else. Why should you shake your head? I never saw any one like her," said Geoff, growing solemn, and shaking off his blush as he saw himself opposed.

"Oh, Geoff!" Mary shook her head and contracted her beautiful brow, "I do not think anything good can come out of that family; but I must not speak. I am jealous, I suppose. How did you know I did not want you for Annie or Fanny?" she went on with a smile that was a little strained and fictitious; for Mary knew very well that she was jealous, but not for Annie, or Fanny, or of Geoff.

"Hush," he said, "I loved you before Lily, but you could not have me; it is Lily, failing you. If you could but have seen her just now! The Squire is lying between life and death, and Miss Musgrave, who was so good to her, is with him night and day, and poor little Lily is so lonely and frightened. She looks at me with her little lip all quivering, and says, 'Papa! I want papa.'" Geoff almost cried himself to recollect her piteous tone, and the tears came to Mary's eyes.

"Ah! if she takes after *him*, Geoff! but that is just what I want to talk to you about.

I have done something that you may think rash. I have spoken to Sir Henry. He is—well, he has his faults like the rest of us—but he is just; he would not do a wrong thing. I told him that you had found out something——"

"What did he say?" cried Geoff, breathless, for Lady Stanton made a sudden pause.

She was looking across him out at the window; her eyes had strayed past his face, looking away from him as people do with a natural artifice to allow the first signs of displeasure to blow over, before they look an offended person in the face. But as she looked, Lady Stanton's countenance changed, her lips fell apart, her eyes widened out, her face paled, as if a cloud had passed over it. She gave a great cry, "Oh John, *John!*" she said.

"What is it?—who is it?" cried Geoff.

She made him signs to have the carriage stopped; she could not speak. Geoff did what he could to make the coachman hear him; but it was by no means the affair of a moment to gain the attention of that functionary, and induce him to stop. When, however, this was accomplished, Geoff obeyed the passionate desire in Lady Stanton's face, who all the time had been straining to look out, and jumped to

the ground. He looked round anxiously, while she, half out of the carriage, gazed back, fixing her eyes upon one of those recesses in the road which are common in the north country. "I see no one," said Geoff. He came back to the place on which her gaze was fixed, and looked behind the wall that bounded it, and all about, but could see nothing. When he returned, he found that Mary had fallen back in her corner, and was weeping bitterly. "He looked at me with such reproachful eyes. Oh, he need not; there was no reason. I would have saved or served him with my life," she cried; "and he had never any claim on me, Geoff, never any claim on me!—why should he come and look at me with such reproachful eyes? If he is dead, he ought to know better than that. Surely he ought to know——"

The carriage, standing in the middle of the road, the young man searching about, not knowing what he was looking for; the coachman superbly indifferent on the box, contemplating the agitation of his inferiors with god-like calm; the footman, on Geoff's horse, with his mouth open, staring, while the beautiful lady wept inside, made the strangest picture. As a matter of course, the footman, riding on in advance, had seen nothing and nobody. He

avowed frankly that he was not taking any notice of the folks on the road. He might have seen a man seated on the stones, he could not be certain. Neither had the coachman taken any notice. Foot passengers did not interest either of these functionaries. And Lady Stanton did not seem able to give any further explanation. The only thing to be done was to go on. She had been on her way to Stanton to give Geoff the advantage of Sir Henry's advice and opinion, and thither, accordingly, they proceeded after this interruption. Geoff took his place again beside his cousin, perhaps a little impatient of the stoppage; but as she lay back in the corner, covering her face with her hands, Geoff's heart was too soft not to forget every other sentiment. He thought only of consoling her.

"Tell me what it was," he said, soothingly. "You saw—some one? Do not cry so bitterly. You never harmed anybody in your life. Tell me—you thought you saw——?"

"I saw *him*, as plainly as I see you, Geoff; don't tell me it was a fancy. He was sitting, resting, like a man tired with walking, dusty and worn out. I noticed his weary look before I saw his face, and just as we passed he raised

his head. Oh, why should he have looked at *me* like that, Geoff? No, I never did any one harm, much less him. I have always stood up for him, you know, since you first spoke to me. I have always said, always—even before this was found out: living people mistake each other continually; but the dead—the dead ought to know——"

"Who is dead?" said Geoff; "are you speaking of John Musgrave, who is as much alive as I am?"

"If he were a living man," said Mary, solemnly, "how could I have seen him? Geoff, it is no mistake. I saw him, as I see you."

"And is that why you think him dead?" said Geoff, with natural surprise.

Lady Stanton raised herself erect in her corner. "Geoff, oh, can you not understand?" she cried. But she did not herself quite understand what she meant. She thought from the suddenness of it, from the shock it gave her, and from the disappearance of the wayfarer, which was so inexplicable, that it was an apparition she had seen. John Musgrave could not be there, in the flesh, seated by the roadside; it was not possible; but when Geoff asked whether having seen him

was an argument for thinking him dead, she had nothing to say. She wrung her hands. "I have seen him whether he is living or dead," she repeated, "and he looked at me with such eyes. He was not young as he used to be, but worn, and a little grey. I came to tell you what Sir Henry said; but here is something far, far more important. Know him! Could I mistake him, do you think?—how could I mistake him? Geoff, how could it be *he*, sitting there without any warning, without a word? but if it was he, if that was possible, why are we going on like this? Are we to desert him?—give him up? I am talking folly," she said, again clasping her hands. "Oh, Geoff, a living man would not have looked at me with such eyes."

"He has not very much right to happy eyes, has he?" said Geoff; "coming home an outlaw, not venturing to speak to any one. It would not be half so sad if he were a ghost. But to come back, and not to dare to trust even his friends, not to know if he has any friends, not to be able to go home and see his children like any other man, to rest on the stones at the roadside, he to whom all the land belongs! I don't wonder he looked sad," cried Geoff, half-sympathetic, half-indignant.

"How was he to know even that he would find a friend in you?"

Mary was sobbing, scarcely able to speak. "Oh, tell them to go back again—tell them to go back," she cried. There was no way of satisfying her but this: the carriage turned slowly round, rolling like a ship at sea. The coachman was disgusted and unwilling. "What did she want now?" he said, telegraphing with uplifted hands and eyes to the surprised footman on Geoff's horse. Lady Stanton was not a hard mistress like her stepdaughters, nor fantastical and unreasonable as they were. She took the carriage humbly when she could get it, and would consult this very coachman's convenience before bringing him out, which no one else thought of doing. Nevertheless Lady Stanton had her character in the house, and human nature required that it should be kept up. She was the stepmother, the scapegoat. "What is she after now?" the coachman said.

She got out of the carriage herself, trembling, to aid in the search, and the footman getting down, looked everywhere, even under the stones, and in the roadside hedges, but no one was there. When they resumed their way again, Mary lay back in her corner too much

worn out with excitement and emotion to be able even to speak. Geoff could not tell whether she was glad or sorry to be brought to acknowledge that it was more likely to be John Musgrave whom she had seen than his ghost. She was convinced by his reasoning. Oh, yes; no doubt, she said, it must be so. Because you saw a man unexpectedly, that was no reason for supposing him to be dead. Oh, no—Geoff was quite right; she saw the reason of all he said. But Mary's head and her heart and all her being thrilled with the shock. There was a ringing in her ears, and pulses were beating all over, and her blood coursing through her veins. The very country, so familiar, seemed to change its aspect. No stronger commentary could have been on the passage of time than the sudden glimpse of the face which she had seen just now on the roadside. But Mary did not think of that. The lake and the rural road that ran by it, and the hills in the distance, seemed to take again the colours of her youth. He was nothing to her, and never had been. She had not loved him, only had "taken an interest." But all that was most poignant in her life came back to her, with the knowledge that he was here. Once more it seemed to be that time when all is vivid, when

every day may be the turning-point of life—the time that was consciously but a drift and floating on of hour by hour when it existed, as is the present moment—but which, looking back upon it, seemed the time of free action, of choice, of every possibility. Was it so? Might he be met with round any corner—this man who had been banished so long? In the face of death and danger had he come back, he whom nobody had expected ever to come back? A strange half-question whether everything else had come back with him, and half-certainty that nothing for her could change, was in Mary's mind as she lay back, quivering with emotion, hearing Geoff's voice in her ears, not knowing a word he said. What had Geoff to to do with it—young Geoff, to whom nothing had ever happened? She smiled vaguely to herself to think that the boy could think he knew. How was he to know?—he was not of that time. But all the people in the road, and the very water itself, and the villages and houses, seemed to ask her, Was it true?

This was all the evidence on the subject from which a judgment could be formed. Randolph Musgrave (who told no one) had seen, in his own words, a something, a some one, whose face he did not see, but who

suggested John to him so strongly that his very heart seemed to stop beating—then disappeared. And Lady Stanton from the window of the carriage, driving past, saw a face, which was John Musgrave's face grown older and worn, with hair that was slightly grey, instead of the brown curls of former years, and which disappeared too in the twinkling of an eye, and being searched for, could be found no more. What was it?—an apparition conjured up by their interest or their fears? or John Musgrave, in his own person, come home?

END OF VOL. II.

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