# A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF

BY

MRS OLIPHANT

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
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# A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

Lady Markham received young Gaunt with the most gracious kindness: had his mother seen him seated in the drawing-room at Eaton Square, with Frances hovering about him full of pleasure and questions, and her mother insisting that he should stay to luncheon, and Markham's hansom just drawing up at the door, she would have thought her boy on the highway to fortune. The sweetness of the two ladies—the happy eagerness of Frances, and Lady Markham's grace and graciousness—had a soothing effect upon the young man. He had been unwilling to come, as he was



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unwilling to go anywhere at this crisis of his life; but it soothed him, and filled him with a sort of painful and bitter pleasure to be thus surrounded by all that was most familiar to Constance,—by her mother and sister, and all their questions about her. These questions, indeed, it was hard upon him to be obliged to answer; but yet that pain was the best thing that now remained to him, he said to himself. To hear her name, and all those allusions to her, to be in the rooms where she had spent her life—all this gave food to his longing fancy, and wrung, yet soothed, his heart.

"My dear, you will worry Captain Gaunt with your questions; and I don't know those good people, Tasie and the rest: you must let me have my turn now. Tell me about my daughter, Captain Gaunt. She is not a very good correspondent. She gives few details of her life; and it must be so very different from life here. Does she seem to enjoy herself? Is she happy and bright? I have longed so much to see some one, impartial, whom I could ask."

Impartial! If they only knew! "She is always bright," he said with a suppressed passion, the meaning of which Frances divined suddenly, almost with a cry, with a start and thrill of sudden certainty, which took away her breath. "But for happy, I cannot tell. It is not good enough for her, out there."

"No? Thank you, Captain Gaunt, for appreciating my child. I was afraid it was not much of a sphere for her. What company has she? Is there anything going on——?"

"Mamma," said Frances, "I told you—there is never anything going on."

The young soldier shook his head. "There is no society—except the Durants—and ourselves—who are not interesting," he said, with a somewhat ghastly smile.

"The Durants are the clergyman's family? —and yourselves. I think she might have been worse off. I am sure Mrs Gaunt has been kind to my wayward girl," she said, looking him in the face with that charming smile.

"Kind!" he cried, as if the word were a profanation. "My mother is too happy to do

—anything. But Miss Waring," he added with a feeble smile, "has little need of—any one. She has so many resources—she is so far above——"

He got inarticulate here, and stumbled in his speech, growing very red. Frances watched him under her eyelids with a curious sensation of pain. He was very much in earnest, very sad, yet transported out of his langour and misery by Constance's name. Now Frances had heard of George Gaunt for years, and had unconsciously allowed her thoughts to dwell upon him, as has been mentioned in another part of this history. His arrival, had it not happened in the midst of other excitements which preoccupied her, would have been one of the greatest excitements she had ever known. She remembered now that when it did happen, there had been a faint, almost imperceptible, touch of disappointment in it, in the fact that his whole attention was given to Constance, and that for herself, Frances, he had no eyes. But in the moment of seeing him again she had forgotten all that, and had gone back to her previous prepossession in his

favour, and his mother's certainty that Frances and her George would be "great friends." Now she understood with instant divination the whole course of affairs. He had given his heart to Constance, and she had not prized the gift. The discovery gave her an acute, yet vague (if that could be), impression of pain. It was she, not Constance, that had been prepossessed in his favour. Had Constance not been there, no doubt she would have been thrown much into the society of George Gaunt—and—who could tell what might have happened? All this came before her like the sudden opening of a landscape hid by fog and mists. Her eyes swept over it, and then it was gone. And this was what never had been, and never would be.

"Poor Con," said Lady Markham. "She never was thrown on her own resources before. Has she so many of them? It must be a curiously altered life for her, when she has to fall back upon what you call her resources. But you think she is happy?" she asked with a sigh.

How could he answer? The mere fact that

she was Constance, seemed to Gaunt a sort of paradise. If she could make him happy by a look or a word, by permitting him to be near her, how was it possible that, being herself, she could be otherwise than blessed? He was well enough aware that there was a flaw in his logic somewhere, but his mind was not strong enough to perceive where that flaw was.

Markham came in in time to save him from the difficulty of an answer. Markham did not recollect the young man, whom he had only seen once; but he hailed him with great friendliness, and began to inquire into his occupations and engagements. "If you have nothing better to do, you must come and dine with me at my club," he said in the kindest way, for which Frances was very grateful to her brother. And young Gaunt, for his part, began to gather himself together a little. The presence of a man roused him. There is something, no doubt, seductive and relaxing in the fact of being surrounded by sympathetic women, ready to divine and to console. He had not braced himself to bear the pain of their questions; but somehow had felt a certain luxury in letting

his despondency, his languor, and displeasure with life appear. "I have to be here," he had said to them, "to see people, I believe. My father thinks it necessary: and I could not stay; that is, my people are leaving Bordighera. It becomes too hot to hold one—they say."

"But you would not feel that, coming from India?"

"I came to get braced up," he said with a smile, as of self-ridicule, and made a little pause. "I have not succeeded very well in that," he added presently. "They think England will do me more good. I go back to India in a year; so that, if I can be braced up, I should not lose any time."

"You should go to Scotland, Captain Gaunt. I don't mean at once, but as soon as you are tired of the season—that is the place to brace you up—or to Switzerland, if you like that better."

"I do not much care," he had said with another melancholy smile, "where I go."

The ladies tried every way they could think of to console him, to give him a warmer interest in his life. They told him that when he was

feeling stronger, his spirits would come back. "I know how one runs down when one feels out of sorts," Lady Markham said. "You must let us try to amuse you a little, Captain Gaunt."

But when Markham appeared, this softness came to an end. George Gaunt picked himself up, and tried to look like a man of the world. He had to see some one at the Horse Guards, and he had some relations to call upon; but he would be very glad, he said, to dine with Lord Markham. It surprised Frances that her mother did not appear to look with any pleasure on this engagement. She even interposed in a way which was marked. "Don't you think, Markham, it would be better if Captain Gaunt and you dined with *me?* Frances is not half satisfied. She has not asked half her questions. She has the first right to an old friend."

"Gaunt is not going away to-morrow," said Markham. "Besides, if he's out of sorts, he wants amusing, don't you see?"

"And we are not capable of doing that! Frances, do you hear?"

"Very capable, in your way. But for a man,

when he's low, ladies are dangerous—that's my opinion, and I've a good deal of experience."

"Of low spirits, Markham!"

"No, but of ladies," he said with a chuckle. "I shall take him somewhere afterwards; to the play perhaps, or—somewhere amusing: whereas you would talk to him all night, and Fan would ask him questions, and keep him on the same level."

Lady Markham made a reply which to Frances sounded very strange. She said, "To the play—perhaps?" in a doubtful tone, looking at her son. Gaunt had been sitting looking on in the embarrassed and helpless way in which a man naturally regards a discussion over his own body as it were, particularly if it is a conflict of kindness, and, glad to be delivered from this friendly duel, turned to Frances with some observation, taking no heed of Lady Markham's remark. But Frances heard it with a confused premonition which she could not understand. She could not understand, and yet—— She saw Markham shrug his shoulders in reply; there was a slight colour upon his face, which ordinarily knew none. What did they both mean?

But how elated would Mrs Gaunt have been, how pleased the General, had they seen their son at Lady Markham's luncheon-table, in the midst, so to speak, of the first society! Sir Thomas came in to lunch, as he had a way of doing; and so did a gay young Guardsman, who was indeed naturally a little contemptuous of a man in the line, yet civil to Markham's friend. These simple old people would have thought their George on the way to every advancement, and believed even the heart-break which had procured him that honour well compensated. These were far from his own sentiments; yet, to feel himself thus warmly received by "*her* people," the object of so much kindness, which his deluded heart whispered must surely, surely, whatever she might intend, have been suggested at least by something she had said of him, was balm and healing to his wounds. He looked at her mother—and indeed Lady Markham was noted for her graciousness, and for looking as if she meant to be the motherly friend of all who approached her—with a sort of adoration. To be the mother of Constance, and yet to speak to ordinary mortals

with that smile, as if she had no more to be proud of than they! And what could it be that made her so kind? not anything in him —a poor soldier, a poor soldier's son, knowing nothing but the exotic society of India and its curious ways—surely something which, out of some relenting of the heart, some pity or regret, Constance had said. Frances sat next to him at table, and there was a more subtle satisfaction still in speaking low, aside to Frances, when he got a little confused with the general conversation, that bewildering talk which was all made up of allusions. He told her that he had brought a parcel from the Palazzo, and a box of flowers from the bungalow,—that his mother was very anxious to hear from her, that they were going to Switzerland—no, not coming home this year. "They have found a cheap place in which my mother delights," he said, with a faint smile. He did not tell her that his coming home a little circumscribed their resources, and that the month in town which they were so anxious he should have, which in other circumstances he would have enjoyed so much, but which now he cared nothing for, nor

for anything, was the reason why they had stopped half-way on their usual summer journey to England. Dear old people, they had done it for him—this was what he thought to himself, though he did not say it—for him, for whom nobody could now do anything! He did not say much, but as he looked in Frances' sympathetic eyes, he felt that, without saying a word to her, she must understand it all.

Lady Markham made no remark about their visitor until after they had done their usual afternoon's "work," as it was her habit to call it—their round of calls, to which she went in an exact succession, saying lightly, as she cut short each visit, that she could stay no longer, as she had so much to do. There was always a shop or two to go to, in addition to the calls, and almost always some benevolent errand—some Home to visit, some hospital to call at, something about the work of poor ladies, or the salvation of poor girls,—all these were included along with the calls in the afternoon's work. And it was not till they had returned home and were seated together at tea, refreshing themselves after their labours, that she mentioned

young Gaunt. She then said, after a minute's silence, suddenly, as if the subject had been long in her mind, "I wish Markham had let that young man alone; I wish he had left him to you and me."

Frances started a little, and felt, with great self-indignation and distress, that she blushed—though why, she could not tell. She looked up, wondering, and said, "Markham! I thought it was so very kind."

"Yes, my dear; I believe he means to be kind."

"Oh, I am sure he does; for he could have no interest in George Gaunt—not for himself. I thought it was perhaps for my sake, because he was—because he was the son of—such a friend."

"Were they so good to you, Frances? And no doubt to Con too."

"I am sure of it, mamma."

"Poor people," said Lady Markham; "and this is the reward they get. Con has been experimenting on that poor boy. What do I mean by experimenting? You know well enough what I mean, Frances. I suppose he was the

only man at hand, and she has been amusing herself. He has been dangling about her constantly, I have no doubt, and she has made him believe that she liked it as well as he did. And then he has made a declaration, and there has been a scene. I am sorry to say I need no evidence in this case: I know all about it. And now, Markham! Poor people, I say: it would have been well for them if they had never seen one of our race."

"Mamma!" cried Frances, with a little indignation, "I feel sure you are misjudging Constance. Why should she do anything so cruel? Papa used to say that one must have a motive."

"*He* said so! I wonder if he could tell what motives were his when—— Forgive me, my dear. We will not discuss your father. As for Con, her motives are clear enough—amusement. Now, my dear, don't! I know you were going to ask me, with your innocent face, what amusement it could possibly be to break that young man's heart. The greatest in the world, my love! We need not mince matters between ourselves. There is nothing that diverts Con so

much, and many another woman. You think it is terrible; but it is true."

"I think—you must be mistaken," said Frances, pale and troubled, with a little gasp as for breath. "But," she went on, "supposing even that you were right about Con, what could Markham do?"

Lady Markham looked at her very gravely. "He has asked this poor young fellow—to dinner," she said.

Frances could scarcely restrain a laugh, which was half hysterical. "That does not seem very tragic," she said.

"Oh no, it does not seem very tragic—poor people, poor people!" said Lady Markham, shaking her head.

And there was no more; for a visitor appeared—one of a little circle of ladies who came in and out every day, intimates, who rushed up-stairs and into the room without being announced, always with something to say about the Home, or the Hospital, or the Reformatory, or the Poor Ladies, or the endangered girls. There was always a great deal to talk over about these institutions, which formed an important

part of the "work" which all these ladies had to do. Frances withdrew to a little distance, so as not to embarrass her mother and her friend, who were discussing "cases" for one of those refuges of suffering humanity, and were more comfortable when she was out of hearing. Frances knitted and thought of home—not this bewildering version of it, but the quiet of the idle village life where there was no "work," but where all were neighbours, lending a kindly hand to each other in trouble, and where the tranquil days flew by she knew not how. She thought of this with a momentary, oft-recurring secret protest against this other life, of which, as was natural, she saw the evil more clearly than the good; and then, with a bound, her thoughts returned to the extraordinary question to which her mother had made so extraordinary a reply. What could Markham do? "He has asked the poor young fellow to dinner." Even now, in the midst of the painful confusion of her mind, she almost laughed. Asked him to dinner! How would that harm him? At Markham's club there would be no poisoned dishes—nothing that would slay. What harm

could it do to George Gaunt to dine with Markham? She asked herself the question again and again, but could find no reply. When she turned to the other side and thought of Constance, the blood rushed to her head with a feverish angry pang. Was that also true? But in this case, Frances, like her mother, felt that no doubt was possible. In this respect she had been able to understand what her mother said to her. Her heart bled for the poor people, whom Lady Markham compassionated without knowing them, and wondered how Mrs Gaunt would bear the sight of the girl who had been cruel to her son. All that, with agitation and trouble she could believe: but Markham! What could Markham do?

She was going to the play with her mother that evening, which was to Frances, fresh to every real enjoyment, one of the greatest of pleasures. But she did not enjoy it that night. Lady Markham paid little attention to the play: she studied the people as they went and came, which was a usual weakness of hers, much wondered at and deplored by Frances, to whom the stage was the centre of

attraction. But on this occasion Lady Markham was more *distraite* than ever, levelling her glass at every new group that appeared in the recesses between the acts,—the restless crowd, which is always in motion. Her face, when she removed the glass from it, was anxious, and almost unhappy. "Frances," she said, in one of these pauses, "your eyes must be sharper than mine; try if you can see Markham anywhere."

"Here is Markham," said her son, opening the door of the box. "What does the mother want with me, Fan?"

"Oh, you are here!" Lady Markham cried, leaning back in her chair with a sigh of relief. "And Captain Gaunt too."

"Quite safe, and out of the way of mischief," said Markham with a chuckle, which brought the colour to his mother's cheek.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

After this, for about a fortnight, Captain Gaunt was very often visible in Eaton Square. He dined next evening with Lady Markham and Frances—Sir Thomas, who scarcely counted, he was so often there, being the only other guest. Sir Thomas was a man who had a great devotion for Lady Markham, and a very distant link of cousinship, which, or something in themselves which made that impossible, had silenced any remark of gossip, much less scandal, upon their friendship. He came in to luncheon whenever it pleased him; he dined there—when he was not dining anywhere else. But as both he and Lady Markham had many engagements, this was not too often the case, though there was rarely an evening, if the ladies were at home, when Sir Thomas did

not "look in." His intimacy was like that of a brother in the cheerful easy house. This cheerful company, the friendliness, the soothing atmosphere of feminine sympathy around him, and underneath all the foolish hope, more sweet than anything else, that a certain relenting on the part of Constance must be underneath, took away the gloom and dejection, in great part at least, from the young soldier's looks. He exerted himself to please the people who were so kind to him, and his melancholy smile had begun to brighten into something more natural. Frances, for her part, thought him a very delightful addition to the party. She looked at him across the table almost with the pride which a sister might have felt when he made a good appearance and did himself credit. He seemed to belong to her more or less,—to reflect upon her the credit which he gained. It showed that her friends after all were worth thinking of, that they were not unworthy of the admiration she had for them, that they were able to hold their own in what the people here called Society and the world. She raised her little animated face to young

Gaunt, was the first to see what he meant, unconsciously interpreted or explained for him when he was hazy—and beamed with delight when Lady Markham was interested and amused. Poor Frances was not always quite clever enough to see when it happened that the two elders were amused by the man himself, rather than by what he said—and her gratification was great in his success. She herself had never aspired to success in her own person; but it was a great pleasure to her that the little community at Bordighera should be vindicated and put in the best light. "They will never be able to say to me *now* that we had no Society, that we saw nobody," Frances said to herself—attributing, however, a far greater brilliancy to poor George than he ever possessed. He fell back into melancholy, however, when the ladies left, and Sir Thomas found him dull. He had very little to say about Waring, on whose behalf the benevolent baronet was so much interested.

"Do you think he shows any inclination towards home?" Sir Thomas asked.

"I am sure," young Gaunt answered, with a

solemn face, "that there is nothing there that can satisfy such a creature as that."

"He has no society, then?" asked Sir Thomas.

"Oh, society! it is like the poem," said the young man, with a sigh. "I should think it would be so everywhere. 'Ye common people of the sky, what are ye when your queen is nigh?'"

Sir Thomas had been much puzzled by the application to Waring, as he supposed, of the phrase, "such a creature as that;" but now he perceived, with a compassionate shake of his head, what the poor young fellow meant. Con had been at her tricks again! He said, with the pitying look which such a question warranted, "I suppose you are very fond of poetry?"

"No," said the young soldier, astonished, looking at him suddenly. "Oh no. I am afraid I am very ignorant; but sometimes it expresses what nothing else can express. Don't you think so?"

"I think perhaps it is time to join the ladies," Sir Thomas said. He was sorry for the boy,

though a little contemptuous too; but then he himself had known Con and her tricks from her cradle, and those of many another, and he was hardened. He thought their mothers had been far more attractive women.

Was it the same art which made Frances look up with that bright look of welcome, and almost affectionate interest, when they returned to the drawing-room? Sir Thomas liked her so much, that he hoped it was not merely one of their tricks; then paused, and said to himself that it would be better if it were so, and not that the girl had really taken a fancy to this young fellow, whose heart and head were both full of another, and who, even without that, would evidently be a very poor thing for Lady Markham's daughter. Sir Thomas was so far unjust to Frances, that he concluded it must be one of her tricks, when he recollected how complacent she had been to Claude Ramsay, finding places for him where he could sit out of the draught. They were all like that, he said to himself; but concluded that, as one nail drives out another, a second "affair," if he could be drawn into it, might cure the victim. This rapid *résumé* of

all the circumstances, present and future, is a thing which may well take place in an experienced mind in the moment of entering a room in which there are materials for the development of a new chapter in the social drama. The conclusion he came to led him to the side of Lady Markham, who was writing the address upon one of her many notes. "It is to Nelly Winterbourn," she explained, "to inquire—— You know they have dragged that poor sufferer up to town, to be near the best advice; and he is lying more dead than alive."

"Perhaps it is not very benevolent, so far as he is concerned; but I hope he'll linger a long time," said Sir Thomas.

"Oh, so do I! These imbroglios may go on for a long time and do nobody any harm. But when a horrible crisis comes, and one feels that they must be cleared up!" It was evident that in this Lady Markham was not specially considering the sufferings of poor Mr Winterbourn.

"What does Markham say?" Sir Thomas asked.

"Say! He does not say anything. He shuffles—you know the way he has. He never could stand still upon both of his feet."

"And you can't guess what he means to do?"

"I think—— But who can tell? even with one whom I know so intimately as Markham. I don't say even in my son, for that does not tell for very much."

"Nothing at all," said the social philosopher.

"Oh, a little, sometimes. I believe to a certain extent in a kind of magnetic sympathy. You don't, I know. I think, then, so far as I can make out, that Markham would rather do nothing at all. He likes the *status quo* well enough. But then he is only one; and the other—one cannot tell how she might feel."

"Nelly is the unknown quantity," said Sir Thomas; and then Lady Markham sent away, by the hands of the footman, her anxious affectionate little billet "to inquire."

Meanwhile young Gaunt sat down by Frances. On the table near them there was a glorious show of crimson—the great dazzling

red anemones, the last of the season, which Mrs Gaunt had sent. It had been very difficult to find them so late on, he told her; they had hunted into the coolest corners where the spring flowers lingered the longest, his mother quite anxious about it, climbing into the little valleys among the hills. "For you know what you are to my mother," he said, with a smile, and then a sigh. Mrs Gaunt had often made disparaging comparisons — comparisons how utterly out of the question! He allowed to himself that this candid countenance, so open and simple, and so full of sympathy, had a charm—more than he could have believed; but yet to make a comparison between this sister and the other! Nevertheless it was very consolatory, after the effort he had made at dinner, to lay himself back in the soft low chair, with his long limbs stretched out, and talk or be talked to, no longer with any effort, with a softening tenderness towards the mother who loved Frances, but with whom he had had many scenes before he left her, in frantic defence of the woman who had broken his heart.

"Mrs Gaunt was always so kind to me," Frances said, gratefully, a little moisture starting into her eyes. "At the Durants' there seemed always a little comparison with Tasie; but with your mother there was no comparison."

"A comparison with Tasie!" He laughed in spite of himself. "Nothing can be so foolish as these comparisons," he added, not thinking of Tasie.

"Yes, she was older," said Frances. "She had a right to be more clever. But it was always delightful at the bungalow. Does my father go there often now?"

"Did he ever go often?"

"N-no," said Frances, hesitating; "but sometimes in the evening. I hope Constance makes him go out. I used to have to worry him, and often get scolded. No, not scolded—that was not his way; but sent off with a sharp word. And then he would relent, and come out."

"I have not seen very much of Mr Waring," Gaunt said.

"Then what does Constance do? Oh, it

must be such a change for her! I could not have imagined such a change. I can't help thinking sometimes it is a great pity that I, who was not used to it, nor adapted for it, should have all this—and Constance, who likes it, who suits it, should be—banished; for it must be a sort of banishment for her, don't you think?"

"I—suppose so. Yes, there could be no surroundings too bright for her," he said, dreamily. He seemed to see her, notwithstanding, walking with him up into the glades of the olive-gardens, with her face so bright. Surely she had not felt her banishment then! Or was it only that the amusement of breaking his heart made up for it, for the moment, as his mother said?

"Fancy," said Frances; "I am going to court on Monday—I—in a train and feathers. What would they all say? But all the time I am feeling like the daw in the peacock's plumes. They seem to belong to Constance. She would wear them as if she were a queen herself. She would not perhaps object to be stared at; and she would be admired."

"Oh yes!"

"She was, they say, when she was presented, so much admired. She might have been a maid of honour; but mamma would not. And I, a poor little brown sparrow, in all the fine feathers—I feel inclined to call out, 'I am only Frances.' But that is not needed, is it, when any one looks at me?" she said, with a laugh. She had met with nobody with whom she could be confidential among all her new acquaintances. And George Gaunt was a new acquaintance too, if she had but remembered; but there was in him something which she had been used to, something with which she was familiar, a breath of her former life —and that acquaintance with his name and all about him which makes one feel like an old friend. She had expected for so many years to see him, that it appeared to her imagination as if she had known him all these years—as if there was scarcely any one with whom she was so familiar in the world.

He looked at her attentively as she spoke, a little touched, a little charmed by this instinctive delicate familiarity, in which he at

last, having so lately come out of the hands of a true operator, saw, whatever Sir Thomas might think, that it was not one of their tricks. She did not want any compliment from him, even had he been capable of giving it. She was as sincere as the day, as little troubled about her inferiority as she was convinced of it; the laugh with which she spoke had in it a genuine tone of innocent youthful mirth, such as had not been heard in that house for long. The exhilarating ring of it, so spontaneous, so gay, reached Lady Markham and Sir Thomas in their colloquy, and roused them. Frances herself had never laughed like that before. Her mother gave a glance towards her, smiling. "The little thing has found her own character in the sight of her old friend," she said; and then rounded her little epigram with a sigh.

"The young fellow ought to think much of himself to have two of them taking that trouble."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Lady Markham. "Do you think she is taking trouble? She does not understand what it means."

"Do any of them not understand what it

means?" asked Sir Thomas. He had a large experience in Society, and thought he knew; but he had little experience out of Society, and so, perhaps, did not. There are some points in which a woman's understanding is the best.

The evening had not been unpleasant to any one, not even, perhaps, to the lovelorn, when Markham appeared, coming back from his dinner-party, a signal to the other gentlemen that it was time for them to disappear from theirs. He gave his mother the last news of Winterbourn; and he told Sir Thomas that a division was expected, and that he ought to be in the House. "The poor sufferer" was sinking slowly, Markham said. It was quite impossible now to think of the operation which might perhaps have saved him three months since. His sister was with Nelly, who had neither mother nor sister of her own; and the long-expected event was thus to come off decorously, with all the proper accessories. It was a very important matter for two at least of the speakers; but this was how they talked of it, hiding, perhaps, the anxiety within. Then Markham turned to the other group.

"Have you got all the feathers and the furbelows ready?" he said. "Do you think there will be any of you visible through them, little Fan?"

"Don't frighten the child, Markham. She will do very well. She can be as steady as a little rock: and in that case it doesn't matter that she is not tall."

"Oh, tall—as if that were necessary! You are not tall yourself, our mother; but you are a very majestic person when you are in your war-paint."

"There's the Queen herself, for that matter," said Sir Thomas. "See her in a procession, and she might be six feet. I feel a mouse before her." He had held once some post about the court, and had a right to speak.

"Let us hope Fan will look majestic too. You should, to carry off the effect I shall produce. In ordinary life," said Markham, "I don't flatter myself that I am an Adonis; but you should see me screwed up into a uniform. No, I'm not in the army, Fan. What is my uniform, mother, to please her? A Deputy Lieutenant, or something of that

sort. I hope you are a great deal the wiser, Fan."

"People always look well in uniform," said Frances, looking at him somewhat doubtfully, on which Markham broke forth into his chuckle. "Wait till you see me, my little dear. Wait till the little boys see me on the line of route. They are the true tests of personal attraction. Are you coming, Gaunt? Do you feel inclined to give those fellows their revenge?"

Markham had spoken rather low, and at some distance from his mother; but the word caught her quick ear.

"Revenge? What do you mean by revenge? Who is going to be revenged?" she cried.

"Nobody is going to fight a duel, if that is what you mean," said Markham, quietly turning round. "Gaunt has, for as simple as he stands there, beaten me at billiards, and I can't stand under the affront. Didn't you lick me, Gaunt?"

"It was an accident," said Gaunt. "If that is all, you are very welcome to your revenge."

"Listen to his modesty, which, by-the-by,

shows a little want of tact; for am I the man to be beaten by an accident?" said Markham, with his chuckle of self-ridicule. "Come along, Gaunt."

Lady Markham detained Sir Thomas with a look as he rose to accompany them. She gave Captain Gaunt her hand, and a gracious, almost anxious smile. "Markham is noted for bad hours," she said. "You are not very strong, and you must not let him beguile you into his evil ways." She rose too, and took Sir Thomas by the arm as the young man went away. "Did you hear what he said? Do you think it was only billiards he meant? My heart quakes for that poor boy and the poor people he belongs to. Don't you think you could go after them and see what they are about?"

"I will do anything you please. But what good could I do?" said Sir Thomas. "Markham would not put up with any interference from me—nor the other young fellow either, for that matter."

"But if you were there, if they saw you about, it would restrain them: oh, you have

always been such a true friend. If you were but there."

"There: where?" There came before the practical mind of Sir Thomas a vision of himself, at his sober age, dragged into he knew not what nocturnal haunts, like an elderly spectre, jeered at by the pleasure-makers. "I will do anything to please you," he said, helplessly. "But what can I do? It would be of no use. You know yourself that interference never does any good."

Frances stood by aghast, listening to this conversation. What did it mean? Of what was her mother afraid? Presently Lady Markham took her seat again, with a return to her usual smiling calm. "You are right, and I am wrong," she said. "Of course we can do nothing. Perhaps, as you say, there is no real reason for anxiety." (Frances observed, however, that Sir Thomas had not said this.) "It is because the boy is not well off, and his people are not well off—old soldiers, with their pensions and their savings. That is what makes me fear."

"Oh, if that is the case, you need have the

less alarm. Where there's not much to lose, the risks are lessened," Sir Thomas said, calmly.

When he too was gone, Frances crept close to her mother. She knelt down beside the chair on which Lady Markham sat, grave and pale, with agitation in her face. "Mother," she whispered, taking her hand and pressing her cheek against it, "Markham is so kind—he never would do poor George any harm."

"Oh, my dear," cried Lady Markham, "how can you tell? Markham is not a man to be read off like a book. He is very kind—which does not hinder him from being cruel too. He means no harm, perhaps; but when the harm is done, what does it matter whether he meant it or not? And as for the risks being lessened because your friend is poor, that only means that he is despatched all the sooner. Markham is like a man with a fever: he has his fits of play, and one of them is on him now."

"Do you mean—gambling?" said Frances, growing pale too. She did not know very well what gambling was, but it was ruin, she had always heard.

"Don't let us talk of it," said Lady Markham. "We can do no good; and to distress ourselves for what we cannot prevent is the worst policy in the world, everybody says. You had better go to bed, dear child; I have some letters to write."

## CHAPTER XXXV.

GAUNT did not appear again at Eaton Square for two or three days,—not, indeed, till after the great event of Frances' history had taken place—the going to court, which had filled her with so many alarms. After all, when she got there, she was not frightened at all, the sense of humour which was latent in her nature getting the mastery at the last moment, and the spectacle, such as it was, taking all her attention from herself. Lady Markham's good taste had selected for Frances as simple a dress as was possible, and her ornaments were the pearls which her aunt had given her, which she had never been able to look at, save uneasily, as spoil. Mrs Clarendon, however, condescended, which was a wonderful stretch of good-nature, to come to Eaton Square to

see her dressed, which, as everybody knows, is one of the most agreeable parts of the ceremony. Frances had not a number of young friends to fill the house with a chorus of admiration and criticism; but the Miss Montagues thought it "almost a duty" to come, and a number of her mother's friends. These ladies filled the drawing-room, and were much more formidable than even the eyes of Majesty, pre-occupied with the sight of many toilets, and probably very tired of them, which would have no more than a passing glance for Frances. The spectators at Eaton Square took her to pieces conscientiously, though they agreed, after each had made her little observation, that the *ensemble* was perfect, and that the power of millinery could no further go. The intelligent reader needs not to be informed that Frances was all white, from her feathers to her shoes. Her pretty glow of youthfulness and expectation made the toilet supportable, nay, pretty, even in the glare of day. Markham, who was not afraid to confront all these fair and critical faces, in his uniform, which misbecame, and did not even fit him,

and which made his insignificance still more apparent, walked round and round his little sister with the most perfect satisfaction. "Are you sure you know how to manage that train, little Fan? Do you feel quite up to your curtsey?" he said in a whisper with his chuckle of mirth; but there was a very tender look in the little man's eyes. He might wrong others; but to Frances, nobody could be more kind or considerate. Mrs Clarendon, when she saw him, turned upon her heel and walked off into the back drawing-room, where she stood for some minutes sternly contemplating a picture, and ignoring everybody. Markham did not resent this insult. "She can't abide me, Fan," he went on. "Poor lady, I don't wonder. I was a little brat when she knew me first. As soon as I go away, she will come back; and I am going presently, my dear. I am going to snatch a morsel in the dining-room, to sustain nature. I hope you had your sandwiches, Fan? It will take a great deal of nourishment to keep you up to that curtsey." He patted her softly on her white shoulder, with kindness beaming out of his ugly face.

"I call you a most satisfactory production, my dear. Not a beauty, but better—a real nice innocent girl. I should like any fellow to show me a nicer," he went on, with his short laugh. Though it took the form of a chuckle, there was something in it that showed Markham's heart was touched. And this was the man whom even his own mother was afraid to trust a young man with! It seemed to Frances that it was impossible such a thing could be true.

Mrs Clarendon, as Markham had predicted, came back as he retired. Her contemplation of the dress of the *débutante* was very critical. "Satin is too heavy for you," she said. "I wonder your mother did not see that silk would have been far more in keeping; but she always liked to overdo. As for my Lord Markham, I am glad he will have to look after your mother, and not you, Frances; for the very look of a man like that contaminates a young girl. Don't say to me that he is your brother, for he is not your brother. Considering my age and yours, I surely ought to know best. Turn round a little. There is a perceptible crease across the middle of your shoulder,

and I don't quite like the hang of this skirt. But one thing looks very well, and that is your pearls. They have been in the family I can't tell you how long. My grandmother gave them to me."

"Mamma insisted I should wear them, and nothing else, aunt Caroline."

"Yes, I daresay. You have nothing else good enough to go with them, most likely. And Lady Markham knows a good thing very well, when she sees it. Have you been put through all that you have to do, Frances? Remember to keep your right hand quite free; and take care your train doesn't get in your way. Oh, why is it that your poor father is not here to see you, to go with you! It would be a very different thing then."

"Nothing would make papa go, aunt Caroline. Do you think he would dress himself up like Markham, to be laughed at?"

"I promise you nobody would laugh at my brother," said Mrs Clarendon. "As for Lord Markham——" But she bit her lip, and forbore. She spoke to none of the other ladies, who swarmed like numerous bees in the room,

keeping up a hum in the air; but she made very formal acknowledgments to Lady Markham as she went away. "I am much obliged to you for letting me come to see Frances dressed. She looks very well on the whole, though, perhaps, I should have adopted a different style had it been in my hands."

"My dear Caroline," cried Lady Markham, ignoring this ungracious conclusion, "how can you speak of letting you come? You know we are only too glad to see you whenever you will come. And I hope you liked the effect of your beautiful pearls. What a charming present to give the child; I thought it so kind of you."

"So long as Frances understands that they are family ornaments," said Mrs Clarendon, stiffly, rejecting all acknowledgments.

There was a little murmur and titter when she went away. "Is it Medusa in person?" "It is Mrs Clarendon, the wife of the great Q.C." "It is Frances' aunt, and she does not like any remark." "It is my dear sister-in-law," said Lady Markham. "She does not love me; but she is kind to Frances, which covers

a multitude of sins." "And very rich," said another lady, "which covers a multitude more." This put a little bitterness into the conversation to Frances, standing there in her fine clothes, and not knowing how to interfere; and it was a relief to her when Markham, though she could not blame the whispering girls who called him a guy, came in shuffling and smiling, with a glance and nod of encouragement to his little sister to take the mother down-stairs to her carriage. After that, all was a moving phantasmagoria of colour and novel life, and nothing clear.

And it was not until after this great day that Captain Gaunt appeared again. The ladies received him with reproaches for his absence. "I expected to see you yesterday at least," said Lady Markham. "You don't care for fine clothes, as we women do; but five o'clock tea, after a Drawing-room, is a fine sight. You have no idea how grand we were, and how much you have lost."

Captain Gaunt responded with a very grave, indeed melancholy smile. He was even more dejected than when he made his first appear-

ance. Then his melancholy had been unalloyed, and not without something of that tragic satisfaction in his own sufferings which the victims of the heart so often enjoy. But now there were complications of some kind, not so easily to be understood. He smiled a very serious evanescent smile. "I shall have to lose still more," he said, "for I think I must leave London—sooner than I thought."

"Oh," cried Frances, whom this concerned the most; "leave London! You were to stay a month."

"Yes; but my month seems to have run away before it has begun," he said, confusedly. Then, finding Lady Markham's eye upon him, he added, "I mean, things are very different from what I expected. My father thought I might do myself good by seeing people who—might push me, he supposed. I am not good at pushing myself," he said, with an abrupt and harsh laugh.

"I understand that. You are too modest. It is a defect, as well as the reverse one of being too bold. And you have not met—the people you hoped?"

"It is not exactly that either. My father's old friends have been kind enough; but London perhaps is not the place for a poor soldier." He stopped, with again a little quiver of a smile.

"That is quite true," said Lady Markham, gravely. "I enter into your feelings. You don't think that the game is worth the candle? I have heard so many people say so—even among those who were very well able to push themselves, Captain Gaunt. I have heard them say that any little thing they might have gained was not worth the expenditure and trouble of a season in London—besides all the risks."

Captain Gaunt listened to this with his discouraged look. He made no reply to Lady Markham, but turned to Frances with a sort of smile. "Do you remember," he said, "I told you my mother had found a cheap place in Switzerland, such as she delights in? I think I shall go and join them there."

"Oh, I am very sorry," said Frances, with a countenance of unfeigned regret. "No doubt Mrs Gaunt will be glad to have you; but she will be sorry too. Don't you think she would

rather you stayed your full time in London, and enjoyed yourself a little? I feel sure she would like that best."

"But I don't think I am enjoying myself," he said, with the air of a man who would like to be persuaded. He had perhaps been a little piqued by Lady Markham's way of taking him at his word.

"There must be a great deal to enjoy," said Frances; "every one says so. They think there is no place like London. You cannot have exhausted everything in a week, Captain Gaunt. You have not given it a fair trial. Your mother and the General, they would not like you to run away."

"Run away! no," he said, with a little start; "that is what I should not do."

"But it would be running away," said Frances, with all the zeal of a partisan. "You think you are not doing any good, and you forget that they wished you to have a little pleasure too. They think a great deal of London. The General used to talk to me, when I thought I should never see it. He used to tell me to wait till I had seen London;

everything was there. And it is not often you have the chance, Captain Gaunt. It may be a long time before you come from India again; and think if you told any one out there you had only been a week in town!"

He listened to her very devoutly, with an air of giving great weight to those simple arguments. They were more soothing to his pride, at least, than the way in which her mother took him at his word.

"Frances speaks," said Lady Markham—and while she spoke, the sound of Markham's hansom was heard dashing up to the door—"Frances speaks as if she were in the interest of all the people who prey upon visitors in London. I think, on the whole, Captain Gaunt, though I regret your going, that my reason is with you rather than with her. And, my dear, if Captain Gaunt thinks this is right, it is not for his friends to persuade him against his better judgment."

"What is Gaunt's better judgment going to do?" said Markham. "It's always alarming to hear of a man's better judgment. What is it all about?"

Lady Markham looked up in her son's face with great seriousness and meaning. "Captain Gaunt," she said, "is talking of leaving London, which—if he finds his stay unprofitable and of little advantage to him—though I should regret it very much, I should think him wise to do."

"Gaunt leaving London? Oh no! He is taking you in. A man who is a ladies' man likes to say that to ladies in order to be coaxed to stay. That is at the bottom of it, I'll be bound. And where was our hero going, if he had his way?"

Frances thought that there were signs in Gaunt of failing temper, so she hastened to explain. "He was going to Switzerland, Markham, to a place Mrs Gaunt knows of, where she is to be."

"To Switzerland!" Markham cried—"the dullest place on the face of the earth. What would you do there, my gallant Captain? Climb?—or listen all day long to those who recount their climbings, or those who plan them—all full of insane self-complacency, as if there was the highest morality in climbing

mountains. Were you going in for the mountains, Fan?"

"Frances was pleading for London—a very unusual fancy for her," said Lady Markham. "The very young are not afraid of responsibility; but I am, at my age. I could not venture to recommend Captain Gaunt to stay."

"I only meant—I only thought——" Frances stammered and hung her head a little. Had she been indiscreet? Her abashed look caught young Gaunt's eye. Why should she be abashed?—and on his account? It made his heart stir a little, that heart which had been so crushed and broken, and, he thought, pitched away into a corner; but at that moment he found it again stirring quite warm and vigorous in his breast.

"I always said she was full of sense," said Markham. "A little sister is an admirable institution; and her wisdom is all the more delightful that she doesn't know what sense it is." He patted Frances on the shoulder as he spoke. "It wouldn't do, would it, Fan, to have him run away?"

"If there was any question of that," Gaunt said, with something of a defiant air.

"And to Switzerland," said Markham, with a chuckle. "Shall I tell you my experiences, Gaunt? I was there for my sins once, with the mother here. Among all her admirable qualities, my mamma has that of demanding few sacrifices in this way—so that a man is bound in honour to make one now and then."

"Markham, when you are going to say what you know I will disapprove, you always put in a little flattery—which silences me."

He kissed his hand to her with a short laugh. "The place," he said, "was in possession of an athletic band, in roaring spirits and tremendous training, men and women all the same. You could scarcely tell the creatures one from another—all burned red in the faces of them, worn out of all shape and colour in the clothes of them. They clamped along the passages in their big boots from two o'clock till five every morning. They came back, perspiring, in the afternoon—a procession of old clothes, all complacent, as if they had done the finest action in the world. And the rest of us surrounded

them with a circle of worshippers, till they clamped up-stairs again, fortunately very early, to bed. Then a faint sort of life began for *nous autres.* We came out and admired the stars and drank our coffee in peace—short-lived peace, for, as everybody had been up at two in the morning, the poor beggars naturally wanted to get to bed. You are an athletic chap, so you might like it, and perhaps attain canonisation by going up Mont Blanc."

"My mother—is not in one of those mountain centres," said Gaunt, with a faint smile.

"Worse and worse," said Markham. "We went through that experience too. In the non-climbing places the old ladies have it all their own way. You will dine at two, my poor martyr; you will have tea at six, with cold meat. The table-cloths and napkins will last a week. There will be honey with flies in it on every table. All about the neighbourhood, mild constitutionals will meet you at every hour in the day. There will be gentle raptures over a new view. 'Have you seen it, Captain Gaunt? Do come with us to-morrow and let us show it you; *quite* the finest view'—of

Pilatus, or Monte Rosa, or the Jungfrau, or whatever it may happen to be. And meanwhile we shall all be playing our little game comfortably at home. We will give you a thought now and then. Frances will run to the window and say, 'I thought that was Captain Gaunt's step;' and the mother will explain to Sir Thomas, 'Such a pity our poor young friend found that London did not suit him.'"

"Well, Markham," said his mother, with firmness, "if Captain Gaunt found that London did not suit him, I should think all the more highly of him that he withdrew in time."

Perhaps the note was too forcibly struck. Gaunt drew himself slightly up. "There is nothing so very serious in the matter, after all. London may not suit me; but still I do not suppose it will do me any harm."

Frances looked on at this triangular duel with eyes that acquired gradually consciousness and knowledge. She saw ere long that there was much more in it than met the eye. At first, her appeal to young Gaunt to remain had been made on the impulse of the moment, and

without thought. Now she remained silent, only with a faint gesture of protest when Markham brought in her name.

"Let us go to luncheon," said her mother. "I am glad to hear you are not really in earnest, Captain Gaunt; for of course we should all be very sorry if you went away. London is a siren to whose wiles we all give in. I am as bad myself as any one can be. I never make any secret of my affection for town; but there are some with whose constitutions it never agrees, who either take it too seriously or with too much passion. We old stagers get very moderate and methodical in our dissipations, and make a little go a long way."

But there was a chill at table; and Lady Markham was "not in her usual force." Sir Thomas, who came in as usual as they were going down-stairs, said, "Anything the matter? Oh, Captain Gaunt going away. Dear me, so soon! I am surprised. It takes a great deal of self-control to make a young fellow leave town at this time of the year."

"It was only a project," said poor young

Gaunt. He was pleased to be persuaded that it was more than could be expected of him. Lady Markham gave Sir Thomas a look which made that devoted friend uncomfortable; but he did not know what he had done to deserve it. And so Captain Gaunt made up his mind to stay.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Yes, I wish you had not said anything, Frances: not that it matters very much. I don't suppose he was in earnest, or, at all events, he would have changed his mind before evening. But, my dear, this poor young fellow is not able to follow the same course as Markham's friends do. They are at it all the year round, now in town, now somewhere else. They bet and play, and throw their money about, and at the end of the year they are not very much the worse—or at least that is what he always tells me. One time they lose, but another time they gain. And then they are men who have time, and money more or less. But when a young man with a little money comes among them, he may ruin himself before he knows."

"I am very sorry," said Frances. "It is difficult to believe that Markham could hurt any one."

Her mother gave her a grateful look. "Dear Markham!" she said. "To think that he should be so good—and yet—— It gives me great pleasure, Frances, that you should appreciate your brother. Your father never did so —and all of them, all the Warings—— But it is understood between us, is it not, that we are not to touch upon that subject?"

"Perhaps it would be painful, mamma. But how am I to understand unless I am told?"

"You have never been told, then—your father——? But I might have known he would say very little; he always hated explanations. My dear," said Lady Markham, with evident agitation, "if I were to enter into that story, it would inevitably take the character of a self-defence, and I can't do that to my own child. It is the worst of such unfortunate circumstances as ours that you must judge your parents, and find one or other in the wrong. Oh yes; I do not deceive myself on that

subject. And you are a partisan in your nature. Con was more or less of a cynic, as people become who are bred up in Society, as she was. She could believe we were both wrong, calmly, without any particular feeling. But you,—of your nature, Frances, you would be a partisan."

"I hope not, mamma. I should be the partisan of both sides," said Frances, almost under her breath.

Lady Markham rose and gave her a kiss. "Remain so," she said, "my dear child. I will say no harm of him to you, as I am sure he has said no harm of me. Now let us think no more of Markham's faults, nor of poor young Gaunt's danger, nor of——"

"Danger?" said Frances, with an anxious look.

"If it were less than danger, would I have said so much, do you think?"

"But, mamma, pardon me,—if it is real danger, ought you not to say more?"

"What! for the sake of another woman's son, betray and forsake my own? How can I say to him in so many words, 'Take care of Markham; avoid Markham and his friends.' I have

said it in hints as much as I dare. Yes, Frances, I would do a great deal for another woman's son. It would be the strongest plea. But in this case how can I do more? Never mind; fate will work itself out quite independent of you and me. And here are people coming—Claude, probably, to see if you have changed your mind about him, or whether I have heard from Constance. Poor boy! he must have one of you two."

"I hope not," said Frances, seriously.

"But I am sure of it," cried her mother, with a smile. "We shall see which of us is the better prophet. But this is not Claude. I hear the sweep of a woman's train. Hush!" she said, holding up a finger. She rose as the door opened, and then hastened forward with an astonished exclamation, "Nelly!" and held out both her hands.

"You did not look for me?" said Mrs Winterbourn, with a defiant air.

"No, indeed; I did not look for you. And so fine, and looking so well. He must have taken an unexpected turn for the better, and you have come to tell me."

"Yes, am I not smart?" said Nelly, looking down upon her beautiful dress with a curious air, half pleasure, half scorn. "It is almost new; I have never worn it before."

"Sit down here beside me, my dear, and tell me all about it. When did this happy change occur?"

"Happy? For whom?" she asked, with a harsh little laugh. "No, Lady Markham, there is no change for the better: the other way—they say there is no hope. It will not be very long, they say, before——"

"And Nelly, Nelly! you here, in your fine new dress."

"Yes; it seems ridiculous, does it not?" she said, laughing again. "I away—going out to pay visits in my best gown, and my husband—dying. Well! I know that if I had stayed any longer in that dreary house without any air, and with Sarah Winterbourn, I should have died. Oh, you don't know what it is. To be shut up there, and never hear a step except the doctor's, or Robert's carrying up the beef-tea. So I burst out of prison, to save my life. You

may blame me if you like, but it was to save my life, neither less nor more."

"Nelly, my dear," said Lady Markham, taking her hand, "there is nothing wonderful in your coming to see so old a friend as I am. It is quite natural. To whom should you go in your trouble, if not to your old friends?"

Upon which Nelly laughed again in an excited hysterical way. "I have been on quite a round," she said. "You always did scold me, Lady Markham; and I know you will do so again. I was determined to show myself once more before—the waters went over my head. I can come out now in my pretty gown. But *afterwards*, if I did such a thing everybody would think me mad. Now you know why I have come, and you can scold me as much as you please. But I have done it, and it can't be undone. It is a kind of farewell visit, you know," she added, in her excited tone. "After this I shall disappear into—crape and affliction. A widow! What a horrible word. Think of me, Nelly St John; me, a widow! Isn't it horrible, horrible? That is what they will call

me, Markham and the other men—the widow. I know how they will speak, as well as if I heard them. Lady Markham, they will call me *that*, and you know what they will mean."

"Nelly, Nelly, my poor child!" Lady Markham held her hand and patted it softly with her own. "Oh Nelly, you are very imprudent, very silly. You will shock everybody, and make them talk. You ought not to have come out now. If you had sent for me, I would have gone to you in a moment."

"It was not *that* I wanted. I wanted just to be like others for once—before—— I don't seem to care what will happen to me—afterwards. What do they do to a woman, Lady Markham, when her husband dies? They would not let her bury herself with him, or burn herself, or any of those sensible things. What do they do, Lady Markham? Brand her somewhere in her flesh with a red-hot iron—with 'Widow' written upon her flesh?"

"My dear, you must care for poor Mr Winterbourn a great deal more than you were aware, or you would not feel this so bitterly. Nelly——"

"Hush!" she said, with a sort of solemnity.

"Don't say that, Lady Markham. Don't talk about what I feel. It is all so miserable, I don't know what I am doing. To think that he should be my husband, and I just boiling with life, and longing to get free, to get free: I that was born to be a good woman, if I could, if you would all have let me, if I had not been made to—— Look here! I am going to speak to that little girl. You can say the other thing afterwards. I know you will. You can make it look so right—so right. Frances, if you are persuaded to marry Claude Ramsay, or any other man that you don't care for, remember you'll just be like me. Look at me, dressed out, paying visits, and my husband dying. Perhaps he may be dead when I get home." She paused a moment with a nervous shivering, and drew her summer cloak closely around her. "He is going to die, and I am running about the streets. It is horrible, isn't it? He doesn't want me, and I don't want him; and next week I shall be all in crape, and branded on my shoulder or somewhere—where, Lady Markham?—all for a man who—all for a man that——"

"Nelly, Nelly! for heaven's sake, at least respect the child."

"It is because I respect her that I say anything. Oh, it is all horrible! And already the men and everybody are discussing, What will Nelly do? The widow, what will she do?"

Then the excited creature suddenly, without warning, broke out into sobbing and tears. "Oh, don't think it is for grief," she said, as Frances instinctively came towards her; "it's only the excitement, the horror of it, the feeling that it is coming so near. I never was in the house with Death, never, that I can remember. And I shall be the chief mourner, don't you know? They will want me to do all sorts of things. What do you do when you are a widow, Lady Markham? Have you to give orders for the funeral, and say what sort of a—coffin there is to be, and—all that?"

"Nelly, Nelly! Oh, for God's sake, don't say those dreadful things. You know you will not be troubled about anything, least of all—— And, my dear, my dear, recollect your husband is still alive. It is dreadful to talk of details such as those for a living man."

"Most likely," she said, looking up with a shiver, "he will be dead when I get home. Oh, I wish it might all be over, everything, before I go home. Couldn't you hide me somewhere, Lady Markham? Save me from seeing him and all those—details, as you call them. I cannot bear it; and I have no mother nor any one to come to me—nobody, nobody but Sarah Winterbourn."

"I will go home with you, Nelly; I will take you back, my dear. Frances, take care of her till I get my bonnet. My poor child, compose yourself. Try and be calm. You must be calm, and bear it," Lady Markham said.

Frances, with alarm, found herself left alone with this strange being—not much older than herself, and yet thrown amid such tragic elements. She stood by her, not knowing how to approach the subject of her thoughts, or indeed any subject—for to talk to her of common things was impossible. Mrs Winterbourn, however, did not turn towards Frances. Her sobbing ended suddenly, as it had begun. She sat with her head upon her hands, gazing at the light. After a while she said, though

without looking round, "You once offered to sit up with me, thinking, or pretending, I don't know which, that I was sitting up with him all night: would you have done so if you had been in my place?"

"I think—I don't know," said Frances, checking herself.

"You would—you are not straightforward enough to say it—I know you would; and in your heart you think I am a bad creature, a woman without a heart."

"I don't think so," said Frances. "You must have a heart, or you would not be so unhappy."

"Do you know what I am unhappy about? About myself. I am not thinking of him; he married me to please himself, not me,—and I am thinking of myself, not him. It is all fair. You would do the same if you married like me."

Frances made no reply. She looked with awe and pity at this miserable excitement and wretchedness, which was so unlike anything her innocent soul knew.

"You don't answer," said Nelly. "You think

you never would have married like me. But how can you tell? If you had an offer as good as Mr Winterbourn, your mother would make you marry him. I made a great match, don't you know? And if you ever have that in your power, Lady Markham will make short work of your objections. You will just do as other people have done. Claude Ramsay is not so rich as Mr Winterbourn; but I suppose he will be your fate, unless Con comes back and takes him, which, very likely, is what she will do. Oh, are you ready, Lady Markham? It is a pity you should give yourself so much trouble; for, you see, I am quite composed now, and ready to go home."

"Come, then, my dear Nelly. It is better you should lose no time." Lady Markham paused to say, "I shall probably be back quite soon; but if I don't come, don't be alarmed," in Frances' ear.

The girl went to the window and watched Nelly sweep out to her carriage as if nothing could ever happen to her. The sight of the servants and of the few passers-by had restored her in a moment to herself. Frances stood and

pondered for some time at the window. Nelly's was an agitating figure to burst into her quiet life. She did not need the lesson it taught; but yet it filled her with trouble and awe. This brilliant surface of Society, what tragedies lay underneath! She scarcely dared to follow the young wife in imagination to her home; but she felt with her the horror of the approaching death, the dread interval when the event was coming, the still more dread moment after, when, all shrinking and trembling in her youth and loneliness, she would have to live side by side with the dead, whom she had never loved, to whom no faithful bond had united her—— It was not till another carriage drew up and some one got out of it that Frances retreated, with a very different sort of alarm, from the window. It was some one coming to call, she did not see whom, one of those wonderful people who came to talk over with her mother other people whom Frances did not know. How was she to find any subject on which to talk to them? Her anxiety was partially relieved by seeing that it was Claude who came in. He explained that Lady Someone had dropped him

at the door, having picked him up at some other place where they had both been calling. "There is a little east in the wind," he said, pulling up the collar of his coat:

"Was that Nelly Winterbourn I saw driving away from the door? I thought it was Nelly. And when he is dying, with not many hours to live——!"

"And why should not she come to mamma?" said Frances. "She has no mother of her own."

"Ah," said Ramsay, looking at her keenly, "I see what you mean. She has no mother of her own; and therefore she comes to Markham's, which is next best."

"I said, to my mother," said Frances, indignantly. "I don't see what Markham has to do with it."

"All the same, I shouldn't like my wife to be about the streets, going to—any one's mother, when I was dying."

"It would be right enough," cried Frances, hot and indignant, "if you had married a woman who did not care for you." She forgot, in the heat of her partisanship, that she

was admitting too much. But Claude did not remember, any more than she.

"Oh, come," he said, "Miss Waring, Frances. (May I call you Frances? It seems unnatural to call you Miss Waring, for, though I only saw you for the first time a little while ago, I have known you all your life.) Do you think it's quite fair to compare me to Winterbourn? He was fifty when he married Nelly, a fellow quite used up. At all events, I am young, and never was fast; and I don't see," he added, pathetically, "why a woman shouldn't be able to care for me."

"Oh, I did not mean that," cried Frances, with penitence; "I only meant——"

"And you shouldn't," said Claude, shaking his head, "pay so much attention to what Nelly says. She makes herself out a martyr now; but she was quite willing to marry Winterbourn. She was quite pleased. It was a great match; and now she is going to get the good of it."

"If being very unhappy is getting the good of it——!"

"Oh, unhappy!" said Claude. It was evi-

dent he held Mrs Winterbourn's unhappiness lightly enough. "I'll tell you what," he said, "talking of unhappiness, I saw another friend of yours the other day who was unhappy, if you like—that young soldier-fellow, the Indian man. What do you call him?—Grant? No; that's a Nile man. Gaunt. Now, if Lady Markham had taken him in hand——"

"Captain Gaunt!" said Frances, in alarm; "what has happened to him, Mr Ramsay? Is he ill? Is he——" Her face flushed with anxiety, and then grew pale.

"I can't say exactly," said Claude, "for I am not in his confidence; but I should say he had lost his money, or something of that sort. I don't frequent those sort of places in a general way; but sometimes, if I've been out in the evening, if there's no east in the wind, and no rain or fog, I just look in for a moment. I rather think some of those fellows had been punishing that poor innocent Indian man. When a stranger comes among them, that's a way they have. One feels dreadfully sorry for the man; but what can you do?"

"What can you do? Oh, anything, rather

than stand by," cried Frances, excited by sudden fears, "and see—and see—— I don't know what you mean, Mr Ramsay! Is it *gambling?* Is that what you mean?"

"You should speak to Markham," he replied. "Markham's deep in all that sort of thing. If anybody could interfere, it would be Markham. But I don't see how even he could interfere. He is not the fellow's keeper; and what could he say? The other fellows are gentlemen; they don't cheat, or that sort of thing. Only, when a man has not much money, or has not the heart to lose it like a man——"

"Mr Ramsay, you don't know anything about Captain Gaunt," cried Frances, with hot indignation and excitement. "I don't understand what you mean. He has the heart for—whatever he may have to do. He is not like you people, who talk about everybody, who know everybody. But he has been in action; he has distinguished himself; he is not a nobody like——"

"You mean me," said Claude. "So far as being in action goes, I am a nobody of course. But I hope, if I went in for play and that sort of thing, I would bear my losses without look-

ing as ghastly as a skeleton. That is where a man of the world, however little you may think of us, has the better of people out of Society. But I have nothing to do with his losses. I only tell you, so that, if you can do anything to get hold of him, to keep him from going to the bad——"

"To the—bad!" she cried. Her face grew pale; and something appalling, an indistinct vision of horrors, dimly appeared before Frances' eyes. She seemed to see not only George Gaunt, but his mother weeping, his father looking on with a startled miserable face. "Oh," she cried, trying to throw off the impression, "you don't know what you are saying. George Gaunt would never do anything that is bad. You are making some dreadful mistake, or—— Oh, Mr Ramsay, couldn't you tell him, if you know it is so bad, before——?"

"What!" cried Claude, horror-struck. "I tell—a fellow I scarcely know! He would have a right to—kick me, or something—or at least to tell me to mind my own business. No; but you might speak to Markham. Markham is the only man who perhaps might interfere."

"Oh, Markham! always Markham! Oh, I wish any one would tell me what Markham has to do with it," cried Frances, with a moan.

"That's just one of his occupations," said Ramsay, calmly. "They say it doesn't tell much on him one way or other, but Markham can't live without play. Don't you think, as Lady Markham does not come in, that you might give me a cup of tea?"

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

Constance Waring had not been enjoying herself in Bordighera. Her amusement indeed came to an end with the highly exciting yet disagreeable scene which took place between herself and young Gaunt the day before he went away. It is late to recur to this, so much having passed in the meantime; but it really was the only thing of note that happened to her. The blank negative with which she had met his suit, the air of surprise, almost indignation, with which his impassioned appeal was received, confounded poor young Gaunt. He asked her, with a simplicity that sprang out of despair, "Did you not know then? Were you not aware? Is it possible that you were not—prepared?"

"For what, Captain Gaunt?" Constance asked, fixing him with a haughty look.

He returned that look with one that would have cowed a weaker woman. "Did you not know that I—loved you?" he said.

Even she quailed a little. "Oh, as for that, Captain Gaunt!—a man must be responsible for his own follies of that kind. I did not ask you to—care for me, as you say. I thought, indeed, that you would have the discretion to see that anything of the kind between us was out of the question."

"Why?" he asked, almost sternly; and Constance hesitated a little, finding it perhaps not so easy to reply.

"Because," she said after a pause, with a faint flush, which showed that the effort cost her something—"because—we belong to two different worlds—because all our habits and modes of living are different." By this time she began to grow a little indignant that he should give her so much trouble. "Because you are Captain Gaunt, of the Indian service, and I am Con stance Waring," she said, with angry levity.

He grew deadly red with fierce pride and shame.

"Because you are of the higher class, and

I of the lower," he said. "Is that what you mean? Yet I am a gentleman, and one cannot well be more."

To this she made no reply, but moved away from where she had been standing to listen to him, and returned to her chair. They were on the loggia, and this sudden movement left him at one end, while she returned to the other. He stood for a time following her with his eyes; then, having watched the angry *abandon* with which she threw herself into her seat, turning her head away, he came a little closer with a certain sternness in his aspect.

"Miss Waring," he said, "notwithstanding the distance between us, you have allowed me to be your — companion for some time past."

"Yes," she said. "What then? There was no one else, either for me or for you."

"That, then, was the sole reason?"

"Captain Gaunt," she cried, "what is the use of all this? We were thrown in each other's way. I meant nothing more; if you did, it was your own fault. You could not surely expect that I should marry you and go to India with

you? It is absurd—it is ridiculous," she cried, with a hot blush, throwing back her head. He saw with suddenly quickened perceptions that the suggestion filled her with contempt and shame. And the young man's veins tingled as if fire was in them; the rage of love despised shook his very soul.

"And why?" he cried—"and why?" his voice tremulous with passion. "What is ridiculous in that? It may be ridiculous that I should have believed in a girl like you. I may have been a vain weak fool to do it, not to know that I was only a plaything for your amusement; but it never could be ridiculous to think that a woman might love and marry an honourable man."

He paused several times to command his voice, and she listened impatient, not looking at him, clasping and unclasping her hands.

"It would be ridiculous in me," she cried. "You don't know me, or you never would have dreamt—— Captain Gaunt, this had better end. It is of no use lashing yourself to fury, or me either. Think the worst of me you can; it will be all the better for you—it will make

you hate me. Yes, I have been amusing myself; and so, I supposed, were you too."

"No," he said, "you could not think that."

She turned round and gave him one look, then averted her eyes again, and said no more.

"You did not think that," he cried, vehemently. "You knew it was death to me, and you did not mind. You listened and smiled, and led me on. You never checked me by a word, or gave me to understand—— Oh," he cried, with a sudden change of tone, "Constance, if it is India, if it is only India, you have but to hold up a finger, and I will give up India without a word."

He had suddenly come close to her again. A wild hope had blazed up in him. He made as though he would throw himself at her feet. She lifted her hand hurriedly to forbid this action.

"Don't!" she cried, sharply. "Men are not theatrical nowadays. It is nothing to me whether you go to India or stay at home. I have told you already I never thought of anything beyond friendship. Why should not we have amused each other, and no harm? If I

have done you any harm, I am sorry; but it will only be for a very short time."

He had turned away, stung once more into bitterness, and had tried to say something in reply; but his strength had not been equal to his intention, and in the strong revulsion of feeling, the young man leant against the wall of the loggia, hiding his face in his hands.

There was a little pause. Then Constance turned round half stealthily to see why there was no reply. Her heart perhaps smote her a little when she saw that attitude of despair. She rose, and, after a moment's hesitation, laid her hand lightly on his shoulder. "Captain Gaunt, don't vex yourself like that. I am not worth it. I never thought that any one could be so much in earnest about me."

"Constance," he cried, turning round quickly upon her, "I am all in earnest. I care for nothing in the world but you. Oh, say that you were hasty—say that you will give me a little hope!"

She shook her head. "I think," she said, "that all the time you must have mistaken me for Frances. If I had not come, you would

have fallen in love with her, and she with you."

"Don't insult me, at least!" he cried.

"Insult you—by saying that *my* sister——! You forget yourself, Captain Gaunt. If my sister is not good enough for you, I wonder who you think good enough. She is better than I am; far better—in that way."

"There is only one woman in the world for me; I don't care if there was no other," he said.

"That is benevolent towards the rest of the world," said Constance, recovering her composure. "Do you know," she said, gravely, "I think it will be much better for you to go away. I hope we may eventually be good friends; but not just at present. Please go. I should like to part friends; and I should like you to take a parcel for Frances, as you are going to London; and to see my mother. But, for heaven's sake, go away now. A walk will do you good, and the fresh air. You will see things in their proper aspect. Don't look at me as if you could kill me. What I am saying is quite true."

"A walk," he repeated with unutterable scorn, "will do me good!"

"Yes," she said, calmly. "It will do you a great deal of good. And change of air and scene will soon set you all right. Oh, I know very well what I am saying. But pray, go now. Papa will make his appearance in about ten minutes; and you don't want to make a confidant of papa."

"It matters nothing to me who knows," he said; but all the same he gathered himself up and made an effort to recover his calm.

"It does to me, then," said Constance. "I am not at all inclined for papa's remarks. Captain Gaunt, good-bye. I wish you a pleasant journey; and I hope that some time or other we may meet again, and be very good friends."

She had the audacity to hold out her hand to him calmly, looking into his eyes as she spoke. But this was more than young Gaunt could bear. He gave her a fierce look of passion and despair, waved his hand without touching hers, and hurried headlong away.

Constance stood listening till she heard the

door close behind him; and then she seated herself tranquilly again in her chair. It was evening, and she was waiting for her father for dinner. She had taken her last ramble with the Gaunts that afternoon; and it was after their return from this walk that the young soldier had rushed back to inform her of the letters which called him at once to London, and had burst forth into the love-tale which had been trembling on his lips for days past. She had known very well that she could not escape—that the reckoning for these innocent pleasures would have to come. But she had not expected it at that moment, and had been temporarily taken by surprise. She seated herself now with a sigh of relief, yet regret. "Thank goodness, that's over," she said to herself; but she was not quite comfortable on the subject. In the first place, it *was* over, and there was an end of all her simple fun. No more walks, no more talks skirting the edge of the sentimental and dangerous, no more diplomatic exertions to keep the victim within due limits—fine exercises of power, such as always carry with them a real pleasure. And then, being no more than human,

she had a little compunction as to the sufferer. "He will get over it," she said to herself; change of air and scene would no doubt do everything for him. Men have died, and worms have eaten them, &c. Still, she could not but be sorry. He had looked very wretched, poor fellow, which was complimentary; but she had felt something of the self-contempt of a man who has got a cheap victory over an antagonist much less powerful than himself. A practised swordsman (or woman) of Society should not measure arms with a merely natural person, knowing nothing of the noble art of self-defence. It was perhaps a little—mean, she said to herself. Had it been one of her own species, the duel would have been as amusing throughout, and no harm done. This vexed her a little, and made her uneasy. She remembered, though she did not in general care much about books or the opinion of the class of nobodies who write them, of some very sharp things that had been said upon this subject. Lady Clara Vere de Vere had not escaped handling; and she thought that after it Lady Clara must have felt small, as Constance Waring did now.

But then, on the other hand, what could be more absurd than for a man to suppose, because a girl was glad enough to amuse herself with him for a week or two, in absolute default of all other society, that she was ready to marry him, and go to India with him! To India! What an idea! And it had been quite as much for his amusement as for hers. Neither of them had any one else: it was in self-defence—it was the only resource against absolute dulness. It had made the time pass for him as well as for her. He ought to have known all along that she meant nothing more. Indeed Constance wondered how he could be so silly as to want to have a wife and double his expenses, and bind himself for life. A man, she reflected, must be so much better off when he has only himself to think of. Fancy him taking *her* bills on his shoulders as well as his own! She wondered, with a contemptuous laugh, how he would like that, or if he had the least idea what these bills would be. On the whole, it was evident, in every point of view, that he was much better out of it. Perhaps even by this time he would have been tearing his hair, had

she taken him at his word. But no. Constance could not persuade herself that this was likely. Yet he would have torn his hair, she was certain, before the end of the first year. Thus she worked herself round to something like self-forgiveness; but all the same there rankled at her heart a sense of meanness, the consciousness of having gone out in battle-array and vanquished with beat of drum and sound of trumpet an unprepared and undefended adversary, an antagonist with whom the struggle was not fair. Her sense of honour was touched, and all her arguments could not content her with herself.

"I suppose you have been out with the Gaunts again?" Waring said, as they sat at table, in a dissatisfied tone.

"Yes; but you need never put the question to me again in that uncomfortable way, for George Gaunt is going off to-morrow, papa."

"Oh, he is going off to-morrow? Then I suppose you have been honest, and given him his *congé* at last?"

"I honest? I did not know I had ever been accused of picking and stealing. If he had asked me for his *congé*, he should have

had it long ago. He has been sent for, it seems."

"Then has the *congé* not yet been asked for? In that case we shall have him back again, I suppose?" said her father, in a tone of resignation, and with a shrug of his shoulders.

"No; for his people will be away. They are going to Switzerland, and the Durants are going to Homburg. Where do you mean to go, when it is too hot to stay here?"

He looked at her half angrily for a moment. "It is never too hot to stay here," he said; then, after a pause, "We can move higher up among the hills."

"Where one will never see a soul—worse even than here!"

"Oh, you will see plenty of country-folk," he said—"a fine race of people, mountaineers, yet husbandmen, which is a rare combination."

Constance looked up at him with a little *moue* of mingled despair and disdain.

"With perhaps some romantic young Italian count for you to practise upon," he said.

Though the humour on his part was grim

and derisive rather than sympathetic, her countenance cleared a little. "You know, papa," she said, with a faintly complaining note, "that my Italian is very limited, and your counts and countesses speak no language but their own."

"Oh, who can tell? There may be some poor soldier on furlough who has French enough to—— By the way," he added, sharply, "you must remember that they don't understand flirtation with girls. If you were a married woman, or a young widow——"

"You might pass me off as a young widow, papa. It would be amusing—or at least it *might* be amusing. That is not a quality of the life here in general. What an odd thing it is that in England we always believe life to be so much more amusing abroad than at home."

"It is amusing—at Monte Carlo, perhaps."

Constance made another *moue* at the name of Monte Carlo, from the sight of which she had not derived much pleasure. "I suppose," she said, impartially, "what really amuses one is the kind of diversion one has been accus-

tomed to, and to know everybody: chiefly to know everybody," she added, after a pause.

"With these views, to know nobody must be bad luck indeed!"

"It is," she said, with great candour; "that is why I have been so much with the Gaunts. One can't live absolutely alone, you know, papa."

"I can—with considerable success," he replied.

"Ah, you! There are various things to account for it with you," she said.

He waited for a moment, as if to know what these various things were; then smiled to himself a little angrily at his daughter's calm way of taking his disabilities for granted. It was not till some time after, when the dinner had advanced a stage, that he spoke again. Then he said, without any introduction, "I often wonder, Constance, when you find this life so dull as you do——"

"Yes, very dull," she said frankly,—"especially now, when all the people are going away."

"I wonder often," he repeated, "my dear, why you stay; for there is nothing to recom-

pense you for such a sacrifice. If it is for my sake, it is a pity, for I could really get on very well alone. We don't see very much of each other; and till now, if you will pardon me for saying so, your mind has been taken up with a pursuit which — you could have carried on much better at home."

"You mean what you are pleased to call flirtation, papa? No, I could not have carried on that sort of thing at home. The conditions are altogether different. It *is* difficult to account for my staying, when, clearly, you don't consider me of any use, and don't want me."

"I have never said that. Of course I am very glad to have you. It is in the bond, and therefore my right. I was regarding the question solely from your point of view."

Constance did not answer immediately. She paused to think. When she had turned the subject over in her mind, she replied, "I need not tell you how complicated one's motives get. It takes a long time to make sure which is really the fundamental one, and how it works."

"You are a philosopher, my dear."

"Not more than one must be with Society pressing upon one as it does, papa. Nothing is straightforward nowadays. You have to dig quite deep down before you come at the real meaning of anything you do; and very often, when you get hold of it, you don't quite like to acknowledge it, even to yourself."

"That is rather an alarming preface, but very just too. If you don't like to acknowledge it to yourself, you will like still less to acknowledge it to me?"

"I don't quite see that: perhaps I am harder upon myself than you would be. No; but I prefer to think of it a little more before I tell you. I have a kind of feeling now that it is because—but you will think that a shabby sort of pride—it is because I am too proud to own myself beaten, which I should do if I were to go back."

"It is a very natural sort of pride," he said. "But it is not all that. I must go a little deeper still. Not to-night. I have done as much thinking as I am quite able for to-night."

And thus the question was left for another day.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Next morning, Constance, seated as usual in the loggia, which was now, as the weather grew hot, veiled with an awning, heard—her ears being very quick, and on the alert for every sound—a tinkle of the bell, a sound of admittance, the step of Domenico leading some visitor to the place in which she sat. Was it *he*, coming yet again to implore her pardon, an extension of privileges, a hope for the future? She made out instantaneously, however, that the footstep which followed Domenico was not that of young Gaunt. It was softer, less decided—an indefinite female step. She sat up in her chair and listened, letting her book fall, and next moment saw Mrs Gaunt, old-fashioned, unassured, with a troubled look upon her face, in her shawl and big hat, come out almost

timidly upon the loggia. Constance sprang to her feet—then in a moment collapsed and shrank away into herself. Before the young lover she was a queen, and to her father she preserved her dignity very well; but when *his* mother appeared, the girl had no longer any power to hold up her head. Mrs Gaunt was old, very badly dressed, not very clever or wise; but Constance felt those mild, somewhat dull eyes penetrating to the depths of her own guilty heart.

"How do you do, Miss Waring?" said Mrs Gaunt, stiffly. (She had called her "my dear" yesterday, and had been so anxious to please her, doing everything she could to ingratiate herself.) "I hope I do not disturb you so early; but my son, Captain Gaunt, is going away——"

"Oh yes—I heard. I am very sorry," the guilty Constance murmured, hanging her head.

"I do not know that there is any cause to be sorry; we were going anyhow in a few days. And in London my son will find many friends."

"I mean," said Constance, drawing a long breath, beginning to recover a little courage,

feeling, even in her discomfiture, a faint amusement still—"I mean, for his friends here, who will miss him so much."

Mrs Gaunt darted a glance at her, half wrathful, half wavering; it had seemed so unnatural to her that any girl could play with or resist her son. Perhaps, after all, he had misunderstood Constance. She said, proudly, "His friends always miss George; he is so friendly. Nobody ever asks anything from him, to take any trouble or make any sacrifice, in vain."

"I am sure he is very good," said Constance, tremulous, yet waking to the sense of humour underneath.

"That is why I am here to-day," said Mrs Gaunt. "My son—remembers—though perhaps you will allow he has not much call to do so, Miss Waring—that you said something about a parcel for Frances. Dear Frances; he will see her—that will always be something."

"Then he is not coming to say good-bye?" she said, opening her eyes with a semblance of innocent and regretful surprise.

"Oh, Miss Waring! oh, Constance!" cried

the poor mother. "But perhaps my boy has made a mistake. He is very wretched. I am sure he never closed his eyes all last night. If you saw him this morning, it would go to your heart. Ah, my dear, he thinks you will have nothing to say to him, and his heart is broken. If you will only let me tell him that he has made a mistake!"

"Is it about me, Mrs Gaunt?"

"Oh, Constance! who should it be about but you? He has never looked at any one else since he saw you first. All that has been in his mind has been how to see you, how to talk to you, to make himself agreeable if he could—to try and get your favour. I will not conceal anything from you. I never was satisfied from the first. I thought you were too grand, too much used to fine people and their ways, ever to look at one of us. But then, when I saw my George, the flower of my flock, with nothing in his mind but how to please you, his eyes following you wherever you went, as if there was not another in the world——"

"There was not another in Bordighera, at least," said Constance, under her breath.

"There was not——? What did you say—what did you say? Oh, there was nobody that he ever wasted a thought on but you. I had my doubts all the time. I used to say, 'George, dear, don't go too far; don't throw everything at her feet till you know how she feels.' But I might as well have talked to the sea. If he had been the king of all the world, he would have poured everything into your lap. Oh, my dear, a man's true love is a great thing; it is more than crowns or queen's jewels. You might have all the world contains, and beside that it would be as nothing—and this is what he has given you. Surely you did not understand him when he spoke, or he did not understand you. Perhaps you were taken by surprise—fluttered, as girls will be, and said the wrong words. Or you were shy. Or you did not know your own mind. Oh, Constance, say it was a mistake, and give me a word of comfort to take to my boy!"

The tears were running down the poor mother's cheeks as she pleaded thus for her son. When she had left home that morning, after surprising, divining the secret, which he

had done his best to hide from her overnight, there had been a double purpose in Mrs Gaunt's mind. She had intended to pour out such vials of wrath upon the girl who had scorned her son, such floods of righteous indignation, that never, never should she raise her head again; and she had intended to watch her opportunity, to plead on her knees, if need were, if there was any hope of getting him what he wanted. It did not disturb her that these two intentions were totally opposed to each other. And she had easily been beguiled into thinking that there was good hope still.

While she spoke, Constance on her side had been going through a series of observations, running comments upon this address, which did not move her very much. "If he had been king of all the world—ah, that would have made a difference," she said to herself; and it was all she could do to refrain from bursting forth in derisive laughter at the suggestion that she herself had perhaps been shy, or had not known her own mind. To think that any woman could be such a simpleton, so easily deceived! The question was, whether to

be gentle with the delusion, and spare Mrs Gaunt's feelings; or whether to strike her down at once with indignation and sharp scorn. There passed through the mind of Constance a rapid calculation that in so small a community it was better not to make an enemy, and also perhaps some softening reflections from the remorse which really had touched her last night. So that when Mrs Gaunt ended by that fervent prayer, her knees trembling with the half intention of falling upon them, her voice faltering, her tears flowing, Constance allowed herself to be touched with responsive emotion. She put out both her hands and cried, "Oh, don't speak like that to me; oh, don't look at me so! Dear, dear Mrs Gaunt, teach me what to do to make up for it! for I never thought it would come to this. I never imagined that he, who deserves so much better, would trouble himself about me. Oh, what a wretched creature I am to bring trouble everywhere! for I am not free. Don't you know I am—engaged to some one else? Oh, I thought everybody knew of it! I am not free."

"Not free!" said Mrs Gaunt, with a cry of dismay.

"Oh, didn't you know of it?" said Constance. "I thought everybody knew. It has been settled for a long time—since I was quite a child."

"My dear," said Mrs Gaunt, solemnly, "if your heart is not in it, you ought not to go on with it. I did hear something of—a gentleman, whom your mamma wished you to marry; who was very rich, and all that."

Constance nodded her head slowly, in a somewhat melancholy assent.

"But I was told that you did not wish it yourself—that you had broken it off—that you had come here to avoid—— Oh, my dear girl, don't take up a false sense of duty, or—or honour—or self-sacrifice! Constance, you may have a right to sacrifice yourself, but not another—not another, dear. And all his happiness is wrapped up in you. And if it is a thing your heart does not go with!" cried the poor lady, losing herself in the complication of phrases. Constance only shook her head.

"Dear Mrs Gaunt! I *must* think of honour and duty. What would become of us all if we put an engagement aside, because — because ——? And it would be cruel to the other; he is not strong. I could not, oh, I could not break off—oh no, not for worlds—it would kill him. But will you try and persuade Captain Gaunt not to think hardly of me? I thought I might enjoy his friendship without any harm. If I have done wrong, oh forgive me!" Constance cried.

Mrs Gaunt dried her eyes. She was a simple-minded woman, who knew what she wanted, and whose instinct taught her to refuse a stone when it was offered to her instead of bread. She said, "He will forgive you, Miss Waring; he will not think hardly of you, you may be sure. They are too infatuated to do that, when a girl like you takes the trouble to—— But I think you might have thought twice before you did it, knowing what you tell me now. A young man fresh from India, where he has been working hard for years—coming home to get up his strength, to enjoy himself a little, to make up

for all his long time away—— And because you are a little lonely, and want to enjoy his —friendship, as you say, you go and spoil his holiday for him, make it all wretched, and make even his poor mother wish that he had never come home at all. And you think it will all be made up if you say you are sorry at the end! To him, perhaps, poor foolish boy; but oh, not to me."

Constance made no reply to this. She had done her best, and for a moment she thought she had succeeded; but she had always been aware, by instinct, that the mother was less easy to beguile than the son; and she was silent, attempting no further self-defence.

"Young men are a mystery to me," said Mrs Gaunt, standing with agitated firmness in the middle of the loggia, taking no notice of the chair which had been offered her. She did not even look at Constance, but directed her remarks to the swaying palms in the foreground and the hills behind—"they are a mystery! There may be one under their very eyes that is as good as gold and as true as steel, and they will never so much as look at

her. And there will be another that thinks of nothing but amusing herself, and that is the one they will adore. Oh, it is not for the first time now that I have found it out! I had my misgivings from the very first; but he was like all the rest—he would not hear a word from his mother; and now I am sure I wish his furlough was at an end; I wish he had never come home. His father and I would rather have waited on and pined for him, or even made up our minds to die without seeing him, rather than he should have come here to break his heart."

She paused a moment and then resumed again, turning from the palms and distant peaks to concentrate a look of fire upon Constance, who sat sunk in her wicker chair, turning her head away.

"And if a man were to go astray after being used like that, whose fault would it be? If he were to go wrong—if he were to lose heart, to say What's the good? whose fault would it be? Oh, don't tell me that you didn't know what you were doing—that you didn't mean to break his heart! Did you think he had no heart at

all? But then, why should you have taken the trouble? It wouldn't have amused you, it would have been no fun, had he had no heart."

"You seem," said Constance, without turning her head, launching a stray arrow in self-defence, "to know all about it, Mrs Gaunt."

"Perhaps I do know all about it,—I am a woman myself. I wasn't always old and faded. I know there are some things a girl may do in innocence, and some—that no one but a wicked woman of the world—— Oh, you are young to be called such a name. I oughtn't, at your age, however I may suffer by you, to call you such a name."

"You may call me what name you like. Fortunately I have not to look to you as my judge. Look here," cried Constance, springing to her feet. "You say you are a woman yourself. I am not like Frances, a girl that knew nothing. If your son is at my feet, I have had better men at my feet, richer men, far better matches than Captain Gaunt. Would any one in their senses expect *me* to marry a poor soldier, to go out to India, to follow the regiment? You forget I'm Lady Markham's

daughter as well as Mr Waring's. Put yourself in her place for a moment, and think what you would say if your daughter told you that was what she was going to do. To marry a poor man, not even at home—an officer in India! What would you say? You would lock me up in my room, and keep me on bread and water. You would say, the girl is mad. At least that is what my mother, if she could, would do."

Mrs Gaunt caught upon the point which was most salient and attackable. "An Indian officer!" she cried. "That shows how little you know. He is not an Indian officer—he is a Queen's officer: not that it matters. There were men in the Company's service that—— The Company's service was—— How dare you speak so to me? General Gaunt was in the Company's service!" she cried, with an outburst of injured feeling and excited pride.

To this Constance made reply with a mocking laugh, which nearly drove her adversary frantic, and resumed her seat, having said what she had to say.

Poor Mrs Gaunt sat down, too, in sheer inability to support herself. Her limbs trembled

under her. She wanted to cry, but would not, had she died in that act of self-restraint. And as she could not have said another word without crying, force was upon her to keep silence, though her heart burned. After an interval, she said, tremulously, "If this is one of our punishments for Eve's fault, it's far, far harder to bear than the other; and every woman has to bear it more or less. To see a man that ought to make one woman's happiness turned into a jest by another woman, and made a laughing-stock of, and all his innocent pleasure turned into bitterness. Why did you do it? Were there not plenty of men in the world that you should take my boy for your plaything? Wasn't there room for you in London, that you should come here? Oh, what possessed you to come here, where no one wanted you, and spoil all?"

Constance turned round and stared at her accuser with troubled eyes. It was a question to which it was difficult to give any answer; and she could not deny that it was a very pertinent question. No one had wanted her. There had been room for her in London, and

a recognised place, and everything a girl could desire. Oh, how she desired now those things which belonged to her, which she had left so lightly, which there was nothing here to replace! Why had she left them? If a wish could have taken her back, out of this foreign, alien, unloved scene, away from Mrs Gaunt, scolding her in the big hat and shawl, which would be only fit for a charade at home, to Lady Markham's soft and lovely presence—to Claude, even poor Claude, with his beautiful eyes and his fear of draughts—how swiftly would she have travelled through the air! But a wish would not do it; and she could only stare at her assailant blankly, and in her heart echo the question, Why, oh why?

Notwithstanding this stormy interview, Constance had so far recovered by the afternoon, and was so utterly destitute of anything else by way of amusement, that she walked down to the railway station at the hour when the train started for Marseilles and England, with a perfectly composed and smiling countenance, and the little parcel for Frances under her arm. Mrs Gaunt was like a woman turned to stone

when she suddenly saw this apparition, standing upon the platform, talking to her old general, amusing and occupying him so that he almost forgot that he was here on no joyful but a melancholy occasion. And to see George hurry forward, his dark face lit up with a sudden glow, his hat in his hand, as if he were about to address the Queen! These are things which are very hard upon women, to whom it is generally given to preserve their senses even when the most seductive siren smiles.

"You would not come to say good-bye to me, so I had to take it into my own hands," Constance said, in her clear young voice, which was to be heard quite distinctly through all the jabber of the Riviera functionaries. "And here is the little parcel for Frances, if you will be so very good. *Do* go and see them, Captain Gaunt."

"Of course he will go and see them," said the General—"too glad. He has not so many people to see in town that he should forget our old friend Waring's near connections, and Frances, whom we were all so fond of. And you may be sure he will be honoured by any commissions you will give him."

"Oh, I have no commissions. Markham does my commissions when I have any. He is the best of brothers in that respect. Give my love to mamma, Captain Gaunt. She will like to see some one who has seen me. Tell her I get on—pretty well. Tell them all to come out here."

"He must not do that, Miss Waring; for it will soon be too hot, and we are all going away."

"Oh, I was not in earnest," said Constance; "it was only a little jest. I must look too sincere for anything, for people are always taking my little jokes as if I meant them, every word." She raised her eyes to Captain Gaunt as she spoke, and with one steady look made an end in a moment of all the hasty hopes that had sprung up again in less time than Jonah's gourd. She put the parcel in his charge, and shook hands with him, taking no notice of his sudden change of countenance,—and not only this, but waited a little way off till the poor young fellow had got into the train, and had been taken farewell of by his parents. Then she waved her hand and a little film of

a pocket-handkerchief, and waited till the old pair came out, Mrs Gaunt with very red eyes, and even the General blowing his nose unnecessarily.

"It seems only the other day that we came down to meet him—after not seeing him for so many years."

"Oh, my poor boy! But I should not mind if I thought he had got any good out of his holiday," said Mrs Gaunt, launching a burning look among her tears at the siren.

"Oh, I think he has enjoyed himself, Mrs Gaunt. I am sure you need not have any burden on your mind on that account," the young deceiver said smoothly.

Yes, he had enjoyed himself, and now had to pay the price of it in disappointment and ineffectual misery. This was all it had brought him, this brief intoxicating dream, this fool's paradise. Constance walked with them as far as their way lay together, and "talked very nicely," as he said afterwards, to the General; but Mrs Gaunt, if she could have done it with a wish, would have willingly pitched this siren, where other sirens belong to—into the sea.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

AND Constance, too, had found it amusing—she did not hesitate to acknowledge that to herself. She had got a great deal of diversion out of these six weeks. There had been nothing, really, when you came to think of it, to amuse anybody: a few dull walks; a drive along the dusty roads, which were more dusty than anything she had ever experienced in her life; and then a ramble among the hills, a climb from terrace to terrace of the olive-gardens, or through the stony streets of a little mountain town. It was the contrast, the harmony, the antagonism, the duel and the companionship continually going on, which had given everything its zest. The scientific man with an exciting object under the microscope, the astronomer with his new star pulsing

out of the depths of the sky, could scarcely have been more absorbed than Constance. Not so much; for not the most cherished of star-fishes, not the most glorious of stars, is so exciting as it is to watch the risings and flowings of emotion under your own hand, to feel that you can cause ecstasy or despair, and raise up another human creature to the heights of delight, or drop him to depths beneath purgatory, at your will. When the young and cruel possess this power—and the very young are often cruel by ignorance, by inability to understand suffering—they are seldom clever enough to use it to the full extent. But Constance was clever, and had tasted blood before. It had made the time pass as nothing else could have done. It had carried on a thread of keen interest through all these commonplace pursuits. It had been as amusing, nay, much more so than if she had loved him; for she got the advantage of his follies without sharing them, and felt herself to stand high in cool ethereal light, while the unfortunate young man turned himself outside in for her enlightenment. She had enjoyed her-

self—she did not deny it; but now there was the penalty to pay.

He was gone, clean gone, escaped from her power; and nothing was left but the beggarly elements of this small bare life, in which there was nothing to amuse or interest. The roads were more intolerable than ever, lying white in heat and dust, which rose in clouds round every carriage—carriage! that was an euphemism—cab which passed. The sun blazed everywhere, so that one thought regretfully of the dull skies of England, and charitably of the fogs and rains. There was nothing to do but to go up among the olives and sit down upon some ledge and look at the sea. Constance did not draw, neither did she read. She did nothing that could be of any use to her here. She regretted now that she had allowed herself at the very beginning to fall into the snare of that amusement, too ready to her hand, which consisted of Captain Gaunt. It had been a mistake—if for no other reason, at least because it left the dulness more dull than ever, now it was over. He it was who had been her resource, his looks and ways her study, the gradual growth of his

love the romance which had kept her going. She asked herself sometimes whether she could possibly have done as much harm to him as to herself by this indulgence, and answered earnestly, No. How could it do him any harm? He was vexed, of course, for the moment, because he could not have her; but very soon he would come to. He would be a fool, more of a fool than she thought him, if he did not soon see that it was much better for him that she had thought only of a little amusement. Why should he marry, a young man with very little money? There could be no doubt it would have been a great mistake. Constance did not know what society in India is like, but she supposed it must be something like society at home, and in that case there was no doubt he would have found it altogether more difficult had he gone back a married man.

She could not think, looking at the subject dispassionately, how he could ever have wished it. An unmarried young man (she reflected) gets asked to a great many places, where the people could not be troubled with a pair.

And whereas some girls may be promoted by marriage, it is *almost always* to the disadvantage of a young man. So, why should he make a fuss about it, this young woman of the world asked herself. He ought to have been very glad that he had got his amusement and no penalty to pay. But for herself, she was sorry. Now he was gone, there was nobody to talk to, nobody to walk with, no means of amusement at all. She did not know what to do with herself, while he was speeding to dear London. What was she to do with herself? Filial piety and the enjoyment of her own thoughts—without anything to do even for her father, or any subject to employ her thoughts upon—these were all that seemed to be left to her in her life. The tourists and invalids were all gone, so that there was not even the chance of somebody turning up at the hotels; and even the Gaunts—between whom and herself there was now a gulf fixed—and the Durants, who were bores unspeakable, were going away. What was she to do?

Alas, that exhilarating game which had ended so sadly for George Gaunt was not ending very

cheerfully for Constance. It had made life too tolerable—it had kept her in a pleasant self-deception as to the reality of the lot she had chosen. Now that reality flashed upon her,—nay, the word is far too animated—it did not flash, nothing any longer flashed, except that invariable, intolerable sun,—it opened upon her dully, with its long, long, endless vistas. The still rooms in the Palazzo with the green *persiani* closed, all blazing sunshine without, all dead stillness and darkness within—and nothing to do, nobody to see, nothing to give a fresh turn to her thoughts. Not a novel even! Papa's old books upon out-of-the-way subjects, dreary as the dusty road, endless as the uneventful days—and papa himself, the centre of all. When she turned this over and over in her mind, it seemed to her that if, when she first came, instead of being seduced into flowery paths of flirtation, she had paid a little attention to her father, it might have been better for her now. But that chance was over, and George Gaunt was gone, and only dulness remained behind.

And oh, how different it must be in town,

where the season was just beginning, and Frances, that little country thing, who would care nothing about it, was going to be presented! Constance, it is scarcely necessary to say, had been told what her sister was to wear; indeed, having gone through the ceremony herself, and knowing exactly what was right, could have guessed without being told. How would Frances look with her little demure face and her neat little figure? Constance had no unkindly feeling towards her sister. She fully recognised the advantages of the girl, who was like mamma; and whose youthful freshness would be enhanced by the good looks of the little stately figure beside her, showing the worst that Frances was likely to come to, even when she got old. Constance knew very well that this was a great advantage to a girl, having heard the frank remarks of Society upon those beldams who lead their young daughters into the world, presenting in their own persons a horrible caricature of what those girls may grow to be. But Frances would look very well, the poor exile decided, sitting on the low wall of one of the terraces, gazing through the grey

olives over the blue sea. She would look very well. She would be frightened, yet amused, by the show. She would be admired—by people who liked that quiet kind. Markham would be with them; and Claude, perhaps Claude, if it was a fine day, and there was no east in the wind! She stopped to laugh to herself at this suggestion, but her colour rose at the same time, and an angry question woke in her mind. Claude! She had told Mrs Gaunt she was engaged to him still. Was she engaged to him? Or had he thrown her off, as she threw him off, and perhaps found consolation in Frances? At this thought the olive-gardens in their coolness grew intolerable, and the sea the dreariest of prospects. She jumped up, and notwithstanding the sun and the dust, went down the broad road, the old Roman way, where there was no shade nor shelter. It was not safe, she said to herself, to be left there with her thoughts. She must break the spell or die.

She went, of all places in the world, poor Constance! to the Durants' in search of a little variety. Their loggia also was covered with an

awning; but they did not venture into it till the sun was going down. They had their tea-table in the drawing-room, which, till the eyes grew accustomed to it, was quite dark, with one ray of subdued light stealing in from the open door of the loggia, but the blinds all closed and the windows. Here Constance was directed, by the glimmer of reflection in the teapot and china, to the spot where the family were sitting, Mrs Durant and Tasie languidly waving their fans. The *dolce far niente* was not appreciated in that clerical house. Tasie thought it her duty to be always doing something—knitting at least for a bazaar, if it was not light enough for other work. But the heat had overcome even Tasie; though it could not, if it had been tropical, do away with the little furnace of the hot tea. They all received Constance with the languid delight of people in an atmosphere of ninety degrees, to whom no visitor has appeared, nor any incident happened, all day.

"Oh, Miss Waring," said Tasie, "we have just had a great disappointment. Some one sent us the 'Queen' from home, and we looked

directly for the drawing-room, to see Frances' name and how she was dressed; but it is not there."

"No," said Constance; "the 29th is her day."

"Oh, that is what I said, mamma. I said we must have mistaken the date. It couldn't be that there was any mistake about going, when she wrote and told us. I knew the date must be wrong."

"Many things may occur at the last moment to stop one, Tasie. I have known a lady with her dress all ready laid out on the bed; and circumstances happened so that she could not go."

"That is by no means a singular experience, my dear," said Mr Durant, who in his black coat was almost invisible. "I have known many such cases; and in matters more important than drawing-rooms."

"There was the Sangazures," said the clergyman's wife—"don't you recollect? Lady Alice was just putting on her bonnet to go to her daughter's marriage, when——"

"It is really unnecessary to recall so many

examples," said Constance. "No doubt they are all quite true; but as a matter of fact, in this case the date was the 29th."

"Oh, I hope," said Tasie, "that somebody will send us another 'Queen'; for I should be so sorry to miss seeing about Frances. Have you heard, Miss Waring, how she is to be dressed?"

"It will be the usual white business," said Constance, calmly.

"You mean—all white? Yes, I suppose so; and the material, silk or satin, with tulle? Oh yes, I have no doubt; but to see it all written down, with the drapings and *bouillonnés* and all that, makes it so much more real. Don't you think so? Dear Frances, she always looked so nice in white—which is trying to many people. I really cannot wear white, for my part."

Constance looked at her with a scarcely concealed smile. She was not tolerant of the old-young lady, as Frances was. Her eyes meant mischief as they made out the sandy complexion, the uncertain hair, which were so unlike Frances' clear little face and glossy

brown satin locks. But, fortunately, the eloquence of looks did not tell for much in that closely shuttered dark room. And Constance's nerves, already so jarred and strained, responded with another keen vibration when Mrs Durant's voice suddenly came out of the gloom with a bland question: "And when are you moving? Of course, like all the rest, you must be on the wing."

"Where should we be going? I don't think we are going anywhere," she said.

"My dear Miss Waring, that shows, if you will let me say so, how little you know of our climate here. You must go: in the summer it is intolerable. We have stayed a little longer than usual this year. My husband takes the duty at Homburg every summer, as perhaps you are aware."

"Oh, it is so much nicer there for the Sunday work," said Tasie; "though I love dear little Bordighera too. But the Sunday-school is a trial. To give up one's afternoons and take a great deal of trouble for perhaps three children! Of course, papa, I know it is my duty."

"And quite as much your duty, if there were but one; for, think, if you saved but one soul,—is that not worth living for, Tasie?" Mr Durant said.

"Oh yes, yes, papa. I only say it is a little hard. Of course that is the test of duty. Tell Frances, please, when you write, Miss Waring, there is to be a bazaar for the new church; and I daresay she could send or do me something—two or three of her nice little sketches. People like that sort of thing. Generally things at bazaars are so useless. Knitted things, everybody has got such shoals of them; but a water-colour—you know that always sells."

"I will tell Fan," said Constance, "when I write—but that is not often. We are neither of us very good correspondents."

"You should tell your papa," went on Mrs Durant, "of that little place which I always say I discovered, Miss Waring. Such a nice little place, and quite cool and cheap. Nobody goes; there is not a tourist passing by once in a fortnight. Mr Waring would like it, I know. Don't you think Mr Waring would like it, papa?"

"That depends, my dear, upon so many circumstances over which he has no control—such as, which way the wind is blowing, and if he has the books he wants, and——"

"Papa, you must not laugh at Mr Waring. He is a dear. I will not hear a word that is not nice of Mr Waring," cried Tasie.

This championship of her father was more than Constance could bear. She rose from her seat quickly, and declared that she must go.

"So soon?" said Mrs Durant, holding the hand which Constance had held out to her, and looking up with keen eyes and spectacles. "And we have not said a word yet of the event, and all about it, and why it was. But I think we can give a guess at why it was."

"What event?" Constance said, with chill surprise: as if she cared what was going on in their little world!

"Ah, how can you ask me, my dear? The last event, that took us all so much by surprise. I am afraid, I am sadly afraid, you are not without blame."

"Oh mamma! Miss Waring will think we

do nothing but gossip. But you must remember there is so little going on, that we can't help remarking—— And perhaps it was quite true what they said, that poor Captain Gaunt——"

"Oh, if it is anything about Captain Gaunt," said Constance, hastily withdrawing her hand; "I know so little about the people here——"

Tasie followed her to the door. "You must not mind," she said, "what mamma says. She does not mean anything—it is only her way. She always thinks there must be reasons for things. Now I," said Tasie, "know that very often there are no reasons for anything." Having uttered this oracle, she allowed the visitor to go down-stairs. "And you will not forget to tell Frances," she said, looking over the balustrade. In a little house like that of the Durants the stairs in England would have been wood, and shabby ones; but here they were marble, and of imposing appearance. "Any little thing I should be thankful for," said Tasie; "or she might pick up a few trifles from one of the Japanese shops; but water-colours are what I should prefer. Good-bye,

dear Miss Waring. Oh, it is not good-bye for good; I shall certainly come to see you before we go away!"

Constance had not gone half-way along the Marina when she met General Gaunt, who looked grave, but yet greeted her kindly. "We are going to-morrow," he said. "My wife is so very busy, I do not know if she will be able to find time to call to say good-bye."

"I hope you don't think so badly of me as she does, General Gaunt?"

"Badly, my dear young lady! You must know that is impossible," said the old soldier, shuffling a little from one foot to the other. And then he added, "Ladies are a little unreasonable. And if they think you have interfered with the little finger of a child of theirs—— But I hope you will let me have the pleasure of paying my farewell visit in the morning."

"Good-bye, General," Constance said. She held her head high, and walked proudly away past all the empty hotels and shops, not heeding the sun, which still played down upon her,

though from a lower level. She cared nothing for these people, she said to herself vehemently: and yet the mere feeling of the farewells in the air added a forlorn aspect to the stagnation of the place. Everybody was going away except her father and herself. She felt as if the preparations and partings, and all the pleasure of Tasie in the "work" elsewhere, and her little fussiness about the bazaar, were all offences to herself, Constance, who was not thought good enough even to ask a contribution from. No one thought Constance good for anything, except to blame her for ridiculous impossibilities, such as not marrying Captain Gaunt. It seemed that this was the only thing which she was supposed capable of doing. And while all the other people went away, she was to stay here to be burned brown, and perhaps to get fever, unused as she was to a blazing summer like this. She had to stay here—she, who was so young and could enjoy everything—while all the old people, to whom it could not matter very much, went away. She felt angry, offended, miserable, as she went in and got herself ready mechanically for dinner.

She knew her father would take no notice,—would probably receive the news of the departure of the others without remark. He cared nothing, not nearly so much as about a new book. And she, throbbing with pain, discomfiture, loneliness, and anger, was alone to bear the burden of this stillness, and of the uninhabited world.

## CHAPTER XL.

WARING was not so indifferent to the looks or feelings of his daughter as appeared. After all, he was not entirely buried in his books. To Frances, who had grown up by his side without particularly attracting his attention, he had been kindly indifferent, not feeling any occasion to concern himself about the child, who always had managed to amuse herself, and never had made any call upon him. But Constance had come upon him as a stranger, as an individual with a character and faculties of her own, and it had not been without curiosity that he had watched her to see how she would reconcile herself with the new circumstances. Her absorption in the amusement provided for her by young Gaunt had somewhat revolted her father, who set it down as one of the usual

exhibitions of love in idleness, which every one sees by times as he makes his way through the world. He had not interfered, being thoroughly convinced that interference is useless, in addition to that reluctance to do anything which had grown upon him in his recluse life. But since Gaunt had disappeared without a sign—save that of a little irritability, a little unusual gravity on the part of Constance—her father had been roused somewhat to ask what it meant. Had the young fellow "behaved badly," as people say? Had he danced attendance upon her all this time only to leave her at the end? It did not seem possible, when he looked at Constance with her easy air of mastery, and thought of the shy, eager devotion of the young soldier and his impassioned looks. But yet he was aware that in such cases all prognostics failed, that the conqueror was sometimes conquered, and the intended victim remained master of the field. Waring observed his daughter more closely than ever on this evening. She was *distraite*, self-absorbed, a little impatient, sometimes not noting what he said to her, sometimes answering in an irritable tone. The

replies she made to him when she did reply showed that her mind was running on other matters. She said abruptly, in the middle of a little account he was giving her, with the idea of amusing her, of one of the neighbouring mountain castles, "Do you know, papa, that everybody is going away?"

Waring felt, with a certain discomfiture, which was comic, yet annoying, like one who has been suddenly pulled up with a good deal of "way" on him, and stops himself with difficulty—"a branch of the old Dorias," he went on, having these words in his very mouth; and then, after a precipitate pause, "Eh? Oh, everybody is——? Yes, I know. They always do at this time of the year."

"It will be rather miserable, don't you think, when every one is gone?"

"My dear Constance, 'every one' means the Gaunts and Durants. I could not have supposed you cared."

"For the Gaunts and Durants—oh no," said Constance. "But to think there is not a soul—no one to speak to—not even the clergyman, not even Tasie." She laughed, but there was

a certain look of alarm in her face, as if the emergency was one which was unprecedented. "That frightens one, in spite of one's self. And what are we going to do?"

It was Waring now who hesitated, and did not know how to reply. "We!" he said. "To tell the truth, I had not thought of it. Frances was always quite willing to stay at home."

"But I am not Frances, papa."

"I beg your pardon, my dear; that is quite true. Of course I never supposed so. You understand that for myself I prefer always not to be disturbed—to go on as I am. But you, a young lady fresh from society—— Had I supposed that you cared for the Durants, for instance, I should have thought of some way of making up for their absence; but I thought, on the whole, you would prefer their absence."

"That has nothing to do with it," said Constance. "I don't care for the individuals—they are all rather bores. Captain Gaunt," she added, resolutely, introducing the name with determination, "became very much of a bore before he went away. But the thing is to have

nobody—nobody! One has to put up with bores very often; but to have nobody, actually not a soul! The circumstances are quite unprecedented."

There was something in her air as she said this which amused her father. It was the air of a social philosopher brought to a pause in the face of an unimagined dilemma, rather than of a young lady stranded upon a desert shore where no society was to be found.

"No doubt," he said, "you never knew anything of the kind before."

"Never," said Constance, with warmth. "People who are a nuisance, often enough; but *nobody*, never before."

"I prefer nobody," said her father.

She raised her eyes to him, as if he were one of the problems to which, for the first time, her attention was seriously called. "Perhaps," she said; "but then you are not in a natural condition, papa—no more than a hermit in the desert, who has forsworn society altogether."

Allowing that I am abnormal, Constance, for the argument's sake——"

"And so was Frances, more or less—that is, she could content herself with the peasants and fishermen, who, of course, are just as good as anybody else, if you make up your mind to it, and understand their ways. But I am not abnormal," Constance said, her colour rising a little. "I want the society of my own kind. It seems unnatural to you, probably, just as your way of thinking seems unnatural to me."

"I have seen both ways," said Waring, in his turn becoming animated; "and so far as my opinion goes, the peasants and fishermen are a thousand times better than what you call Society; and solitude, with one's own thoughts and pursuits, the best of all."

There was a momentary pause, and then Constance said, "That may be, papa. What is best in the abstract is not the question. In that way, mere nothing would be the best of all, for there could be no harm in it."

"Nor any good."

"That is what I mean on my side—nor any good. It might be better to be alone—then (I suppose) you would never be bored, never feel the need of anything, the mere sound of a

voice, some one going by. That may be your way of thinking, but it is not mine. If one has no society, one had better die at once and save trouble. That is what I should like to do."

A certain feminine confusion in her argument, produced by haste and the stealing in of personal feeling, stopped Constance, who was too clear-headed not to see when she had got involved. Her confusion had the usual effect of touching her temper and causing a little *crise* of sentiment. The tears came to her eyes. She could be heroic, and veil her personal grievances like a social martyr so long as this was necessary in presence of the world; but in the present case it was not necessary: it was better, in fact, to let nature have its way.

"That will not be necessary, I hope," said Waring, somewhat coldly. He thought of Frances with a sigh, who never bothered him, who was contented with everything! and carried on her own little thoughts, whatever they might be, her little drawings, her little life, so tranquilly, knowing nothing better. What was he to do, with the responsibility upon his hands

of this other creature? whom all the same he could not shake off, nor even—as a gentleman, if not as a father—allow to perceive what an embarrassment she was. "Without going so far," he said, "we must consult what is best to be done, since you feel it so keenly. My ordinary habits even of *villeggiatura* would not please you any better than staying at home, I fear. We used to go up to Dolceacqua, Frances and I; or to Eza; or to Porto Fino, on the opposite coast,—at no one of which places was there a soul—as you reckon souls—to be seen."

"That is a great pity," said Constance; "for even Frances, though she may have been a Stoic born, must have wanted to see a human creature who spoke English now and then."

"A Stoic! It never occurred to me that she was a Stoic," said Waring, with astonishment, and a sudden sense of offence. The idea that his little Frances was not perfectly happy, that she had anything to put up with, anything to forgive, was intolerable to him; and it was a new idea. He reflected that she had consented to go away with an ease which surprised him

at the time. Was it possible? This suggestion disturbed him much in his certainty that his was absolutely the right way.

"If all these expedients are unsatisfactory," he said, sharply, "perhaps you will come to my assistance, and tell me where you would be satisfied to go."

"Papa," said Constance, "I am going to make a suggestion which is a very bold one; perhaps you will be angry—but I don't do it to make you angry; and, please, don't answer me till you have thought a moment. It is just this—Why shouldn't we go home?"

"Go home!" The words flew from him in the shock and wonder. He grew pale as he stared at her, too much thunderstruck to be angry, as she said.

Constance put up her hand to stop him. "I said, please don't answer till you have thought."

And then they sat for a minute or more looking at each other from opposite sides of the table—in that pause which comes when a new and strange thought has been thrown into the midst of a turmoil which it has power to excite

or to allay. Waring went through a great many phases of feeling while he looked at his young daughter sitting undaunted opposite to him, not afraid of him, treating him as no one else had done for years—as an equal, as a reasonable being, whose wishes were not to be deferred to superstitiously, but whose reasons for what he did and said were to be put to the test, as in the case of other men. And he knew that he could not beat down this cool and self-possessed girl, as fathers can usually crush the young creatures whom they have had it in their power to reprove and correct from their cradles. Constance was an independent intelligence. She was a gentlewoman, to whom he could not be rude any more than to the Queen. This hushed at once the indignant outcry on his lips. He said at last, calmly enough, with only a little sneer piercing through his forced smile, "We must take care, like other debaters, to define what we mean exactly by the phrases we use. Home, for example. What do you mean by home? My home, in the ordinary sense of the word, is here."

"My dear father," said Constance, with the air, somewhat exasperated by his folly, of a philosopher with a neophyte, "I wish you would put the right names to things. Yes, it is quite necessary to define, as you say. How can an Englishman, with all his duties in his own country, deriving his income from it, with houses belonging to him, and relations, and everything that makes up life—how can he, I ask you, say that home, in the ordinary sense of the word, is here? What is the ordinary sense of the word?" she said, after a pause—looking at him with the indignant frown of good sense, and that little air of repressed exasperation, as of the wiser towards the foolisher, which made Waring, in the midst of his own just anger and equally just discomfiture, feel a certain amusement too. He kept his temper with the greatest pains and care. Domenico had left the room when the discussion began, and the lamp which hung over the table lighted impartially the girl's animated countenance, pressing forward in the strength of a position which she felt to be invulnerable, and the father's clouded and withdrawing face,—for he

had taken his eyes from her, with unconscious cowardice, when she fixed him with that unwavering gaze.

"I will allow that you put the position very strongly—as well as a little undutifully," he said.

"Undutifully? Is it one's duty to one's father to be silly—to give up one's power of judging what is wrong and what is right? I am sure, papa, you are much too candid a thinker to suggest that."

What could he say? He was very angry; but this candid thinker took him quite at unawares. It tickled while it defied him. And he was a very candid thinker, as she said. Perhaps he had been treated illogically in the great crisis of his life; for, as a matter of fact, when an argument was set before him, when it was a good argument, even if it told against him, he would never refuse to acknowledge it. And conscience, perhaps, had said to him on various occasions what his daughter now said. He could bring forward nothing against it. He could only say, I choose it to be so; and this would bear no weight with Constance. "You

are not a bad dialectician," he said. "Where did you learn your logic? Women are not usually strong in that point."

"Women are said to be just what it pleases men to represent them," said Constance. "Listen, papa. Frances would not have said that to you that I have just said. But don't you know that she would have thought it all the same? Because it is quite evident and certain, you know. What did you say the other day of that Italian, that Count something or other, who has the castle there on the hill, and never comes near it from one year's end to another?"

"That is quite a different matter. There is no reason why he should not spend a part of every year there."

"And what reason is there with you? Only what ought to be an additional reason for going—that you have——" Here Constance paused a little, and grew pale. And her father looked up at her, growing pale too, anticipating a crisis. Another word, and he would be able to crush this young rebel, this meddler with things which concerned her not. But Constance was better advised; she said, hurriedly—"relations

and dependants, and ever so many things to look to—things that cannot be settled without you."

"And what may these be?" He had been so fully prepared for the introduction at this point of the mother, from whom Constance, too, had fled—the wife, who was, as he said to himself, the cause of all that was inharmonious in his own life—that the withdrawal of her name left him breathless, with the force of an impulse which was not needed. "What are the things that cannot be settled without me?"

"Well—for one thing, papa, your daughter's marriage," said Constance, still looking at him steadily, but with a sudden glow of colour covering her face.

"My daughter's marriage?" he repeated, vaguely, once more taken by surprise. "What! has Frances already, in the course of a few weeks——?"

"It is very probable," said Constance, calmly. "But I was not thinking of Frances. Perhaps you forget that I am your daughter too, and that your sanction is needed for me as well as for her."

Here Waring leant towards her over the table. "Is this how it has ended?" he said. "Have you really so little perception of what is possible for a girl of your breeding, as to think that a life in India with young Gaunt——?"

Constance grew crimson from her hair to the edge of her white dress. "Captain Gaunt?" she said, for the first time avoiding her father's eye. Then she burst into a laugh, which she felt was weak and half hysterical in its self-consciousness. "Oh no," she said; "that was only amusement—that was nothing. I hope, indeed, I have a little more—perception, as you say. What I meant was——" Her eyes took a softened look, almost of entreaty, as if she wanted him to help her out.

"I did not know you had any second string to your bow," he said. Now was his time to avenge himself, and he took advantage of it.

"Papa," said Constance, drawing herself up majestically, "I have no second string to my bow. I have made a mistake. It is a thing which may happen to any one. But when one does so, and sees it, the thing to do is to acknowledge and remedy it, I think. Some

people, I am aware, are not of the same opinion. But I, for one, am not going to keep it up."

"You refer to—a mistake which has not been acknowledged?"

"Papa, don't let us quarrel, you and me. I am very lonely—oh, dreadfully lonely! I want you to stand by me. What I refer to is my affair, not any one's else. I find out now that Claude—of course I told you his name—Claude—would suit me very well—better than any one else. There are drawbacks, perhaps; but I understand him, and he understands me. That is the great thing, isn't it?"

"It is a great thing—if it lasts."

"Oh, it would last. I know him as well as I know myself."

"I see," said Waring, slowly. "You have made up your mind to return to England, and accomplish the destiny laid out for you. A very wise resolution, no doubt. It is only a pity that you did not think better of it at first, instead of turning my life upside down and causing everybody so much trouble. Never mind. It is to be hoped that your resolution will hold now; and there need be no more

trouble in that case about finding a place in which to pass the summer. *You* are going, I presume—home?"

This time the tears came very visibly to Constance's eyes. There was impatience and vexation in them, as well as feeling. "Where is home?" she said. "I will have to ask you. The home I have been used to is my sister's now. Oh, it is hard, I see, very hard, when you have made a mistake once, to mend it! The only home that I know of is an old house where the master has not been for a long time—which is all overgrown with trees, and tumbling into ruins for anything I know. But I suppose, unless you forbid me, that I have a right to go there—and perhaps aunt Caroline——"

"Of what are you speaking?" he said, making an effort to keep his voice steady.

"I am speaking of Hilborough, papa."

At this he sprang up from his chair, as if touched by some intolerable recollection; then composing himself, sat down again, putting force upon himself, restraining the sudden impulse of excitement. After a time, he said, "Hilborough. I had almost forgotten the name."

"Yes,—so I thought. You forget that you have a home, which is cooler and quieter, as quiet as any of your villages here—where you could be as solitary as you liked, or see people if you liked—where you are the natural master. Oh, I thought you must have forgotten it! In summer it is delightful. You are in the middle of a wood, and yet you are in a nice English house. Oh, an *English* house is very different from those Palazzos. Papa, there is your *villeggiatura*, as you call it, just what you want, far, far better than Mrs Durant's cheap little place, that she asked me to tell you of, or Mrs Gaunt's *pension* in Switzerland, or Homburg. They think you are poor; but you know quite well you are not poor. Take me to Hilborough, papa; oh, take me home! It is there I want to go."

"Hilborough," he repeated to himself—"Hilborough. I never thought of that. I suppose she *has* a right to it. Poor old place! Yes, I suppose, if the girl chooses to call it home——"

He rose up quite slowly this time, and went, as was his usual custom, towards the door which

led through the other rooms to the loggia, but without paying any attention to the movements of Constance, which he generally followed instead of directing. She rose too, and went to him, and stole her hand through his arm. The awning had been put aside, and the soft night-air blew in their faces as they stepped out upon that terrace in which so much of their lives was spent. The sea shone beyond the roofs of the houses on the Marina, and swept outwards in a pale clearness towards the sky, which was soft in summer blue, with the stars sprinkled faintly over the vast vault, too much light still remaining in heaven and earth to show them at their best. Constance walked with her father, close to his side, holding his arm, almost as tall as he was, and keeping step and pace with him. She said nothing more, but stood by him as he walked to the ledge of the loggia and looked out towards the west, where there was still a lingering touch of gold. He was not at all in the habit of expressing admiration of the landscape, but to-night, as if he were making a remark called forth by the previous argument, "It is all very lovely," he said.

"Yes; but not more lovely than home," said the girl. "I have been at Hilborough in a summer night, and everything was so sweet—the stars all looking through the trees as if they were watching the house—and the scent of the flowers. Don't you remember the white rose at Hilborough—what they call Mother's tree?"

He started a little, and a thrill ran through him. She could feel it in his arm—a thrill of recollection, of things beyond the warfare and turmoil of his life, on the other, the boyish side—recollections of quiet and of peace.

"I think I will go to my own room a little, Constance, and smoke my cigarette there. You have brought a great many things to my mind."

She gave his arm a close pressure before she let it go. "Oh, take me to Hilborough! Let us go to our own home, papa."

"I will think of it," he replied.

## CHAPTER XLI.

Frances ate a mournful little dinner alone, after the agitations to which she had been subject. Her mother did not return; and Markham, who had been expected up to the last moment, did not appear. It was unusual to her now to spend so many hours alone, and her mind was oppressed not only by the strange scene with Nelly Winterbourn, but more deeply still by Claude's news. George Gaunt had always been a figure of great interest to Frances; and his appearance here in the world which was as yet so strange, with his grave, indeed melancholy face, had awakened her to a sense of sympathy and friendliness which no one had called forth in her before. He was as strange as she was to that dazzling puzzle of society, sat silent as she did, roused himself into interest like her about matters which did not much

interest anybody else. She had felt amid so many strangers that here was one whom she could always understand, whose thoughts she could follow, who said what she had been about to say. It made no difference to Frances that he had not signalled her out for special notice. She took that quietly, as a matter of course. Her mother, Markham, the other people who appeared and disappeared in the house, were all more interesting, she felt, than she; but sometimes her eyes had met those of Captain Gaunt in sympathy, and she had perceived that he could understand her, whether he wished to do so or not. And then he was Mrs Gaunt's youngest, of whom she had heard so much. It seemed to Frances that his childhood and her own had got all entangled, so that she could not be quite sure whether this and that incident of the nursery had been told of him or of herself. She was more familiar with him than he could be with her. And to hear that he was unhappy, that he was in danger, a stranger among people who preyed upon him, and yet not to be able to help him, was almost more than she could bear.

She went up to the empty drawing-room, with the soft illumination of many lights, which was habitual there, which lay all decorated and bright, sweet with spring flowers, full of pictures and ornaments, like a deserted palace, and she felt the silence and beauty of it to be dreary and terrible. It was like a desert to her, or rather like a prison, in which she must stay and wait and listen, and, whatever might come, do nothing to hinder it. What could she do? A girl could not go out into those haunts, where Claude Ramsay, though he was so delicate, could go; she could not put herself forward, and warn a man, who would think he knew much better than she could do. She sat down and tried to read, and then got up, and glided about from one table to another, from one picture to another, looking vaguely at a score of things without seeing them. Then she stole within the shadow of the curtain, and looked out at the carriages which went and came, now and then drawing up at adjacent doors. It made her heart beat to see them approaching, to think that perhaps they were coming here—her mother perhaps; perhaps Sir

Thomas; perhaps Markham. Was it possible that this night, of all others—this night, when her heart seemed to appeal to earth and heaven for some one to help her—nobody would come? It was Frances' first experience of these vigils, which to some women fill up so much of life. There had never been any anxiety at Bordighera, any disturbing influence. She had always known where to find her father, who could solve every problem and chase away every difficulty. Would he, she wondered, be able to do so now? Would he, if he were here, go out for her, and find George Gaunt, and deliver him from his pursuers? But Frances could not say to herself that he would have done so. He was not fond of disturbing himself. He would have said, "It is not my business;" he would have refused to interfere, as Claude did. And what could she do, a girl, by herself? Lady Markham had been very anxious to keep him out of harm's way; but she had said plainly that she would not forsake her own son in order to save the son of another woman. Frances was wandering painfully through labyrinths of such thoughts, racking her brain with vain

questions as to what it was possible to do, when Markham's hansom, stopping with a sudden clang at the door, drove her thoughts away, or at least made a break in them, and replaced, by a nervous tremor of excitement and alarm, the pangs of anxious expectation and suspense. She would rather not have seen Markham at that moment. She was fond of her brother. It grieved her to hear even Lady Markham speak of him in questionable terms: all the natural prejudices of affectionate youth were enlisted on his side; but, for the first time, she felt that she had no confidence in Markham, and wished that it had been any one but he.

He came in with a light overcoat over his evening clothes,—he had been dining out; but he did not meet Frances with the unembarrassed countenance which she had thought would have made it so difficult to speak to him about what she had heard. He came in hurriedly, looking round the drawing-room with a rapid investigating glance before he took any notice of her. "Where is the mother?" he asked, hurriedly.

"She has not come back," said Frances, divining from his look that it was unnecessary to say more.

Markham sat down abruptly on a sofa near. He did not make any reply to her, but put up the handle of his cane to his mouth with a curious mixture of the comic and the tragic, which struck her in spite of herself. He did not require to put any question; he knew very well where his mother was, and all that was happening. The sense of the great crisis which had arrived took from him all power of speech, paralysing him with mingled awe and dismay. But yet the odd little figure on the sofa sucking his cane, his hat in his other hand, his features all fallen into bewilderment and helplessness, was absurd. Out of the depths of Frances' trouble came a hysterical titter against her will. This roused him also. He looked at her with a faint evanescent smile.

"Laughing at me, Fan? Well, I don't wonder. I am a nice fellow to have to do with a tragedy. Screaming farce is more like my style."

"I did not laugh, Markham; I have not any heart for laughing," she said.

"Oh, didn't you? But it sounded like it. Fan, tell me, has the mother been long away, and did any one see that unfortunate girl when she was here?"

"No, Markham—unless it were Mr Ramsay; he saw her drive away with mamma."

"The worst of old gossips," he said, desperately sucking his cane, with a gloomy brow. "I don't know an old woman so bad. No quarter there—that is the word. Fan, the mother is a trump. Nothing is so bad when she is mixed up in it. Was Nelly much cut up, or was she in one of her wild fits? Poor girl! You must not think badly of Nelly. She has had hard lines. She never had a chance: an old brute, used up, that no woman could take to. But she has done her duty by him, Fan."

"She does not think so, Markham."

"Oh, by Jove, she was giving you that, was she? Fan, I sometimes think poor Nelly's off her head a little. Poor Nelly, poor girl! I don't want to set her up for an example; but she has done her duty by him. Remember this, whatever you may hear. I—am rather a good one to know."

He gave a curious little chuckle as he said this—a sort of strangled laugh, of which he was ashamed, and stifled it in its birth.

"Markham, I want to speak to you—about something very serious."

He gave a keen look at her sideways from the corner of one eye. Then he said, in a sort of whisper to himself, "Preaching;" but added in his own voice, "Fire away, Fan," with a look of resignation.

"Markham—it is about Captain Gaunt."

"Oh!" he cried. He gave a little laugh. "You frightened me, my dear. I thought at this time of the day you were going to give me a sermon from the depths of your moral experience, Fan. So long as it isn't about poor Nelly, say what you please about Gaunt. What about Gaunt?"

"Oh, Markham, Mr Ramsay told me—and mamma has been frightened ever since he came. What have you done with him, Markham? Don't you remember the old General at Bordighera—and his mother? And he had just come from India, for his holiday, after years and years. And they are poor—that is to say, they

are well enough off for them; but they are not like mamma and you. They have not got horses and carriages; they don't live—as you do."

"As I do! I am the poorest little beggar living, and that is the truth, Fan."

"The poorest! Markham, you may think you can laugh at me. I am not clever; I am quite ignorant—that I know. But how can you say you are poor? You don't know what it is to be poor. When they go away in the summer, they choose little quiet places; they spare everything they can. That is one thing I know better than you do. To say you are poor!"

He rose up and came towards her, and taking her hands in his, gave them a squeeze which was painful, though he was unconscious of it. "Fan," he said, "all that is very pretty, and true for you; but if I hadn't been poor, do you think all this would have happened as it has done? Do you think I'd have stood by and let Nelly marry that fellow? Do you think——? Hush! there's the mother, with news; no doubt she's got news. Fan, what d'ye think it'll be?"

He held her hands tight, and pressed them till she had almost cried out, looking in her face with a sort of nervous smile which twitched at the corners of his mouth, looking in her eyes as if into a mirror where he could see the reflection of something, and so be spared the pain of looking directly at it. She saw that the subject which was of so much interest to her had passed clean out of his head. His own affairs were uppermost in Markham's mind, as is generally the case whenever a man can be supposed to have any affairs at all of his own.

And Frances, kept in this position, as a sort of mirror in which he could see the reflection of his mother's face, saw Lady Markham come in, looking very pale and fatigued, with that air of having worn her outdoor dress for hours which gives a sort of haggard aspect to weariness. She gave a glance round, evidently without perceiving very clearly who was there, then sank wearily upon the sofa, loosening her cloak. "It is all over," she said in a low tone, as if speaking to herself—"it is all over. Of course I could not come away before——"

Markham let go Frances' hands without a

word. He walked away to the further window, and drew the curtain aside and looked out. Why, he could not have told, nor with what purpose—with a vague intention of making sure that the hansom which stood there so constantly was at the door.

"What is Markham doing?" said his mother, in a faint querulous tone. "Tell him not to fidget with these curtains. It worries me. I am tired, and my nerves are all wrong. Yes, you can take my cloak, Frances. Don't call anybody. No one will come here to-night. Markham, did you hear what I said? It is all over. I waited till——"

He came towards her from the end of the room with a sort of smile upon his grey sandy-coloured face, his mouth and eyebrows twitching, his eyes screwed up so that nothing but two keen little glimmers of reflection were visible. "You are not the sort," he said, with a little tremor in his voice, "to forsake a man when he is down." He had his hands in his pockets, his shoulders pushed up; nowhere could there have been seen a less tragic figure. Yet every line of his odd face was touched and moving with

feeling, totally beyond any power of expression in words.

"It was not a happy scene," she said. "He sent for her at the last. Sarah Winterbourn was there at the bedside. She was fond of him, I believe. A woman cannot help being fond of her brother, however little he may deserve it. Nelly——"

Here Markham broke in with a sound that was like, yet not like, his usual laugh. "How's Nelly?" he said abruptly, without sequence or reason. Lady Markham paused to look at him, and then went on—

"Nelly trembled so, I could scarcely keep her up. She wanted not to go; she said, What was the good? But I got her persuaded at last. A man dying like that is a—is a—— It is not a pleasant sight. He signed to her to go and kiss him." Lady Markham shuddered slightly. "He was past speaking—I mean, he was past understanding—— I—I wish I had not seen it. One can't get such a scene out of one's mind."

She put up her hand and pressed her fingers upon her eyes, as if the picture was there, and she was trying to get rid of it. Markham had

turned away again, and was examining, or seeming to examine, the flowers in a jardinière. Now and then he made a movement, as if he would have stopped the narrative. Frances, trembling and crying with natural horror and distress, had loosened her mother's cloak and taken off her bonnet while she went on speaking. Lady Markham's hair, though always covered with a cap, was as brown and smooth as her daughter's. Frances put her hand upon it timidly, and smoothed the satin braid. It was all she could do to show the emotion, the sympathy in her heart; and she was as much startled in mind as physically, when Lady Markham suddenly threw one arm round her and rested her head upon her shoulder. "Thank God," the mother cried, "that here is one, whatever may happen, that will never, never——! Frances, my love, don't mind what I say. I am worn out, and good for nothing. Go and get me a little wine, for I have no strength left in me."

Markham turned to her with his chuckle more marked than ever, as Frances left the room. "I am glad to see that you have strength to remember what you're about, mammy, in spite of

that little break-down. It wouldn't do, would it?—to let Frances believe that a match like Winterbourn was a thing she would never—never——! though it wasn't amiss for poor Nelly, in *her* day."

"Markham, you are very hard upon me. The child did not understand either one thing or the other. And I was not to blame about Nelly; you cannot say I was to blame. If I had been, I think to-night might make up: that ghastly face, and Nelly's close to it, with her eyes staring in horror, the poor little mouth——"

Markham's exclamation was short and sharp like a pistol-shot. It was a monosyllable, but not one to be put into print. "Stop that!" he said. "It can do no good going over it. Who's with her now?"

"I could not stay, Markham; besides, it would have been out of place. She has her maid, who is very kind to her; and I made them give her a sleeping-draught—to make her forget her trouble. Sarah Winterbourn laughed out when I asked for it. The doctor was shocked. It was so natural that poor little Nelly, who never saw anything so ghastly, never

was in the house with death; never saw, much less touched——"

"I can understand Sarah," he said, with a grim smile.

Frances came back with the wine, and her mother paused to kiss her as she took it from her hand. "I am sure you have had a wearing, miserable evening. You look quite pale, my dear. I ought not to speak of such horrid things before you at your age. But you see, Markham, she saw Nelly, and heard her wild talk. It was all excitement and misery and overstrain; for in reality she had nothing to reproach herself with—nothing, Frances. He proved that by sending for her, as I tell you. He knew, and everybody knows, that poor Nelly had done her duty by him."

Frances paid little attention to this strange defence. She was, as her mother knew, yet could scarcely believe, totally incapable of comprehending the grounds on which Nelly was so strongly asserted to have done her duty, or of understanding that not to have wronged her husband in one unpardonable way, gave her a claim upon the applause of

her fellows. Fortunately, indeed, Frances was defended against all questions on this subject by the possession of that unsuspected trouble of her own, of which she felt that for the night at least it was futile to say anything. Nelly was the only subject upon which her mother could speak, or for which Markham had any ears. They did not say anything, either after Frances left them or in her presence, of the future, of which, no doubt, their minds were full—of which Nelly's mind had been so full when she burst into Lady Markham's room in her finery, on that very day; of what was to happen after, what "the widow"—that name against which she so rebelled, but which was already fixed upon her in all the clubs and drawing-rooms—was to do? that was a question which was not openly put to each other by the two persons chiefly concerned.

When Markham appeared in his usual haunts that night, he was aware of being regarded with many significant looks; but these he was of course prepared for, and met with a countenance in which it would have puzzled the wisest to find any special expression.

Lady Markham went to bed as soon as her son left her. She had said she could receive no one, being much fatigued. "My lady have been with Mrs Winterbourn," was the answer made to Sir Thomas when he came to the door late, after a tedious debate in the House of Commons. Sir Thomas, like everybody, was full of speculations on this point, though he regarded it from a point of view different from the popular one. The world was occupied with the question whether Nelly would marry Markham, now that she was rich and free. But what occupied Sir Thomas, who had no doubt on this subject, was the—afterwards? What would Lady Markham do? Was it not now at last the moment for Waring to come home?

In Lady Markham's mind, some similar thoughts were afloat. She had said that she was fatigued; but fatigue does not mean sleep, at least not at Lady Markham's age. It means retirement, silence, and leisure for the far more fatiguing exertion of thought. When her maid had been dismissed, and the faint night-lamp was all that was left in her

curtained, cushioned, luxurious room, the questions that arose in her mind were manifold. Markham's marriage would make a wonderful difference in his mother's life. Her house in Eaton Square she would no doubt retain; but the lovely little house in the Isle of Wight, which had been always hers—and the solemn establishment in the country, would be hers no more. These two things of themselves would make a great difference. But what was of still more consequence was, that Markham himself would be hers no more. He would belong to his wife. It was impossible to believe of him that he could ever be otherwise than affectionate and kind; but what a difference when Markham was no longer one of the household! And then the husband, so long cut off, so far separated, much by distance, more by the severance of all the habits and mutual claims which bind people together—with him what would follow? What would be the effect of the change? Questions like these, diversified by perpetual efforts of imagination to bring before her again the tragical scene of which she had been a witness,—the dying man, with his hoarse attempts

to be intelligible; the young, haggard, horrified countenance of Nelly, compelled to approach the awful figure, for which she had a child's dread,—kept her awake long into the night. It is seldom that a woman of her age sees herself on the eve of such changes without any will of hers. It seemed to have overwhelmed her in a moment, although, indeed, she had foreseen the catastrophe. What would Nelly do? was the question all the world was asking. But Lady Markham had another which occupied her as much on her own side. Waring, what would he do?

## CHAPTER XLII.

THE question which disturbed Frances, which nobody knew or cared for, was just as little likely to gain attention next day as it had been on the evening of Mr Winterbourn's death. Lady Markham returned to Nelly before breakfast; she was with her most of the day; and Markham, though he lent an apparent attention to what Frances said to him, was still far too much absorbed in his own subject to be easily moved by hers. "Gaunt? Oh, he is all right," he said.

"Will you speak to him, Markham? Will you warn him? Mr Ramsay says he is losing all his money; and I know, oh Markham, I *know* that he has not much to lose."

"Claude is a little meddler. I assure you, Fan, Gaunt knows his own affairs best."

"No," cried Frances: "when I tell you, Markham, when I tell you! that they are quite poor, *really* poor—not like you."

"I have told you, my little dear, that I am the poorest beggar in London."

"Oh Markham! and you drive about in hansoms, and smoke cigars, all day."

"Well, my dear, what would you have me do? Keep on trudging through the mud, which would waste all my time; or get on the knife-board of an omnibus? Well, these are the only alternatives. The omnibuses have their recommendation—they are fun; but after a while, society in that development palls upon the intelligent observer. What do you want me to do, Fan? Come, I have a deal on my mind; but to please you, and to make you hold your tongue, if there is anything I can do, I will try."

"You can do everything, Markham. Warn him that he is wasting his money—that he is spending what belongs to the old people—that he is making himself wretched. Oh, don't laugh, Markham! Oh, if I were in your place! I know what I should do—I would

get him to go home, instead of going to—those places."

"Which places, Fan?"

"Oh," cried the girl, exasperated to tears, "how can I tell?—the places you know—the places you have taken him to, Markham—places where, if the poor General knew it, or Mrs Gaunt——"

"There you are making a mistake, little Fan. The good people would think their son was in very fine company. If he tells them the names of the persons he meets, they will think——"

"Then you know they will think wrong, Markham!" she cried, almost with violence, keeping herself with a most strenuous effort from an outburst of indignant weeping. He did not reply at once; and she thought he was about to consider the question on its merits, and endeavour to find out what he could do. But she was undeceived when he spoke.

"What day did you say, Fan, the funeral was to be?" he asked, with the air of a man who has escaped from an unwelcome intrusion to the real subject of his thoughts.

Sir Thomas found her alone, flushed and

miserable, drying her tears with a feverish little angry hand. She was very much alone during these days, when Lady Markham was so often with Nelly Winterbourn. Sir Thomas was pleased to find her, having also an object of his own. He soothed her, when he saw that she had been crying. "Never mind me," he said; "but you must not let other people see that you are feeling it so much: for you cannot be supposed to take any particular interest in Winterbourn: and people will immediately suppose that you and your mother are troubled about the changes that must take place in the house."

"I was not thinking at all of Mrs Winterbourn," cried Frances, with indignation.

"No, my dear; I knew you could not be. Don't let any one but me see you crying. Lady Markham will feel the marriage dreadfully, I know. But now is our time for our grand *coup*."

"What grand *coup?*" the girl said, with an astonished look.

"Have you forgotten what I said to you at the Priory? One of the chief objects of my

life is to bring Waring back. It is intolerable to think that a man of his abilities should be banished for ever, and lost not only to his country but his kind. Even if he were working for the good of the race out there—— But he is doing nothing but antiquities, so far as I can hear, and there are plenty of antiquarians good for nothing else. Frances, we must have him home."

"Home!" she said. Her heart went back with a bound to the rooms in the Palazzo with all the green *persiani* shut, and everything dark and cool: it was getting warm in London, but there were no such precautions taken. And the loggia at night, with the palm-trees waving majestically their long drooping fans, and the soft sound of the sea coming over the houses of the Marina—ah, and the happy want of thought, the pleasant vacancy, in which nothing ever happened! She drew a long breath. "I ought not to say so, perhaps; but when you say home——"

"You think of the place where you were brought up? That is quite natural. But it would not be the same to him. He was not

brought up there; he can have nothing to interest him there. Depend upon it, he must very often wish that he could pocket his pride and come back. We must try to get him back, Frances. Don't you think, my dear, that we could manage it, you and I?"

Frances shook her head, and said she did not know. "But I should be very glad—oh, very glad: if I am to stay here," she said.

"Of course you would be glad; and of course you are to stay here. You could not leave your poor mother by herself. And now that Markham—now that probably everything will be changed for Markham—— If Markham were out of the way, it would be so much easier; for, you know, he always was the stumbling-block. She would not let Waring manage him, and she could not manage him herself."

Frances was so far instructed in what was going on around her, that she knew how important in Markham's history the death of Mr Winterbourn had been; but it was not a subject on which she could speak. She said: "I am very sorry papa did not like Markham. It

does not seem possible not to like Markham. But I suppose gentlemen—— Oh, Sir Thomas, if he were here, I would ask papa to do something for me; but now I don't know who to ask to help me—if anything can be done."

"Is it something I can do?"

"I think," she said, "any one that was kind could do it; but only not a girl. Girls are good for so little. Do you remember Captain Gaunt, who came to town a few weeks ago? Sir Thomas, I have heard that something has happened to Captain Gaunt. I don't know how to tell you. Perhaps you will think that it is not my business; but don't you think it is your friend's business, when you get into trouble? Don't you think that—that people who know you—who care a little for you—should always be ready to help?"

"That is a hard question to put to me. In the abstract, yes; but in particular cases—— Is it Captain Gaunt for whom you care a little?"

Frances hesitated a moment, and then she answered boldly: "Yes—at least I care for his people a great deal. And he has come home

from India, not very strong; and he knew nothing about—about what you call Society; no more than I did. And now I hear that he is—I don't know how to tell you, Sir Thomas—losing all his money (and he has not any money) in the places where Markham goes—in the places that Markham took him to. Oh, wait till I have told you everything, Sir Thomas! they are not rich people,—not like any of you here. Markham says he is poor——"

"So he is, Frances."

"Ah," she cried, with hasty contempt, "but you don't understand! He may not have much money; but they—they live in a little house with two maids and Toni. They have no luxuries or grandeur. When they take a drive in old Luca's carriage, it is something to think about. All that is quite, quite different from you people here. Don't you see, Sir Thomas, don't you see? And Captain Gaunt has been—oh, I don't know how it is—losing his money; and he has not got any—and he is miserable—and I cannot get any one to take an interest, to tell him—to warn him, to get him to give up——"

"Did he tell you all this himself?" said Sir Thomas, gravely.

"Oh no, not a word. It was Mr Ramsay who told me; and when I begged him to say something, to warn him——"

"He could not do that. There he was quite right; and you were quite wrong, if you will let me say so. It is too common a case, alas! I don't know what any one can do."

"Oh, Sir Thomas! if you will think of the old General and his mother, who love him more than all the rest—for he is the youngest. Oh, won't you do something, try something, to save him?" Frances clasped her hands, as if in prayer. She raised her eyes to his face with such an eloquence of entreaty, that his heart was touched. Not only was her whole soul in the petition for the sake of him who was in peril, but it was full of boundless confidence and trust in the man to whom she appealed. The other plea might have failed; but this last can scarcely fail to affect the mind of any individual to whom it is addressed.

Sir Thomas put his hand on her shoulder with fatherly tenderness. "My dear little girl,"

he said, "what do you think I can do? I don't know what I can do. I am afraid I should only make things worse, were I to interfere."

"No, no. He is not like that. He would know you were a friend. He would be thankful. And oh, how thankful, how thankful I should be!"

"Frances, do you take, then, so great an interest in this young man? Do you want me to look after him for your sake?"

She looked at him hastily with an eager "Yes"—then paused a little, and looked again with a dawning understanding which brought the colour to her cheek. "You mean something more than I mean," she said, a little troubled. "But yet, if you will be kind to George Gaunt, and try to help him, for my sake—— Yes, oh, yes! Why should I refuse? I would not have asked you if I had not thought that perhaps you would do it—for me."

"I would do a great deal for you; for your mother's daughter, much; and for poor Waring's child; and again, for yourself. But, Frances, a young man who is so weak, who falls into temptation in this way—my dear, you must

let me say it—he is not a mate for such as you."

"For me? Oh no. No one thought—no one ever thought——" cried Frances hastily. "Sir Thomas, I hear mamma coming, and I do not want to trouble her, for she has so much to think of? Will you? Oh, promise me. Look for him to-night; oh, look for him to-night!"

"You are so sure that I can be of use?" The trust in her eyes was so genuine, so enthusiastic, that he could not resist that flattery. "Yes, I will try. I will see what it is possible to do. And you, Frances, remember you are pledged, too; you are to do everything you can for me."

He was patting her on the shoulder, looking down upon her with very friendly tender eyes, when Lady Markham came in. She was a little startled by the group; but though she was tired and discomposed and out of heart, she was not so preoccupied but what her quick mind caught a new suggestion from it. Sir Thomas was very rich. He had been devoted to herself, in all honour and kindness, for many years. What if Frances——? A whole train of new ideas burst into her mind on the moment, al-

though she had thought, as she came in, that in the present chaos and hurry of her spirits she had room for nothing more.

"You look," she said with a smile, "as if you were settling something. What is it? An alliance, a league?"

"Offensive and defensive," said Sir Thomas. "We have given each other mutual commissions, and we are great friends, as you see. But these are our little secrets, which we don't mean to tell. How is Nelly, Lady Markham? And is it all right about the will?"

"The will is the least of my cares. I could not inquire into that, as you may suppose; nor is there any need, so far as I know. Nelly is quite enough to have on one's hands, without thinking of the will. She is very nervous and very headstrong. She would have rushed away out of the house, if I had not used—almost force. She cannot bear to be under the same roof with death."

"It was the old way. I scarcely wonder, for my part: for it was never pretended, I suppose, that there was any love in the matter."

"Oh no" (Lady Markham looked at her own

elderly knight and at her young daughter, and said to herself, What if Frances—— ?); "there was no love. But she has always been very good, and done her duty by him—that, everybody will say."

"Poor Nelly!—that is quite true. But still I should not like, if I were such a fool as to marry a young wife, to have her do her duty to me in that way."

"You would be very different," said Lady Markham with a smile. "I should not think you a fool at all; and I should think her a lucky woman." She said this with Nelly Winterbourn's voice still ringing in her ears.

"Happily, I am not going to put it to the test. Now, I must go—to look after your affairs, Miss Frances; and remember that you are pledged to look after mine in return."

Lady Markham looked after him very curiously as he went away. She thought, as women so often think, that men were very strange, inscrutable—"mostly fools," at least in one way. To think that perhaps little Frances—— It would be a great match, greater than Claude Ramsay—as good in one point of view, and in

other respects far better than Nelly St John's great marriage with the rich Mr Winterbourn. "I am glad you like him so much, Frances," she said. "He is not young—but he has every other quality; as good as ever man was, and so considerate and kind. You may take him into your confidence fully." She waited a moment to see if the child had anything to say; then, too wise to force or precipitate matters, went on: "Poor Nelly gives me great anxiety, Frances. I wish the funeral were over, and all well. Her nerves are in such an excited state, one can't feel sure what she may do or say. The servants and people happily think it grief; but to see Sarah Winterbourn looking at her fills me with fright, I can't tell why. *She* doesn't think it is grief. And how should it be? A dreadful, cold, always ill, repulsive man. But I hope she may be kept quiet, not to make a scandal until after the funeral at least. I don't know what she said to you, my love, that day; but you must not pay any attention to what a woman says in such an excited state. Her marriage has been unfortunate (which is a thing that may happen in any circumstances), not because

Mr Winterbourn was such a good match, but because he was such a disagreeable man."

Frances, who had no clue to her mother's thoughts, or to any appropriateness in this short speech, had little interest in it. She said, somewhat stiffly, that she was sorry for poor Mrs Winterbourn—but much more sorry for her own mother, who was having so much trouble and anxiety. Lady Markham smiled upon her, and kissed her tenderly. It was a relief to her mind, in the midst of all those anxious questions, to have a new channel for her thoughts; and upon this new path she threw herself forth in the fulness of a lively imagination, leaving fact far behind, and even probability. She was indeed quite conscious of this, and voluntarily permitted herself the pleasant exercise of building a new castle in the air. Little Frances! And she said to herself there would be no drawback in such a case. It would be the finest match of the season; and no mother need fear to trust her daughter in Sir Thomas's hands.

Sir Thomas came back next morning when Lady Markham was again absent. He informed

Frances that he had gone to several places where he was told Captain Gaunt was likely to be found, and had seen Markham as usual "frittering himself away;" but Gaunt had nowhere been visible. "Some one said he had fallen ill. If that is so, it is the best thing that could happen. One has some hope of getting hold of him so." But where did he live? That was the question. Markham did not know, nor any one about. That was the first thing to be discovered, Sir Thomas said. For the first time, Frances appreciated her mother's business-like arrangements for her great correspondence, which made an address-book so necessary. She found Gaunt's address there; and passed the rest of the day in anxiety, which she could confide to no one, learning for the first time those tortures of suspense which to so many women form a great part of existence. Frances thought the day would never end. It was so much the more dreadful to her that she had to shut it all up in her own bosom, and endeavour to enter into other anxieties, and sympathise with her mother's continual panic as to what Nelly Winterbourn might do. The

house altogether was in a state of suppressed excitement; even the servants—or perhaps the servants most keenly of any, with their quick curiosity and curious divination of any change in the atmosphere of a family—feeling the thrill of approaching revolution. Frances with her private preoccupation was blunted to this; but when Sir Thomas arrived in the evening, it was all she could do to curb herself and keep within the limits of ordinary rule. She sprang up, indeed, when she heard his step on the stair, and went off to the further corner of the room, where she could read his face out of the dimness before he spoke; and where, perhaps, he might seek her, and tell her, under some pretence. These movements were keenly noted by her mother, as was also the alert air of Sir Thomas, and his interest and activity, though he looked very grave. But Frances did not require to wait for the news she looked for so anxiously.

"Yes, I am very serious," Sir Thomas said, in answer to Lady Markham's question. "I have news to tell you which will shock you. Your poor young friend Gaunt—Captain

Gaunt—wasn't he a friend of yours?—is lying dangerously ill of fever in a poor little set of lodgings he has got. He is far too ill to know me or say anything to me; but so far as I can make out, it has something to do with losses at play."

Lady Markham turned pale with alarm and horror. "Oh, I have always been afraid of this! I had a presentiment," she cried. Then rallying a little: "But, Sir Thomas, no one thinks now that fever is brought on by mental causes. It must be bad water or defective drainage."

"It may be—anything; I can't tell; I am no doctor. But the fact is, the young fellow is lying delirious, raving. I heard him myself—about stakes and chances and losses, and how he will make it up to-morrow. There are other things too. He seems to have had hard lines, poor fellow, if all is true."

Frances had rushed forward, unable to restrain herself. "Oh, his mother, his mother—we must send for his mother," she cried.

"I will go and see him to-morrow," said Lady Markham. "I had a presentiment. He

has been on my mind ever since I saw him first. I blame myself for losing sight of him. But to-morrow——"

"To-morrow—to-morrow; that is what the poor fellow says."

## CHAPTER XLIII.

Lady Markham did not forget her promise. Whatever else a great lady may forget in these days, her sick people, her hospitals, she is sure never to forget. She went early to the lodgings, which were not far off, hidden in one of the quaint corners of little old lanes behind Piccadilly, where poor Gaunt was. She did not object to the desire of Frances to go with her, nor to the anxiety she showed. The man was ill; he had become a "case;" it was natural and right that he should be an object of interest. For herself, so far as Lady Markham's thoughts were free at all, George Gaunt was much more than a case to her. A little while ago, she would have given him a large share in her thoughts, with a remorseful consciousness almost of a personal part in the

injury which had been done him. But now there were so many other matters in the foreground of her mind, that this, though it gave her one sharp twinge, and an additional desire to do all that could be done for him, had yet fallen into the background. Besides, things had arrived at a climax: there was no longer any means of delivering him, no further anxiety about his daily movements; there he lay, incapable of further action. It was miserable, yet it was a relief. Markham and Markham's associates had no more power over a sick man.

Lady Markham managed her affairs always in a business-like way. She sent to inquire what was the usual hour of the doctor's visit, and timed her arrival so as to meet him, and receive all the information he could give. Even the medical details of the case were not beyond Lady Markham's comprehension. She had a brief but very full consultation with the medical man in the little parlour down-stairs, and promptly issued her orders for nurses and all that could possibly be wanted for the patient. Two nurses at once —one for the day, and the other for the

night; ice by the cart-load; the street to be covered with hay; any traffic that it was possible to stop, arrested. These directions Frances heard while she sat anxious and trembling in the brougham, and watched the doctor—a humble and undistinguished practitioner of the neighbourhood, stirred into excited interest by the sudden appearance of the great lady, with her liberal ideas, upon the scene—hurrying away. Lady Markham then disappeared again into the house,—the small, trim, shallow, London lodging-house, with a few scrubby plants in its little balconies on the first floor, where the windows were open, but veiled by sun-blinds. Something that sounded like incessant talking came from these windows—a sound to which Frances paid no attention at first, thinking it nothing but a conversation, though curiously carried on without break or pause. But after a while the monotony of the sound gave her a painful sensation. The street was very quiet, even without the hay. Now and then a cart or carriage would come round the corner, taking a short-cut from one known locality to another.

Sometimes a street cry would echo through the sunshine. A cart full of flowering-plants, with a hoarse-voiced proprietor, went along in stages, stopping here and there; but through all ran the strain of talk, monologue or conversation, never interrupted. The sound affected the girl's nerves, she could not tell why. She opened the door of the brougham at last, and went into the narrow little doorway of the house, where it became more distinct,—a persistent dull strain of speech. All was deserted on the lower floor, the door of the sitting-room standing open, the narrow staircase leading to the sick man's rooms above. Frances felt her interest, her eager curiosity, grow at every moment. She ran lightly, quickly upstairs. The door of the front room, the room with the balconies, was ajar; and now it became evident that the sound was that of a single voice, hoarse, not always articulate, talking. Oh, the weary strain of talk, monotonous, unending — sometimes rising faintly, sometimes falling lower, never done, without a pause. That could not be raving, Frances said to herself. Oh, not raving! Cries of

excitement and passion would have been comprehensible. But there was something more awful in the persistency of the dull choked voice. She said to herself it was not George Gaunt's voice: she did not know what it was. But as she put forth all these arguments to herself, trembling, she drew ever nearer and nearer to the door.

"Red—red—and red. Stick to my colour: my colour—my coat, Markham, and the ribbon, her ribbon. I say red. Play, play—all play—always: amusement: her ribbon, red. No, no; not red, black, colour death—no colour: means nothing, all nothing. Markham, play. Gain or lose—all—all: nothing kept back. Red, I say; and red—blood—blood colour. Mother, mother! no, it's black, black. No blood—no blood—no reproach. Death—makes up all—death. Black—red—black—all death colours, all death, death." Then there was a little change in the voice. "Constance? —India; no, no; not India. Anywhere—give up everything. Amusement, did you say amusement? Don't say so, don't say so. Sport to you—but death, death:—colour of

death, black: or red—blood: all death colours, death. Mother! don't put on black—red ribbons like hers—red, heart's blood. No bullet, no—her little hand, little white hand—and then blood-red. Constance! Play—play—nothing left—play."

Frances stood outside and shuddered. Was this, then, what they called raving? She shrank within herself; her heart failed her; a sickness which took the light from her eyes, made her limbs tremble and her head swim. Oh, what sport had he been to the two—the two who were nearest to her in the world! What had they done with him, Mrs Gaunt's boy—the youngest, the favourite? There swept through the girl's mind like a bitter wind a cry against—Fate was it, or Providence? Had they but let alone, had each stayed in her own place, it would have been Frances who should have met, with a fresh heart, the young man's early fancy. They would have met sincere and faithful, and loved each other, and all would have been well. But there was no Frances; there was only Constance, to throw his heart away.

She seemed to see it all as in a picture—Constance with the red ribbons on her grey dress, with the smile that said it was only amusement; with the little hand, the little white hand, that gave the blow. And then all play, all play, red or black, what did it matter? and the bullet; and the mother in mourning, and Markham. Constance and Markham! murderers. This was the cry that came from the bottom of the girl's heart. Murderers!—of two; of him and of herself; of the happiness that was justly hers, which at this moment she claimed, and wildly asserted her right to have, in the clamour of her angry heart. She seemed to see it all in a moment: how he was hers; how she had given her heart to him before she ever saw him; how she could have made him happy. She would not have shrunk from India or anywhere. She would have made him happy. And Constance, for a jest, had come between; for amusement, had broken his heart. And Markham, for amusement—for amusement!—had destroyed his life; and hers as well. There are moments when the gentle and simple mind becomes more terrible than

any fury. She saw it all as in a picture—with one clear sudden revelation. And her heart rose against it with a sensation of wrong which was intolerable—of misery, which she could not, would not bear.

She pushed open the door, scarcely knowing what she did. The bed was pulled out from the wall, almost into the centre of the room; and behind, while this strange husky monologue of confused passion was going on unnoted, Lady Markham and the landlady stood together talking in calm undertones of the treatment to be employed. Frances' senses, all stimulated to the highest point, took in, without meaning to do so, every particular of the scene and every word that was said.

"I can do no good by staying now," Lady Markham was saying. "There is so little to be done at this stage. The ice to his head, that is all till the nurse comes. She will be here before one o'clock. And in the meantime, you must watch him carefully, and if anything occurs, let me know. Be very careful to tell me everything; for the slightest symptom is important."

"Yes, my lady; I'll take great care, my lady." The woman was overawed, yet excited, by this unexpected visitor, who had turned the dull drama of the lodger's illness into a great, important, and exciting conflict, conducted by the highest officials, against disease and death.

"As I go home, I shall call at Dr ——'s" —naming the great doctor of the moment— "who will meet the other gentleman here; and after that, if they decide on ice-baths or any other active treatment—— But there will be time to think of that. In the meantime, if anything important occurs, communicate with me at once, at Eaton Square."

"Yes, my lady; I'll not forget nothing. My 'usband will run in a moment to let your ladyship know."

"That will be quite right. Keep him in the house, so that he may get anything that is wanted." Lady Markham gave her orders with the liberality of a woman who had never known any limit to the possibilities of command in this way. She went up to the bed and looked at the patient, who lay all unconscious of inspection, continuing the hoarse talk, to which

she had ceased to attend, through which she had carried on her conversation in complete calm. She touched his forehead for a moment with the back of her ungloved hand, and shook her head. "The temperature is very high," she said. There was a semi-professional calm in all she did. Now that he was under treatment, he could be considered dispassionately as a "case." When she turned round and saw Frances within the door, she held up her finger. "Look at him, if you wish, for a moment, poor fellow; but not a word," she said. Frances, from the passion of anguish and wrong which had seized upon her, sank altogether into a confused hush of semi-remorseful feeling. Her mother at least was occupied with nothing that was not for his good.

"I told you that I mistrusted Markham," she said, as they drove away. "He did not mean any harm. But that is his life. And I think I told you that I was afraid Constance—— Oh, my dear, a mother has a great many hard offices to undertake in her life—to make up for things which her children may have done —*en gaieté du cœur*, without thought."

"*Gaieté du cœur*—is that what you call it," cried Frances, "when you murder a man?" Her voice was choked with the passion that filled her.

"Frances! Murder! You are the last one in the world from whom I should have expected anything violent."

"Oh," cried the girl, flushed and wild, her eyes gleaming through an angry dew of pain, "what word is there that is violent enough? He was happy and good, and there were—there might have been—people who could have loved him, and—and made him happy. When one comes in, one who had no business there, one who—and takes him from—the others, and makes a sport of him and a toy to amuse herself, and flings him broken away. It is worse than murder—if there is anything worse than murder," she cried.

Lady Markham could not have been more astonished if some passer-by had presented a pistol at her head. "Frances!" she cried, and took the girl's hot hands into her own, endeavouring to soothe her; "you speak as if she meant to do it—as if she had some interest in doing it. Frances, you must be just!"

"If I were just—if I had the power to be just—is there any punishment which could be great enough? His life? But it is more than his life. It is misery and torture and wretchedness, to him first, and then to—to his mother —to——" She ended as a woman, as a poor little girl, scarcely yet woman grown, must—in an agony of tears.

All that a tender mother and that a kind woman could do—with due regard to the important business in her hands, and a glance aside to see that the coachman did not mistake Sir Joseph's much frequented door—Lady Markham did to quench this extraordinary passion, and bring back calm to Frances. She succeeded so far, that the girl, hurriedly drying her tears, retiring with shame and confusion into herself, recovered sufficient self-command to refrain from further betrayal of her feelings. In the midst of it all, though she was not unmoved by her mother's tenderness, she had a kind of fierce perception of Lady Markham's anxiety about Sir Joseph's door, and her eagerness not to lose any time in conveying her message to him, which she did rapidly in her

own person, putting the footman aside, corrupting somehow by sweet words and looks the incorruptible functionary who guarded the great doctor's door. It was all for poor Gaunt's sake, and done with care for him, as anxious and urgent as if he had been her own son; and yet it was business too, which, had Frances been in a mood to see the humour of it, might have lighted the tension of her feelings. But she was in no mind for humour—a thing which passion has never any eyes for or cognisance of. "That is all quite right. He will meet the other doctor this afternoon; and we may be now comfortable that he is in the best hands," Lady Markham said, with a sigh of satisfaction. She added: "I suppose, of course, his parents will not hesitate about the expense?" in a faintly inquiring tone; but did not insist on any reply. Nor could Frances have given any reply. But amid the chaos of her mind, there came a consciousness of poor Mrs Gaunt's dismay, could she have known. She would have watched her son night and day; and there was not one of the little community at Bordighera—Mrs Durant, with all her

little pretences; Tasie, with her airs of young-ladyhood—who would not have shared the vigil. But the two expensive nurses, with every accessory that new-fangled science could think of—this would have frightened out of their senses the two poor parents, who would not "hesitate about the expense," or any expense that involved their son's life. In this point, too, the different classes could not understand each other. The idea flew through the girl's mind with a half-despairing consciousness that this, too, had something to do with the overwhelming revolution in her own circumstances. A man of her own species would have understood Constance; he would have known Markham's reputation and ways. The pot of iron and the pot of clay could not travel together without damage to the weakest. This went vaguely through Frances' mind in the middle of her excitement, and perhaps helped to calm her. It also stilled, if it did not calm her, to see that her mother was a little afraid of her in her new development.

Lady Markham, when she returned to the brougham after her visit to Sir Joseph, mani-

festly avoided the subject. She was careful not to say anything of Markham or of Constance. Her manner was anxious, deprecatory, full of conciliation. She advised Frances, with much tenderness, to go and rest a little when they got home. "I fear you have been doing too much, my darling," she cried, and followed her to her room with some potion in a glass.

"I am quite well," Frances said; "there is nothing the matter with me."

"But I am sure, my dearest, that you are overdone." Her anxious and conciliatory looks were of themselves a tonic to Frances, and brought her back to herself.

Markham, when he appeared in the evening, showed unusual feeling too. He was at the crisis, it seemed, of his own life, and perhaps other sentiments had therefore an easier hold upon him. He came in looking very downcast, with none of his usual banter in him. "Yes, I know. I have heard all about it, bless you. What else, do you think, are those fellows talking about? Poor beggar. Who ever thought he'd have gone down like that in so short a time? Now, mother, the only

thing wanting is that you should say 'I told you so.' And Fan,—no, Fan can do worse; she can tell me that she thought he was safe in my hands."

"It is not my way to say I told you so, Markham; but yet——"

"You could do it, mammy, if you tried—that is well known. I'm rather glad he is ill, poor beggar; it stops the business. But there are things to pay, that is the worst."

"Surely, if it is to a gentleman, he will forgive him," cried Frances, "when he knows——"

"Forgive him! Poor Gaunt would rather die. It would be as much as a man's life was worth to offer to—forgive another man. But how should the child know? That's the beauty of Society and the rules of honour, Fan. You can forgive a man many things, but not a shilling you've won from him. And how is he to mend, good life! with the thought of having to pay up in the end?" Markham repeated this despondent speech several times before he went gloomily away. "I had rather die straight off, and make no fuss. But even then, he'd have to pay up, or somebody for

him. If I had known what I know now, I'd have eaten him sooner than have taken him among those fellows, who have no mercy."

"Markham, if you would listen to me, you would give them up—you too."

"Oh, I——" he said, with his short laugh. "They can't do much harm to me."

"But you must change—in that as well as other things, if——"

"Ah, if," he said, with a curious grimace; and took up his hat and went away.

Thus, Frances said to herself, his momentary penitence and her mother's pity melted away in consideration of themselves. They could not say a dozen words on any other subject, even such an urgent one as this, before their attention dropped, and they relapsed into the former question about themselves. And such a question!—Markham's marriage, which depended upon Nelly Winterbourn's widowhood and the portion her rich husband left her. Markham was an English peer, the head of a family which had been known for centuries, which even had touched the history of England here and

there; yet this was the ignoble way in which he was to take the most individual step of a man's life. Her heart was full almost to bursting of these questions, which had been gradually awakening in her mind. Lady Markham, when left alone, turned always to the consolation of her correspondence—of those letters to write which filled up all the interstices of her other occupations. Perhaps she was specially glad to take refuge in this assumed duty, having no desire to enter again with her daughter into any discussion of the events of the day. Frances withdrew into a distant corner. She took a book with her, and did her best to read it, feeling that anything was better than to allow herself to think, to summon up again the sound of that hoarse broken voice running on in the feverish current of disturbed thought. Was he still talking, talking, God help him! of death and blood and the two colours, and her ribbon, and the misery which was all play? Oh, the misery, causeless, unnecessary, to no good purpose, that had come merely from this—that Constance had put herself in Frances'

place,—that the pot of iron had thrust itself in the road of the pot of clay. But she must not think—she must not think, the girl said to herself with feverish earnestness, and tried the book again. Finding it of no avail, however, she put it down, and left her corner and came, in a moment of leisure between two letters, behind her mother's chair. "May I ask you a question, mamma?"

"As many as you please, my dear;" but Lady Markham's face bore a harassed look. "You know, Frances, there are some to which there is no answer—which I can only ask with an aching heart, like yourself," she said.

"This is a very simple one. It is, Have I any money—of my own?"

Lady Markham turned round on her chair and looked at her daughter. "Money!" she said. "Are you in need of anything? Do you want money, Frances? I shall never forgive myself, if you have felt yourself neglected."

"It is not that. I mean—have I anything of my own?"

After a little pause. "There is a—small

provision made for you by my marriage settlement," Lady Markham said.

"And—once more—could, oh, could I have it, mamma?"

"My dear child! you must be out of your senses. How could you have it at your age—unless you were going to marry?"

This suggestion Frances rejected with the contempt it merited. "I shall never marry," she said; "and there never could be a time when it would be of so much importance to me to have it as now. Oh, tell me, is there no way by which I could have it now?"

"Sir Thomas is one of our trustees. Ask him. I do not think he will let you have it, Frances. But perhaps you could tell him what you want, if you will not have confidence in me. Money is just the thing that is least easy for me. I could give you almost anything else; but money I have not. What can you want money for, a girl like you?"

Frances hesitated before she replied. "I would rather not tell you," she said; "for very likely you would not approve; but it is nothing—wrong."

"You are very honest, my dear. I do not suppose for a moment it is anything wrong. Ask Sir Thomas," Lady Markham said, with a smile. The smile had meaning in it, which to Frances was incomprehensible. "Sir Thomas —will refuse nothing he can in reason give— of that I am sure."

Sir Thomas, when he came in shortly afterwards, said that he would not disturb Lady Markham. "For I see you are busy, and I have something to say to Frances."

"Who has also something to say to you," Lady Markham said, with a benignant smile. Her heart gave a throb of satisfaction. It was all she could do to restrain herself, not to tell the dear friend to whom she was writing that there was every prospect of a *most happy* establishment for dear Frances. And her joy was quite genuine and almost innocent, notwithstanding all she knew.

"You have written to your father?" Sir Thomas said. "My dear Frances, I have got the most hopeful letter from him, the first I have had for years. He asks me if I know what state Hilborough is in—if it is habit-

able? That looks like coming home, don't you think? And it is years since he has written to me before."

Frances did not know what Hilborough was; but she disliked showing her ignorance. And this idea was not so comforting to her as Sir Thomas expected. She said: "I do not think he will come," with downcast eyes.

But Sir Thomas was strong in his own way of thinking. He was excited and pleased by the letter. He told her again and again how he had desired this—how happy it made him to think he was about to be successful at last. "And just at the moment when all is likely to be arranged — when Markham—— You have brought me luck, Frances. Now, tell me what it was you wanted from me?"

Frances' spirits had fallen lower and lower while his rose. Her mind ranged over the new possibilities with something like despair. It would be Constance, not she, who would have done it, if he came back—Constance, who had taken her place from her—the love that ought to have been hers—her father—and who now, on her return, would resume her place with her

mother too. Ah, what would Constance do? Would she do anything for him who lay yonder in the fever, for his father and his mother, poor old people!—anything to make up for the harm she had done? Her heart burned in her agitated, troubled bosom. "It is nothing," she said—"nothing that you would do for me. I had a great wish—but I know you would not let me do it, neither you nor my mother."

"Tell me what it is, and we shall see."

Frances felt her voice die away in her throat. "We went this morning to see—to see——"

"You mean poor Gaunt. It is a sad sight, and a sad story—too sad for a young creature like you to be mixed up in. Is it anything for him, that you want me to do?"

She looked at him through those hot gathering tears which interrupt the vision of women, and blind them when they most desire to see clearly. A sense of the folly of her hope, of the impossibility of making any one understand what was in her mind, overwhelmed her. "I cannot, I cannot," she cried. "Oh, I know you are very kind. I wanted my own money,

if I have any. But I know you will not give it me, nor think it right, nor understand what I want to do with it."

"Have you so little trust in me?" said Sir Thomas. "I hope, if you told me, I could understand. I cannot give you your own money, Frances; but if it were for a good—no, I will not say that—for a sensible, for a practicable purpose, you should have some of mine."

"Yours!" she cried, almost with indignation. "Oh no; that is not what I mean. They are nothing—nothing to you." She paused when she had said this, and grew very pale. "I did not mean—— Sir Thomas, please do not say anything to mamma."

He took her hand affectionately between his own. "I do not half understand," he said; "but I will keep your secret, so far as I know it, my poor little girl."

Lady Markham at her writing-table, with her back turned, went on with her correspondence all the time in high satisfaction and pleasure, saying to herself that it would be far better than Nelly Winterbourn's—that it would be the finest match of the year.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

It had seemed to Frances, as it appears naturally to all who have little experience, that a man who was so ill as Captain Gaunt must get better or get worse without any of the lingering suspense which accompanies a less violent complaint; but, naturally, Lady Markham was wiser, and entertained no such delusions. When it had gone on for a week, it already seemed to Frances as if he had been ill for a year,—as if there never had been any subject of interest in the world but the lingering course of the malady, which waxed from less to more, from days of quiet to hours of active delirium. The business-like nurses, always so cool and calm, with their professional reports, gave the foolish girl a chill to her heart, thinking, as she did, of the anxiety that

would have filled, not the house alone in which he lay, but all the little community, had he been ill at home. Perhaps it was better for him that he was not ill at home,—that the changes in his state were watched by clear eyes, not made dim by tears or oversharp by anxiety, but which took him very calmly, as a case interesting, no doubt, but only in a scientific sense.

After a few days, Lady Markham herself wrote to his mother a very kind letter, full of detail, describing everything which she had done, and how she had taken Captain Gaunt entirely into her own hands. "I thought it better not to lose any time," she said; "and you may assure yourself that everything has been done for him that could have been done, had you yourself been here. I have acted exactly as I should have done for my own son in the circumstances;" and she proceeded to explain the treatment, in a manner which was far too full of knowledge for poor Mrs Gaunt's understanding, who could scarcely read the letter for tears. The best nurses, the best doctor, the most anxious care, Lady Markham's own

personal supervision, so that nothing should be neglected. The two old parents held their little counsel over this letter with full hearts. It had been Mrs Gaunt's first intention to start at once, to get to her boy as fast as express trains could carry her; but then they began to look at each other, to falter forth broken words about expense. Two nurses, the best doctor in London—and then the mother's rapid journey, the old General left alone. How was she to do it, so anxious, so unaccustomed as she was? They decided, with many doubts and terrors, with great self-denial, and many a sick flutter of questionings as to which was best, to remain. Lady Markham had promised them news every day of their boy, and a telegram at once if there was "any change"—those awful words, that slay the very soul. Even the poor mother decided that in these circumstances it would be "self-indulgence" to go; and from henceforward, the old people lived upon the post-hours,—lived in awful anticipation of a telegram announcing a "change." Frances was their daily correspondent. She had gone to look at him, she always said, though the

nurses would not permit her to stay. He was no worse. But till another week, there could be no change. Then she would write that the critical day had passed—that there was still no change, and would not be again for a week; but that he was no worse. No worse!—this was the poor fare upon which General Gaunt and his wife lived in their little Swiss *pension*, where it was so cheap. They gave up even their additional candle, and economised that poor little bit of expenditure; they gave up their wine; they made none of the little excursions which had been their delight. Even with all these economies, how were they to provide the expenses which were running on—the dear London lodgings, the nurses, the boundless outgoings, which it was understood they would not grudge? Grudge! No; not all the money in the world, if it could save their George. But where—where were they to get this money? Whence was it to come?

This Frances knew, but no one else. And she, too, knew that the lodgings and the nurses and the doctors were so far from being all. The poor girl spent the days much as they

did, in agonised questions and considerations. If she could but get her money, her own money, whatever it was. Later, for her own use, what would it matter? She could work, she could take care of children, it did not matter what she did: but to save him, to save them. She had learned so much, however, about life and the world in which she lived, as to know that, were her object known, it would be treated as the supremest folly. Wild ideas of Jews, of finding somebody who would lend her what she wanted, as young men do in novels, rose in her mind, and were dismissed, and returned again. But she was not a young man; she was only a girl, and knew not what to do, nor where to go. Not even the very alphabet of such knowledge was hers.

While this was going on, she was taken, all abstracted as she was, into Society—to the solemn heavinesses of dinner-parties; to dances even, in which her gravity and self-absorption were construed to mean very different things. Lady Markham had never said a word to any one of the idea which had sprung into her own mind full grown at sight

of Sir Thomas holding in fatherly kindness her little girl's hands. She had never said a word, oh, not a word. How such a wild and extraordinary rumour had got about, she could not imagine. But the ways of Society and its modes of information are inscrutable: a glance, a smile, are enough. And what so natural as this to bring a veil of gravity over even a *débutante* in her first season? Lucky little girl, some people said; poor little thing, some others. No wonder she was so serious; and her mother, that successful general—her mother, that triumphant match-maker, radiant, in spite, people said, of the very uncomfortable state of affairs about Markham, and the fact that, in the absence of the executor, Nelly Winterbourn knew nothing as yet as to how she was "left."

Thus the weeks went past in great suspense for all. Markham had recovered, it need scarcely be said, from his fit of remorse; and he, perhaps, was the one to whom these uncertainties were a relief rather than an oppression. Mrs Winterbourn had retired into the country, to wait the arrival of the all-

important functionary who had possession of her husband's will, and to pass decorously the first profundity of her mourning. Naturally, Society knew everything about Nelly: how, under the infliction of Sarah Winterbourn's society, she was quite as well as could be expected; how she was behaving herself beautifully in her retirement, seeing nobody, doing just what it was right to do. Nelly had always managed to retain the approval of Society, whatever she did. In the best circles, it was now a subject of indignant remark that Sarah Winterbourn should take it upon herself to keep watch like a dragon over the widow. For Nelly's prevision was right, and the widow was what the men now called her, though women are not addicted to that form of nomenclature. But Sarah Winterbourn was universally condemned. Now that the poor girl had completed her time of bondage, and conducted herself so perfectly, why could not that dragon leave her alone? Markham made no remark upon the subject; but his mother, who understood him so well, believed he was glad that Sarah Winterbourn should be there, making

all visits unseemly. Lady Markham thought he was glad of the pause altogether, of the impossibility of doing anything; and to be allowed to go on without any disturbance in his usual way. She had herself made one visit to Nelly, and reported, when she came home, that notwithstanding the presence of Sarah, Nelly's natural brightness was beginning to appear, and that soon she would be as *espiègle* as ever. That was Lady Markham's view of the subject; and there was no doubt that she spoke with perfect knowledge.

It was very surprising, accordingly, to the ladies, when, some days after this, Lady Markham's butler came up-stairs to say that Mrs Winterbourn was at the door, and had sent to inquire whether his mistress was at home and alone before coming up-stairs. "Of course I am at home," said Lady Markham; "I am always at home to Mrs Winterbourn. But to no one else, remember, while she is here." When the man went away with his message, Lady Markham had a moment of hesitation. "You may stay," she said to Frances, "as you were present before and saw her in her trouble. But

I wonder what has brought her to town? She did not intend to come to town till the end of the season. She must have something to tell me. O Nelly, how are you, dear?" she cried, going forward and taking the young widow into her arms. Nelly was in crape from top to toe. As she had always done what was right, what people expected from her, she continued to do so till the end. A little rim of white was under the edge of her close black bonnet with its long veil. Her cuffs were white and hem-stitched in the old-fashioned *deep* way. Nothing, in short, could be more *deep* than Nelly's costume altogether. She was a very pattern for widows; and it was very becoming, as that dress seldom fails to be. It would have been natural to expect in Nelly's countenance some consciousness of this, as well as perhaps a something at the corners of her mouth which should show that, as Lady Markham said, she would soon be as *espiègle* as ever. But there was nothing of this in her face. She seemed to have stiffened with her crape. She suffered Lady Markham's embrace rather than returned it. She did not take any notice of Frances. She walked across

the room, sweeping with her long dress, with her long veil like an ensign of woe, and sat down with her back to the light. But for a minute or more she said nothing, and listened to Lady Markham's questions without even a movement in reply.

"What is the matter, my dear? Is it something you have to tell me, or have you only got tired of the country?" Lady Markham said, with a look of alarm beginning to appear in her face.

"I am tired of the country," said Mrs Winterbourn; "but I am also tired of everything else, so that does not matter much. Lady Markham, I have come to tell you a great piece of news. My trustee and Mr Winterbourn's executor, who has been at the other end of the world, has come home."

"Yes, Nelly?" Lady Markham's look of alarm grew more and more marked. "You make me very anxious," she cried. "I am sure something has happened that you did not foresee."

"Oh, nothing has happened—that I ought not to have foreseen. I always wondered why

Sarah Winterbourn stuck to me so. The will has been opened and read, and I know how it all is now. I rushed to tell you, as you have been so kind."

"Dear Nelly!" Lady Markham said, not knowing, in the growing perturbation of her mind, what else to say.

"Mr Winterbourn has been very liberal to me. He has left me everything he can leave away from his heir-at-law. Nothing that is entailed, of course; but there is not very much under the entail. They tell me I will be one of the richest women—a wealthy widow."

"My dear Nelly, I am so very glad; but I am not surprised. Mr Winterbourn had a great sense of justice. He could not do less for you than that."

"But Lady Markham, you have not heard all." It was not like Nelly Winterbourn to speak in such measured tones. There was not the faintest sign of the *espiègle* in her voice. Frances, roused by the astonished, alarmed look in her mother's face, drew a little nearer almost involuntarily, notwithstanding her abstraction in anxieties of her own.

"Nelly, do you mind Frances being here?"

"Oh, I wish her to be here! It will do her good. If she is going to do—the same as I did, she ought to know." She made a pause again—Lady Markham meanwhile growing pale with fright and panic, though she did not know what there could be to fear.

"There are some people who had begun to think that I was not so well 'left' as was expected," she said; "but they were mistaken. I am very well 'left.' I am to have the house in Grosvenor Square, and the Knoll, and all the plate and carriages, and three parts or so of Mr Winterbourn's fortune—so long as I remain Mr Winterbourn's widow. He was, as you say, a just man."

There was a pause. But for something in the air which tingled after Nelly's voice had ceased, the listeners would scarcely have been conscious that anything more than ordinary had been said. Lady Markham said "Nelly?" in a breathless interrogative tone—alarmed by that thrill in the air, rather than by the words, which were so simple in their sound.

"Oh yes; he had a great sense of justice. So

long as I remain Mrs Winterbourn, I am to have all that. It was his, and I was his, and the property is to be kept together. Don't you see, Lady Markham?—Sarah knew it, and I might have known, had I thought. He had a great respect for the name of Winterbourn—not much, perhaps, for anything else." She paused a little, then added: "That's all. I wished you to know."

"Oh my dear," cried Lady Markham, "is it possible—is it possible? You—debarred from marrying, debarred from everything—at your age!"

"Oh, I can do anything I please," cried Nelly. "I can go to the bad if I please. He does not say so long as I behave myself—only so long as I remain the widow Winterbourn. I told you they would all call me so. Well, they can do it! That's what I am to be all my life—the widow Winterbourn."

"Nelly—O Nelly," cried Lady Markham, throwing her arms round her visitor. "Oh, my poor child! And how can I tell—how am I to tell——?"

"You can tell everybody, if you please," said

Mrs Winterbourn, freeing herself from the clasping arms and rising up in her stiff crape. "He had a great sense of justice. He doesn't say I'm to wear weeds all my life. I think I mean to come back to Grosvenor Square on Monday, and perhaps give a ball or two, and some dinners, to celebrate—for I have come into my fortune, don't you see?" she said, with an unmoved face.

"Hush, dear—hush! You must not talk like that," Lady Markham said, holding her arm.

"Why not! Justice is justice, whether for him or me. I was such a fool as to be wretched when he was dying, because—— But it appears that there was no love lost—no love and no faith lost. He did not believe in me, any more than I believed in him. I outwitted him when he was living, and he outwits me when he is dead. Do you hear, Frances?—that is how things go. If you do as I did, as I hear you are going to do—— Oh, do it if you please; I will never interfere. But make up your mind to this—he will have his revenge on you—or justice; it is all the same thing.

Good-bye, Lady Markham. I hope you will countenance me at my first ball—for now I have come into my fortune, I mean to enjoy myself. Don't you think these things are rather becoming? I mean to wear them out. They will make a sensation at my parties," she said, and for the first time laughed aloud.

"This is just the first wounded feeling," said Lady Markham. "O Nelly, you must not fly in the face of Society. You have always been so good. No, no; let us think it over. Perhaps we can find a way out of it. There is bound to be a flaw somewhere."

"Good-bye," said Nelly. "I have not fixed on the day for my first At Home; but the invitations will be out directly. Good-bye, Frances. You must come—and Sir Thomas. It will be a fine lesson for Sir Thomas." She walked across the room to the door, and there stood for a moment, looking back. She looked taller, almost grand in still fury and despair with her immovable face. But as she stood there, a faint softening came to the marble. "Tell Geoff—gently," she said, and went away. They could hear the soft sweep of her black

robes retiring down the stair, and then the door opening, the clang of the carriage.

Lady Markham had dropped into a chair in her dismay, and sat with her hands clasped and her eyes wide open, listening to these sounds, as if they might throw some light on the situation. The consequences which might follow from Nelly's freedom had been heavy on her heart; and it was possible that by-and-by this strange news might bring the usual comfort; but in the meantime, consternation overwhelmed her. "As long as she remains his widow!" she said to herself in a tone of horror, as the tension of her nerves yielded and the carriage drove away. "And how am I to tell him—gently; how am I to tell him gently?" she cried. It was as if a great catastrophe had overwhelmed the house.

In an hour or so, however, Lady Markham recovered her energy, and began to think whether there might be any way out of it. "I'll tell you," she cried suddenly; "there is your uncle Clarendon, Frances. He is a great lawyer. If any man can find a flaw in the will, he will do it." She rang the bell at once, and

ordered the carriage. "But, oh dear," she said, "I forgot. Lady Meliora is coming about Trotter's Buildings, the place in Whitechapel. I cannot go. Whatever may happen, I cannot go to-day. But, my dear, you have never taken any part as yet; you need not stay for this meeting: and besides, you are a favourite in Portland Place; you are the best person to go. You can tell your uncle Clarendon—— Stop; I will write a note," Lady Markham cried. That was always the most satisfactory plan in every case. She sent her daughter to get ready to go out; and she herself dashed off in two minutes four sheets of the clearest statement, a *précis* of the whole case. Mr Clarendon, like most people, liked Lady Markham,—he did not share his wife's prejudices; and Frances was a favourite. Surely, moved by these two influences combined, he would bestir himself and find a flaw in the will!

In less than half an hour from the time of Mrs Winterbourn's departure, Frances found herself alone in the brougham, going towards Portland Place. Her mind was not absorbed in Nelly Winterbourn. She was not old

enough, or sufficiently used to the ways of Society, to appreciate the tragedy in this case. Nelly's horror at the moment of her husband's death she had understood; but Nelly's tragic solemnity now struck her as with a jarring note. Indeed, Frances had never learned to think of money as she ought. And yet, how anxious she was about money! How her thoughts returned, as soon as she felt herself alone and free to pursue them, to the question which devoured her heart. It was a relief to her to be thus free, thus alone and silent, that she might think of it. If she could but have driven on and on for a hundred miles or so, to think of it, to find a solution for her problem! But even a single mile was something; for before she had got through the long line of Piccadilly, a sudden inspiration came to her mind. The one person in the world whom she could ask for help was the person whom she was on her way to see — her aunt Clarendon, who was rich, with whom she was a favourite; who was on the other side, ready to sympathise with all that belonged to the life of Bordighera, in opposition to Eaton Square. Nelly Winter-

bourn and her troubles fled like shadows from Frances' mind. To be truly disinterested, to be always mindful of other people's interests, it is well to have as few as possible of one's own.

Mrs Clarendon received her, as always, with a sort of combative tenderness, as if in competition for her favour with some powerful adversary unseen. There was in her a constant readiness to outbid that adversary, to offer more than she did, of which Frances was usually uncomfortably conscious, but which to-day stimulated her like a cordial. "I suppose you are being taken to all sorts of places?" she said. "I wish I had not given up Society so much; but when the season is over, and the fine people are all in the country, then you will see that we have not forgotten you. Has Sir Thomas come with you, Frances? I supposed, perhaps, you had come to tell me——"

"Sir Thomas?" Frances said, with much surprise; but she was too much occupied with concerns more interesting to ask what her aunt could mean. "Oh, aunt Caroline," she said, "I have come to speak to you of something I

am very, very much interested about." In all sincerity, she had forgotten the original scope of her mission, and only remembered her own anxiety. And then she told her story—how Captain Gaunt, the son of her old friend, the youngest, the one that was best beloved, had come to town—how he had made friends who were not—nice—who made him play and lose money—though he had no money.

"Of course, my dear, I know—Lord Markham and his set."

At this Frances coloured high. "It was not Markham. Markham has found out for me. It was some—fellows who had no mercy, he said."

"Oh yes; they are all the same set. I am very sorry that an innocent girl like you should be in any way mixed up with such people. Whether Lord Markham plucks the pigeon himself, or gets some of his friends to do it——"

"Aunt Caroline, now you take away my last hope; for Markham is my brother; and I will never, never ask any one to help me who speaks so of my brother—he is always so kind, so kind to me."

"I don't see what opportunity he has ever had to be kind to you," said Mrs Clarendon.

But Frances in her disappointment would not listen. She turned away her head, to get rid, so far as was possible, of the blinding tears—those tears which would come in spite of her, notwithstanding all the efforts she could make. "I had a little hope in you," Frances said; "but now I have none, none. My mother sees him every day; if he lives, she will have saved his life. But I cannot ask her for what I want. I cannot ask her for more—she has done so much. And now, you make it impossible for me to ask you!"

If Frances had studied how to move her aunt best, she could not have hit upon a more effectual way. "My dear child," cried Mrs Clarendon, hurrying to her, drawing her into her arms, "what is it, what is it that moves you so much? Of whom are you speaking? His life? Whose life is in danger? And what is it you want? If you think I, your father's only sister, will do less for you than Lady Markham does——! Tell me, my dear, tell me what is it you want?"

Then Frances continued her story. How young Gaunt was ill of a brain-fever, and raved about his losses, and the black and red, and of his mother in mourning (with an additional ache in her heart, Frances suppressed all mention of Constance), and how *she* understood, though nobody else did, that the Gaunts were not rich, that even the illness itself would tax all their resources, and that the money, the debts to pay, would ruin them, and break their hearts. "I don't say he has not been wrong, aunt Caroline—oh, I suppose he has been very wrong!—but there he is lying: and oh, how pitiful it is to hear him! and the old General, who was so proud of him; and Mrs Gaunt, dear Mrs Gaunt, who always was so good to me!"

"Frances, my child, I am not a hard-hearted woman, though you seem to think so,—I can understand all that. I am very, very sorry for the poor mother; and for the young man even, who has been led astray: but I don't see what you can do."

"What!" cried Frances, her eyes flashing through her tears—"for their son, who is the

same as a brother—for them, whom I have always known, who have helped to bring me up? Oh, you don't know how people live where there are only a few of them,—where there is no society, if you say that. If he had been ill there, at home, we should all have nursed him, every one. We should have thought of nothing else. We would have cooked for him, or gone errands, or done anything. Perhaps those ladies are better who go to the hospitals. But to tell me that you don't know what I could do! Oh," cried the girl, springing to her feet, throwing up her hands, "if I had the money, if I had only the money, I know what I would do!"

Mrs Clarendon was a woman who did not spend money, who had everything she wanted, who thought little of what wealth could procure; but she was a Quixote in her heart, as so many women are where great things are in question, though not in small. "Money?" she said, with a faint quiver of alarm in her voice. "My dear, if it was anything that was feasible, anything that was right, and you wanted it very much—the money might be found," she said. The position, however, was

too strange to be mastered in a moment, and difficulties rose as she spoke. "A young man. People might suppose—— And then Sir Thomas—what would Sir Thomas think?"

"That is why I came to you; for he will not give me my own money—if I have any money. Aunt Caroline, if you will give it me now, I will pay you back as soon as I am of age. Oh, I don't want to take it from you—I want—— If everything could be paid before he is better, before he knows—if we could hide it, so that the General and his mother should never find out. That would be worst of all, if they were to find out—it would break their hearts. Oh, aunt Caroline, she thinks there is no one like him. She loves him so; more than—more than any one here loves anybody: and to find out all that would break her heart."

Mrs Clarendon rose at this moment, and stood up with her face turned towards the door. "I can't tell what is the matter with me," she said; "I can scarcely hear what you are saying. I wonder if I am going to be ill, or what it is. I thought just then I heard a voice. Surely there is some one at the door.

I am sure I heard a voice—— Oh, a voice you ought to know, if it was true. Frances —I will think of all that after—just now—— He must be dead, or else he is here!"

Frances, who thought of no possibility of death save to one, caught her aunt's arm with a cry. The great house was very still—soft carpets everywhere—the distant sound of a closing door scarcely penetrating from below. Yet there was something, that faint human stir which is more subtle than sound. They stood and waited, the elder woman penetrated by sudden excitement and alarm, she could not tell why; the girl indifferent, yet ready for any wonder in the susceptibility of her anxious state. As they stood, not knowing what they expected, the door opened slowly, and there suddenly stood in the opening, like two people in a dream— Constance, smiling, drawing after her a taller figure. Frances, with a start of amazement, threw from her her aunt's arm, which she held, and calling "Father!" flung herself into Waring's arms.

## CHAPTER XLV.

"I FOUND him in the mood; so I thought it best to strike while the iron was hot," Constance said. She had settled down languidly in a favourite corner, as if she had never been away. She had looked for the footstool where she knew it was to be found, and arranged the cushion as she liked it. Frances had never made herself so much at home as Constance did at once. She looked on with calm amusement while her aunt poured out her delight, her wonder, her satisfaction, in Waring's ears. She did not budge herself from her comfortable place; but she said to Frances in an undertone: "Don't let her go on too long. She will bore him, you know; and then he will repent. And I don't want him to repent."

As for Frances, she saw the ground cut away

entirely from under her feet, and stood sick and giddy after the first pleasure of seeing her father was over, feeling her hopes all tumble about her. Mrs Clarendon, who had been so near yielding, so much disposed to give her the help she wanted, had forgotten her petition and her altogether in the unexpected delight of seeing her brother. And here was Constance, the sight of whom perhaps might call the sick man out of his fever, who might restore life and everything, even happiness to him, if she would. But would she? Frances asked herself. Most likely, she would do nothing, and there would be no longer any room left for Frances, who was ready to do all. She would have been more than mortal if she had not looked with a certain bitterness at this new and wonderful aspect of affairs.

"I saw mamma's brougham at the door," Constance said; "you must take me home. Of course, this was the place for papa to come; but I must go home. It would never do to let mamma think me devoid of feeling. How is she, and Markham—and everybody? I have scarcely had any news for three months. We

met Algy Muncastle on the boat, and he told us some things — a great deal about Nelly Winterbourn—the widow, as they call her—and about you."

"There could be nothing to say of me."

"Oh, but there was, though. What a sly little thing you are, never to say a word! Sir Thomas.—Ah, you see I know. And I congratulate you with all my heart, Fan. He is rolling in money, and such a good kind old man. Why, he was a lover of mamma's *dans les temps.* It is delightful to think of you consoling him. And you will be as rich as a little princess, with mamma to see that all the settlements are right."

"I don't know what you mean," Frances said abruptly. She was so preoccupied and so impatient, that she would not even allow herself to inquire. She went to where her father sat talking to his sister, and stood behind his chair, putting her hand upon his arm. He did not perhaps care for her very much. He had aunt Caroline to think of, from whom he had been separated so long; and Constance, no doubt, had made him her own too, as she had made

everybody else her own; but still he was all that Frances had, the nearest, the one that belonged to her most. To touch him like this gave her a little consolation. And he turned round and smiled at her, and put his hand upon hers. That was a little comfort too; but it did not last long. It was time she should return to her mother; and Constance was anxious to go, notwithstanding her fear that her father might be bored. "I must go and see my mother, you know, papa. It would be very disrespectful not to go. And you won't want me, now you have got aunt Caroline. Frances is going to drive me home." She said this as if it was her sister's desire to go; but as a matter of fact, she had taken the command at once. Frances, reluctant beyond measure to return to the house, in which she felt she would no longer be wanted—which was a perverse imagination, born of her unhappiness—wretched to lose the prospect of help, which she had been beginning to let herself believe in, was yet too shy and too miserable to make any resistance. She remembered her mother's note for Mr Clarendon before she went away, and she made one last

appeal to her aunt. "You will not forget what we were talking about, aunt Caroline?"

"Dear me," said Mrs Clarendon, putting up her hand to her head. "What was it, Frances? I have such a poor memory; and your father's coming, and all this unexpected happiness, have driven everything else away."

Frances went down-stairs with a heart so heavy that it seemed to lie dead in her breast. Was there no help for her, then? no help for *him*, the victim of Constance and of Markham? no way of softening calamity to the old people? Her temper rose as her hopes fell. All so rich, so abounding, but no one who would spare anything out of his superfluity, to help the ruined and heartbroken. Oh yes, she said to herself in not unnatural bitterness, the hospitals, yes; and Trotter's Buildings in Whitechapel. But for the people to whom they were bound so much more closely, the man who had sat at their tables, whom they had received and made miserable, nothing! oh, nothing! not a finger held out to save him. The little countenance that had been like a summer day, so innocent and fresh and candid, was clouded over. Pride

prevented—pride, more effectual than any other defence—the outburst which in other circumstances would have relieved her heart. She sat in her corner, withdrawn as far as possible from Constance, listening dully, making little response. After several questions, her sister turned upon her with a surprise which was natural too.

"What is the matter?" she said. "You don't talk as you used to do. Is it town that has spoiled you? Do you think I will interfere with you? Oh, you need not be at all afraid. I have enough of my own without meddling with you."

"I don't know what I have that you could interfere with," said Frances. "Nothing here."

"Do you want to quarrel with me?" Constance said.

"It is of no use to quarrel; there is nothing to quarrel about. I might have thought you would interfere when you came first to Bordighera. I had people then who seemed to belong to me. But here—you have the first place. Why should I quarrel? You are only coming back to your own."

"Fan, for goodness' sake, don't speak in that dreadful tone. What have I done? If you think papa likes me best, you are mistaken. And as for the mother, don't you know her yet? Don't you know that she is nice to everybody, and cares neither for you nor me?"

"No," cried Frances, raising herself bolt upright; "I don't know that! How dare you say it, you who are her child? Perhaps you think no one cares—not one, though you have made an end of my home. Did you hear about George Gaunt, what you have done to him? He is lying in a brain-fever, raving, raving, talking for ever, day and night; and if he dies, Markham and you will have killed him—you and Markham; but you have been the worst. It will be murder, and you should be killed for it!" the girl cried. Her eyes blazed upon her sister in the close inclosure of the little brougham. "You thought he did not care, either, perhaps."

"Fan! Good heavens! I think you must be going out of your senses," Constance cried.

Frances was not able to say any more. She was stifled by the commotion of her feelings,

her heart beating so wildly in her breast, her emotion reaching the intolerable. The brougham stopped, and she sprang out and ran into the house, hurrying up-stairs to her own room. Constance, more surprised and disconcerted than she could have believed possible, nevertheless came in with an air of great composure, saying a word in passing to the astonished servant at the door. She was quite amiable always to the people about her. She walked up-stairs, remarking, as she passed, a pair of new vases with palms in them, which decorated the staircase, and which she approved. She opened the drawing-room door in her pretty, languid-stately, always leisurely way.

"How are you, mamma? Frances has run up-stairs; but here am I, just come back," she said.

Lady Markham rose from her seat with a little scream of astonishment. "CONSTANCE! It is not possible. Who would have dreamed of seeing you!" she cried.

"Oh yes, it is quite possible," said Constance, when they had kissed, with a prolonged encounter of lips and cheeks. "Surely, you did not think I could keep very long away?"

"My darling, did you get home-sick, or mammy-sick as Markham says, after all your philosophy?"

"I am so glad to see you, mamma, and looking so well. No, not home-sick, precisely, dear mother, but penetrated with the folly of staying *there*, where nothing was ever doing, when I might have been in the centre of everything: which is saying much the same thing, though in different words."

"In very different words," said Lady Markham, resuming her seat with a smile. "I see you have not changed at all, Con. Will you have any tea? And did you leave—your home there—with as little ceremony as you left me!"

"May I help myself, mamma? don't you trouble. It is very nice to see your pretty china, instead of Frances' old bizarre cups, which were much too good for me. Oh, I did not leave my—home. I—brought it back with me."

"You brought——?"

"My father with me, mamma."

"Oh!" Lady Markham said. She was too much astonished to say more.

"Perhaps it was because he got very tired of me, and thought there was no other way of getting rid of me; perhaps because he was tired of it himself. He came at last like a lamb. I did not really believe it till we were on the boat, and Algy Muncastle turned up, and I introduced him to my father. You should have seen how he stared."

"Oh!" said Lady Markham again; and then she added faintly: "Is—is he here?"

"You mean papa? I left him at aunt Caroline's. In the circumstances, that seemed the best thing to do."

Lady Markham leaned back in her chair; she had become very pale. One shock after another had reduced her strength. She closed her eyes while Constance very comfortably sipped her tea. It was not possible that she could have dreamed it or imagined it, when, on opening her eyes again, she saw Constance sitting by the tea-table with a plate of bread and butter before her. "I have really," she explained seriously, "eaten nothing to-day."

Frances came down some time after, having bathed her eyes and smoothed her hair. It was

always smooth like satin, shining in the light. She came in, in her unobtrusive way, ashamed of herself for her outburst of temper, and determined to be "good," whatever might happen. She was surprised that there was no conversation going on. Constance sat in a chair which Frances at once recognised as having been hers from the beginning of time, wondering at her own audacity in having sat in it, when she did not know. Lady Markham was still leaning back in her chair. "Oh, it's nothing—only a little giddiness. So many strange things are happening. Did you give your uncle Clarendon my note? I suppose Frances told you, Con, how we have been upset to-day?"

"Upset?" said Constance over her bread and butter. "I should have thought you would have been immensely pleased. It is about Sir Thomas, I suppose?"

"About Sir Thomas! Is there any news about Sir Thomas?" said Lady Markham, with an elaborately innocent look. "If so, it has not yet been confided to me." And then she proceeded to tell to her daughter the story of Nelly Winterbourn.

"I should have thought that would all have been set right in the settlements," Constance said.

"So it ought. But she had no one to see to the settlements—no one with a real interest in her; and it was such a magnificent match."

"No better than Sir Thomas, mamma."

"Ah, Sir Thomas. Is there really a story about Sir Thomas? I can only say, if it is so, that he has never confided it to me."

"I hope no mistake will be made about the settlements in that case. And what do you suppose Markham will do?"

"What can he do? He will do nothing, Con. You know, after all, that is the *rôle* that suits him best. Even if all had been well, unless Nelly had asked him herself——"

"Do you think she would have minded, after all this time? But I suppose there's an end of Nelly now," Constance said, regretfully.

"I am afraid so," Lady Markham replied. And then recovering, she began to tell her daughter the news—all the news of this one and the other, which Frances had never been able to understand, which Constance entered

into as one to the manner born. They left the subject of Nelly Winterbourn, and not a word was said of young Gaunt and his fever; but apart from these subjects, everything that had happened since Constance left England was discussed between them. They talked and smiled and rippled over into laughter, and passed in review the thousand friends whose little follies and freaks both knew, and skimmed across the surface of tragedies with a consciousness, that gave piquancy to the amusement, of the terrible depths beneath. Frances, keeping behind, not willing to show her troubled countenance, from which the traces of tears were not easily effaced, listened to this light talk with a wonder which almost reached the height of awe. Her mother at least must have many grave matters in her mind; and even on Constance, the consciousness of having stirred up all the quiescent evils in the family history, of her father in England, of the meeting which must take place between the husband and wife so long parted, all by her influence, must have a certain weight. But there they sat and talked and laughed, and shot their little shafts of wit.

Frances, at last feeling her heart ache too much for further repression, and that the pleasant interchange between her mother and sister exasperated instead of lightened her burdened soul, left them, and sought refuge in her room, where presently she heard their voices again as they came up-stairs to dress. Constance's boxes had in the meantime arrived from the railway, and the conversation was very animated upon fashions and new adaptations and what to wear. Then the door of Constance's room was closed, and Lady Markham came tapping at that of Frances. She took the girl into her arms. "Now," she said, "my dream is going to be realised, and I shall have my two girls, one on each side of me. My little Frances, are you not glad?"

"Mother——" the girl said, faltering, and stopped, not able to say any more.

Lady Markham kissed her tenderly, and smiled, as if she were content. Was she content? Was the happiness, now she had it, as great as she said? Was she able to be light-hearted with all these complications round her? But to these questions who could give any

answer? Presently she went to dress, shutting the door; and, between her two girls, retired so many hundred, so many thousand miles away—who could tell?—into herself.

In the evening there was considerable stir and commotion in the house. Markham, warned by one of his mother's notes, came to dinner full of affectionate pleasure in Con's return, and cheerful inquiries for her. "As yet, you have lost nothing, Con. As yet, nobody has got well into the swim. As to how the mammy will feel with two daughters to take about, that is a mystery. If we had known, we'd have shut up little Fan in the nursery for a year more."

"It is I that should be sent to the nursery," said Constance. "Three months is a long time. Algy Muncastle thought I was dead and buried. He looked at me as if he were seeing a ghost."

"A girl might just as well be dead and buried as let half the season slip over and never appear."

"Unless she were a widow," said Con.

"Ah! unless she were a widow, as you say. That changes the face of affairs." Markham

made a slight involuntary retreat when he received that blow, but no one mentioned the name of Nelly Winterbourn. It was much too serious to be taken any notice of now. In the brightness of Lady Markham's drawing-room, with all its softened lights, grave subjects were only discussed *tête-à-tête.* When the company was more than two, everything took a sportive turn. Of the two visitors, however, who came in later, one was not at all disposed to follow this rule. Sir Thomas said but little to Constance, though her arrival was part of the news which had brought him here; but he held Lady Markham's hand with an anxious look into her eyes, and as soon as he could, drew Frances aside to the distant corner in which she was fond of placing herself. "Do you know he has come?" he cried.

"I have seen papa, Sir Thomas, if that is what you mean."

"What else could I mean?" said Sir Thomas. "You know how I have tried for this. What did he say? I want to know what disposition he is in. And what disposition is *she* in? Frances, you and I have a great deal to do.

We have the ball at our feet. There is nobody acting in both their interests but you and I."

There was something in Frances' eyes and in her look of mute endurance which startled him, even in the midst of his enthusiasm. "What is the matter?" he said. "I have not forgotten our bargain. I will do much for you, if you will work for me. And you want something. Come, tell me what it is?"

She gave him a look of reproach. Had he, too, forgotten the sick and miserable, the sufferer, of whom no one thought? "Sir Thomas," she said, "Constance has money; she has stopped at Paris to buy dresses. Oh, give me what is my share."

"I remember now," he said.

"Then you know the only thing that any one can do for me. Oh, Sir Thomas, if you could but give it me now."

"Shall I speak to your father?" he asked.

These words Markham heard by chance, as he passed them to fetch something his mother wanted. He returned to where she sat with a curious look in his little twinkling eyes.

"What is Sir Thomas after? Do you know the silly story that is about? They say that old fellow is after Lady Markham's daughter. It had better be put a stop to, mother. I won't have anything go amiss with little Fan."

"Go amiss! with Sir Thomas. There is nobody he might not marry, Markham—not that anything has ever been said."

"Let him have anybody he pleases except little Fan. I won't have anything happen to Fan. She is not one that would stand it, like the rest of us. We are old stagers; we are trained for the stake; we know how to grin and bear it. But that little thing, she has never been brought up to it, and it would kill her. I won't have anything go wrong with little Fan."

"There is nothing going wrong with Frances. You are not talking with your usual sense, Markham. If that was coming, Frances would be a lucky girl."

Markham looked at her with his eyes all pursed up, nearly disappearing in the puckers round them. "Mother," he said, "we know a girl who was a very lucky girl, you and I. Remember Nelly Winterbourn."

It gave Lady Markham a shock to hear Nelly's name. "O Markham, the less we say of her the better," she cried.

There was another arrival while they talked —Claude Ramsay, with the flower in his coat a little rubbed by the greatcoat which he had taken off in the hall, though it was now June. "I heard you had come back," he said, dropping languidly into a chair by Constance. "I thought I would come and see if it was true."

"You see it is quite true."

"Yes; and you are looking as well as possible. Everything seems to agree with you. Do you know I was very nearly going out to that little place in the Riviera? I got all the *renseignements;* but then I heard that it got hot and the people went away."

"You ought to have come. Don't you know it is at the back of the east wind, and there are no draughts there?"

"What an ideal place!" said Claude. "I shall certainly go next winter, if you are going to be there."

## CHAPTER XLVI.

Frances slept very little all night; her mind was jarred and sore almost at every point. The day with all its strange experiences, and still more strange suggestions, had left her in a giddy round of the unreal, in which there seemed no ground to stand upon. Nelly Winterbourn was the first prodigy in that round of wonders. Why, with that immovable tragic face, had she intimated to Lady Markham the tenure upon which she held her fortune? Why had it been received as something conclusive on all sides? "There is an end of Nelly." But why? And then came her mission to her aunt, the impression that had been made on her mind—the hope that had dawned on Frances; and then the event which swept both hope and impression away,

and the bitter end that seemed to come to everything in the reappearance of Constance. Was it that she was jealous of Constance? Frances asked herself in the silence of the night, with noiseless bitter tears. The throbbing of her heart was all pain; life had become pain, and nothing more. Was it that she was jealous—*jealous* of her sister? It seemed to Frances that her heart was being wrung, pressed till the life came out of it in great drops under some giant's hands. She said to herself, No, no. It was only that Constance came in her careless grace, and the place was hers, wherever she came; and all Frances had done, or was trying to do, came to nought. Was that jealousy? She lay awake through the long hours of the summer night, seeing the early dawn grow blue, and then warm and lighten into the light of day. And then all the elements of chaos round her, which whirled and whirled and left no honest footing, came to a pause and disappeared, and one thing real, one fact remained—George Gaunt in his fever, lying rapt from all common life, taking no note of night or day. Perhaps the

tide might be turning for death or life, for this was once more the day that might be the crisis. The other matters blended into a phantasmagoria, of which Frances could not tell which part was false and which true, or if anything was true; but here was reality beyond dispute. She thought of the pale light stealing into his room, blinding the ineffectual candles; of his weary head on the pillow growing visible; of the long endless watch; and far away among the mountains, of the old people waiting and praying, and wondering what news the morning would bring them. This thought stung Frances into a keen life and energy, and took from her all reflection upon matters so abstract as that question whether or not she was jealous of Constance. What did it matter? so long as he could be brought back from the gates of death and the edge of the grave, so long as the father and mother could be saved from that awful and murderous blow. She got up hastily long before any one was stirring. There are moments when all our ineffectual thinkings, and even futile efforts, end in a sudden determination that

the thing must be done, and revelation of how to do it. She got up with a little tremor upon her, such as a great inventor might have when he saw at last his way clearly, or a poet when he had caught the spark of celestial fire. Is there any machine that was ever invented, or even any power so divine as the right way to save a life and deliver a soul? Frances' little frame was all tingling, but it made her mind clear and firm. She asked herself how she could have thought of any other but this way.

It was very early in the morning when she set out. If it had not been London, in which no dew falls, the paths would have been wet with dew; even in London, there was a magical something in the air which breathed of the morning, and which not all the housemaids' brooms and tradesmen's carts in the world could dispel. Frances walked on in the stillness, along the long silent line of the Park, where there was nobody save a little early schoolmistress, or perhaps a belated man about town, surprised by the morning, with red eyes and furtive looks, in the overcoat

which hid his evening clothes, hurrying home—to break the breadth of the sunshine, the soft morning light, which was neither too warm nor dazzling, but warmed gently, sweetly to the heart. Her trouble had departed from her in the resolution she had taken. She was very grave, not knowing whether death or life, sorrow or hope, might be in the air, but composed, because, whatever it was, it must now come, all being done that man could do. She did not hasten, but walked slowly, knowing how early she was, how astonished her aunt's servants would be to see her, unattended, walking up to the door. "I will arise and go to my father." Wherever these words can be said, there is peace in them, a sense of safety at least. There are, alas! many cases in which, with human fathers, they cannot be said; but Waring, whatever his faults might be, had not forfeited his child's confidence, and he would understand. To all human aches and miseries, to be understood is the one comfort above all others. Those to whom she had appealed before, had been sorry; they had been astonished; they had gazed at her with

troubled eyes. But her father would understand. This was the chief thing and the best. She went along under the trees, which were still fresh and green, through the scenes which, a little while later, would be astir with all the movements, the comedies, the tragedies, the confusions and complications of life. But now they lay like a part of the fair silent country, like the paths in a wood, like the glades in a park, all silent and mute, birds in the branches, dew upon the grass—a place where Town had abdicated, where Nature reigned.

Waring awoke betimes, being accustomed to the early hours of a primitive people. It was a curious experience to him to come down through a closed-up and silent house, where the sunshine came in between the chinks of the shutters, and all was as it had been in the confusion of the night. A frightened maidservant came before him to open the study, which his brother-in-law Clarendon had occupied till a late hour. Traces of the lawyer's vigil were still apparent enough—his waste-paper basket full of fragments; the little tray standing in the corner, which, even when hold-

ing nothing more than soda-water and claret, suggests dissipation in the morning. Waring was jarred by all this unpreparedness. He thought with a sigh of the bookroom in the Palazzo all open to the sweet morning air, before the sun had come round that way; and when he stepped out upon the little iron balcony attached to the window and looked out upon other backs of houses, all crowding round, the recollection of the blue seas, the waving palms, the great peaks, all carved against the brilliant sky, made him turn back in disgust. The mean London walls of yellow brick, the narrow houses, the little windows, all blinded with white blinds and curtains, so near that he could almost touch them—"However, it will not be like this at Hilborough," he said to himself. He was no longer in the mood in which he had left Bordighera; but yet, having left it, he was ready to acknowledge that Bordighera was now impossible. His life there had continued from year to year—it might have continued for ever, with Frances ignorant of all that had gone before; but the thread of life once broken, could be knitted again no more.

He acknowledged this to himself; and then he found that, in acknowledging it, he had brought himself face to face with all the gravest problems of his life. He had held them at arm's-length for years; but now they had to be decided, and there was no alternative. He must meet them; he must look them in the face. And *her*, too, he must look in the face. Life once more had come to a point at which neither habit nor the past could help him. All over again, as if he were a boy coming of age, it would have to be decided what it should be.

Waring was not at all surprised by the appearance of Frances fresh with the morning air about her. It seemed quite natural to him. He had forgotten all about the London streets, and how far it was from one point to another. He thought she had gained much in her short absence from him,—perhaps in learning how to act for herself, to think for herself, which she had acquired since she left him; for he was entirely unaware, and even quite incapable of being instructed, that Frances had lived her little life as far apart from him, and been as independent of him while sitting by his side

at Bordighera, as she could have been at the other end of the world. But he was impressed by the steady light of resolution, the cause of which was as yet unknown to him, which was shining in her eyes. She told him her story at once, without the little explanations that had been necessary to the others. When she said George Gaunt, he knew all that there was to say. The only thing that it was expedient to conceal was Markham's part in the catastrophe, which was, after all, not at all clear to Frances; and as Waring was not acquainted with Markham's reputation, there was no suggestion in his mind of the name that was wanting to explain how the young officer, knowing nobody, had found entrance into the society which had ruined him. Frances told her tale in few words. She was magnanimous, and said nothing of Constance on the one hand, any more than of Markham on the other. She told her father of the condition in which the young man lay—of his constant mutterings, so painful to hear, the Red and Black that came up, over and over again, in his confused thoughts, the distracting burden that awaited him if

he ever got free of that circle of confusion and pain—of the old people in Switzerland waiting for the daily news, not coming to him as they wished, because of that one dread yet vulgar difficulty which only she understood. "Mamma says, of course they would not hesitate at the expense. Oh no, no! they would not hesitate. But how can I make her understand? yet we know."

"How could she understand?" he said with a pale smile, which Frances knew. "*She* has never hesitated." It was all that jarred even upon her excited nerves and mind. The situation was so much more clear to him than to the others, to whom young Gaunt was a stranger. And Waring, too, was in his nature something of a Quixote to those who took him on the generous side. He listened—he understood; he remembered all that had been enacted under his eyes. The young fellow had gone to London in desperation, unsettled, and wounded by the woman to whom he had given his love—and he had fallen into the first snare that presented itself. It was weak, it was miserable; but it was not more than a man could

understand. When Frances found that at last her object was attained, the unlikeliness that it ever should have been attained, overwhelmed her even in the moment of victory. She clasped her arms round her father's arm, and laid down her head upon it, and, to his great surprise, burst into a passion of tears. "What is the matter? What has happened? Have I said anything to hurt you?" he cried, half touched, half vexed, not knowing what it was, smoothing her glossy hair half tenderly, half reluctantly, with his disengaged hand.

"Oh, it is nothing, nothing! It is my folly; it is—happiness. I have tried to tell them all, and no one would understand. But one's father —one's father is like no one else," cried Frances, with her cheek upon his sleeve.

Waring was altogether penetrated by these simple words, and by the childish action, which reminded him of the time when the little forlorn child he had carried away with him had no one but him in the world. "My dear," he said, "it makes me happy that you think so. I have been rather a failure, I fear, in most things; but if you think so, I can't have been

a failure all round." His heart grew very soft over his little girl. He was in a new world, though it was the old one. His sister, whom he had not seen for so long, had half disgusted him with her violent partisanship, though his was the party she upheld so strongly. And Constance, who had no hold of habitual union upon him, had exhibited all her faults to his eyes. But his little girl was still his little girl, and believed in her father. It brought a softening of all the ice and snow about his heart.

They walked together through the many streets to inquire for poor Gaunt, and were admitted with shakings of the head and downcast looks. He had passed a very disturbed night, though at present he seemed to sleep. The nurse who had been up all night, and was much depressed, was afraid that there were symptoms of a "change." "I think the parents should be sent for, sir," she said, addressing herself at once to Waring. These attendants did not mind what they said over the uneasy bed. "He don't know what we are saying, any more than the bed he lies

on. Look at him, miss, and tell me if you don't think there is a change?" Frances held fast by her father's arm. She was more diffident in his presence than she had been before. The sufferer's gaunt face was flushed, his lips moved, though, in his weakness, his words were not audible. The other nurse, who had come to relieve her colleague, and who was fresh and unwearied, was far more hopeful. But she, too, thought that "a change" might be approaching, and that it would be well to summon the friends. She went down-stairs with them to talk it over a little more. "It seems to me that he takes more notice than we are aware of," she said. "The ways of sick folks are that wonderful, we don't understand, not the half of them; seems to me that you have a kind of an influence, miss. Last night he changed after you were here, and took me for his mamma, and asked me what I meant, and said something about a Miss Una that was true, and a false Jessie or something. I wonder if your name is Miss Una, miss?" This inquiry was made while Waring was writing a telegram to the parents. Frances,

who was not very quick, could only wonder for a long time who Una was and Jessie. It was not till evening, nearly twelve hours after, that there suddenly came into her mind the false Duessa of the poet. And then the question remained, who was Una, and who Duessa? a question to which she could find no reply.

Frances remained with her father the greater part of the day. When she found that what she desired was to be done, there fell a strange kind of lull into her being, which unaccountably took away her strength, so that she scarcely felt herself able to hold up her head. She began to be aware that she had neither slept by night nor had any peace by day, and that a fever of the mind had been stealing upon her, a sort of reflection of the other fever, in which her patient was enveloped as in a living shroud. She was scarcely able to stand, and yet she could not rest. Had she not put force upon herself, she would have been sending to and fro all day, creeping thither on limbs that would scarcely support her, to know how he was, or if the change had yet appeared. She had not feared for his life before, having no tradi-

tion of death in her mind; but now an alarm grew upon her that any moment might see the blow fall, and that the parents might come in vain. It was while she stood at one of the windows of Mrs Clarendon's gloomy drawing-room, watching for the return of one of her messengers, that she saw her mother's well-known brougham drive up to the door. She turned round with a little cry of "Mamma" to where her father was sitting, in one of the seldom used chairs. Mrs Clarendon, who would not leave him for many minutes, was hovering by, wearying his fastidious mind with unnecessary solicitude, and a succession of questions which he neither could nor wished to answer. She flung up her arms when she heard Frances' cry. "Your mother! Oh, has she dared! Edward, go away, and let me meet her. She will not get much out of me."

"Do you think I am going to fly from my wife?" Waring said. He rose up very tremulous, yet with a certain dignity. "In that case, I should not have come here."

"But, Edward, you are not prepared. O Edward, be guided by me. If you once get into that woman's hands——"

"Hush!" he said; "her daughter is here." Then, with a smile: "When a lady comes to see me, I hope I can receive her still as a gentleman should, whoever she may be."

The door opened, and Lady Markham came in. She was very pale, yet flushed from moment to moment. She, who had usually such perfect self-command, betrayed her agitation by little movements, by the clasping and unclasping of her hands, by a hurried, slightly audible breathing. She stood for a moment without advancing, the door closing behind her, facing the agitated group. Frances, following an instinctive impulse, went hastily towards her mother as a maid of honour in an emergency might hurry to take her place behind the Queen. Mrs Clarendon on her side, with a similar impulse, drew nearer to her brother—the way was cleared between the two, once lovers, now antagonists. The pause was but for a moment. Lady Markham, after that

hesitation, came forward. She said: "Edward, I should be wanting in my duty if I did not come to welcome you home."

"Home!" he said, with a curious smile. Then he, too, came forward a little. "I accept your advances in the same spirit, Frances." She was holding out her hands to him with a little appeal, looking at him with eyes that sank and rose again—an emotion that was restrained by her age, by her matronly person, by the dignity of the woman, which could not be quenched by any flood of feeling. He took her hands in his with a strange timidity, hesitating, as if there might be something more, then let them drop, and they stood once again apart.

"I have to thank you, too," she said, "for bringing Constance back to me safe and well; and what is more, Edward, for this child." She put out her hand to Frances, and drew her close, so that the girl could feel the agitation in her mother's whole person, and knew that, weak as she was, she was a support to the other, who was so much stronger. "I owe you more thanks still for her—that she never had been

taught to think any harm of her mother, that she came back to me as innocent and true as she went away."

"If you found her so, Frances, it was to her own praise, rather than mine."

"Nay," she said with a tremulous smile, "I have not to learn now that the father of my children was fit to be trusted with a girl's mind —more, perhaps, than their mother—and the world together." She shook off this subject, which was too germane to the whole matter, with a little tremulous movement of her head and hands. "We must not enter on that," she said. "Though I am only a woman of the world, it might be too much for me. Discussion must be for another time. But we may be friends."

"So far as I am concerned."

"And I too, Edward. There are things even we might consult about—without prejudice, as the lawyers say—for the children's good."

"Whatever you wish my advice upon——"

"Yes, that is perhaps the way to put it," Lady Markham said, after a pause which looked like disappointment, and with an agitated smile.

"Will you be so friendly, then," she added, "as to dine at my house with the girls and me? No one you dislike will be there. Sir Thomas, who is in great excitement about your arrival; and perhaps Claude Ramsay, whom Constance has come back to marry."

"Then she has settled that?"

"I think so; yet no doubt she would like him to be seen by you. I hope you will come," she said, looking up at him with a smile.

"It will be very strange," he said, "to dine as a guest at your table."

"Yes, Edward; but everything is strange. We are so much older now than we were. We can afford, perhaps, to disagree, and yet be friends."

"I will come if it will give you any pleasure," he said.

"Certainly, it will give me pleasure." She had been standing all the time, not having even been offered a seat—an omission which neither he nor she had discovered. He did it now, placing with great politeness a chair for her; but she did not sit down.

"For the first time, perhaps it is enough,"

she said. "And Caroline thinks it more than enough. Good-bye, Edward. If you will believe me, I am—truly glad to see you: and I hope we may be friends."

She half raised her clasped hands again. This time he took them in both his, and leaning towards her, kissed her on the forehead. Frances felt the tremor that ran through her mother's frame. "Good-bye," she said, "till this evening." Only the girl knew why Lady Markham hurried from the room. She stopped in the hall below to regain her self-command and arrange her bonnet. "It is so long since we have met," she said, "it upsets me. Can you wonder, Frances? The woman in the end always feels it most. And then there are so many things to upset me just now. Constance and Markham—say nothing of Markham; do not mention his name—and even you—— "

"There is nothing about me to annoy you, mamma."

Lady Markham smiled with a face that was near crying. She gave a little tap with her finger upon Frances' cheek, and then she hurried away.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

The dinner, it need scarcely be said, was a strange one. Except in Constance, who was perfectly cool, and Claude, who was more concerned about a possible draught from a window than anything else, there was much agitation in the rest of the party. Lady Markham was nervously cordial, anxious to talk and to make everything "go"—which, indeed, she would have done far more effectually had she been able to retain her usual cheerful and benign composure. But there are some things which are scarcely possible even to the most accomplished woman of the world. How to place the guests, even, had been a trouble to her, almost too great to be faced. To place her husband by her side was more than she could bear, and where else could it be appro-

priate to place him, unless opposite to her, where the master of the house should sit? The difficulty was solved loosely by placing Constance there, and her father beside her. He sat between his daughters; while Ramsay and Sir Thomas were on either side of his wife. Under such circumstances, it was impossible that the conversation could be other than formal, with outbursts of somewhat conventional vivacity from Sir Thomas, supported by anxious responses from Lady Markham. Frances took refuge in saying nothing at all. And Waring sat like a ghost, with a smile on his face, in which there was a sort of pathetic humour, dashed with something that was half derision. To be sitting there at all was wonderful indeed, and to be listening to the small-talk of a London dinner-table, with all its little discussions, its talk of plays and pictures and people, its scraps of political life behind the scenes, its esoteric revelations on all subjects, was more wonderful still. He had half forgotten it; and to come thus at a single step into the midst of it all, and hear this babble floating on the air which was charged with so

many tragic elements, was more wonderful still. To think that they should all be looking at each other across the flowers and the crystal, and knowing what questions were to be solved between them, yet talking and expecting others to talk of the new tenor and the last scandal! It seemed to the stranger out of the wilds, who had been banished from society so long, that it was a thing incredible, when he was thus thrown into it again. There were allusions to many things which he did not understand. There was something, for instance, about Nelly Winterbourn which called forth a startling response from Lady Markham. "You must not," she said, "say anything about poor Nelly in this house. From my heart, I am sorry and grieved for her; but in the circumstances, what can any one do? The least said, the better, especially here." The pause after this was minute but marked, and Waring asked Constance, "Who is Nelly Winterbourn?"

"She is a young widow, papa. It was thought her husband had left her a large fortune; but he has left it to her on the condition that she should not marry again."

"Is that why she is not to be spoken of in this house?" said Waring, growing red. This explanation had been asked and given in an undertone. He thought it referred to the circumstances in which his own marriage had taken place—Lady Markham being a young widow with a large jointure; and that this was the reason why the other was not to be mentioned; and it gave him a hot sense of offence, restrained by the politeness which is exercised in society, but not always when the offenders are one's wife and children. It turned the tide of softened thoughts back upon his heart, and increased to fierceness the derision with which he listened to all the trifles that floated uppermost. When the ladies left the room, he did not meet the questioning, almost timid, look that Lady Markham threw upon him. He saw it, indeed, but he would not respond to it. That allusion had spoiled all the rest.

In the little interval after dinner, Claude Ramsay did his best to make himself agreeable. "I am very glad to see you back, sir," he said. "I told Lady Markham it was the

right thing. When a girl has a father, it's always odd that he shouldn't appear."

"Oh, you told Lady Markham that it was —the right thing?"

"A coincidence, wasn't it? when you were on your way," said Claude, perceiving the mistake he had made. "You know, sir," he added with a little hesitation, "that it has all been made up for a long time between Constance and me."

"Yes? What has all been made up? I understand that my daughter came out to me to——"

"Oh!" said Claude, interrupting hurriedly, "it is *that* that has all been made up. Constance has been very nice about it," he continued. "She has been making a study of the Riviera, and collecting all sorts of *renseignements;* for in most cases, it is necessary for me to winter abroad."

"That was what she was doing then—her object, I suppose?" said Waring with a grim smile.

"Besides the pleasure of visiting you, sir," said Claude, with what he felt to be great

tact. "She seems to have done a great deal of exploring, and she tells me she has found just the right site for the villa—and all the *renseignements*," he added. "To have been on the spot, and studied the aspect, and how the winds blow, is such a great thing; and to be near your place too," he said politely, by an after-thought.

"Which I hope is to be your place no more, Waring," said Sir Thomas. "Your own place is very empty, and craving for you all the time."

"It is too fine a question to say what is my own place," he said, with that pale indignant smile. "Things are seldom made any clearer by an absence of a dozen years."

"A great deal clearer—the mists blow away, and the hot fumes. Come, Waring, say you are glad you have come home."

"I suppose," said Claude, "you find it really too hot for summer on that coast. What would you say was the end of the season? May? Just when London begins to be possible, and most people have come to town."

"Is not that one of the *renseignements* Con-

stance has given you?" Waring asked with a short laugh; but he made no reply to the other questions. And then there was a little of the inevitable politics before the gentlemen went up-stairs. Lady Markham had been threatened with what in France is called an *attaque des nerfs*, when she reached the shelter of the drawing-room. She was a little hysterical, hardly able to get the better of the sobbing which assailed her. Constance stood apart, and looked on with a little surprise. "You know, mamma," she said reflectively, "an effort is the only thing. With an effort, you can stop it."

Frances was differently affected by this emotion. She, who had never learned to be familiar, stole behind her mother's chair and made her breast a pillow for Lady Markham's head,—a breast in which the heart was beating now high, now low, with excitement and despondency. She did not say anything; but there is sometimes comfort in a touch. It helped Lady Markham to subdue the unwonted spasm. She held close for a moment the arms which were over her shoulders, and she replied to Constance, "Yes, that is true. I

am ashamed of myself. I ought to know better —at my age."

"It has gone off on the whole very well," Constance said. And then she retired to a sofa and took up a book.

Lady Markham held Frances' hand in hers for a moment or two longer, then drew her towards her and kissed her, still without a word. They had approached nearer to each other in that silent encounter than in all that had passed before. Lady Markham's heart was full of many commotions; the past was rising up around her with all its agitating recollections. She looked back, and saw, oh, so clearly in that pale light which can never alter, the scenes that ought never to have been, the words that ought never to have been said, the faults, the mistakes—those things which were fixed there for ever, not to be forgotten. Could they ever be forgotten? Could any postscript be put to the finished story? Or was this strange meeting—unsought, scarcely desired on either side, into which the separated Two, who ought to have been One, seemed to have been driven without any will

of their own—was it to be mere useless additional pain, and no more?

The ladies were all very peacefully employed when the gentlemen came up-stairs. Lady Markham turned round as usual from her writing-table to receive them with a smile. Constance laid down her book. Frances, from her accustomed dim corner, lifted up her eyes to watch them as they came in. They stood in the middle of the room for a minute, and talked to each other according to the embarrassed usage of Englishmen, and then they distributed themselves. Sir Thomas fell to Frances' share. He turned to her eagerly, and took her hand and pressed it warmly. "We have done it," he said, in an excited whisper. "So far, all is victorious; but still there is a great deal more to do."

"I think it is Constance that has done it," Frances said.

"She has worked for us—without meaning it—no doubt. But I am not going to give up the credit to Constance; and there is still a great deal to do. You must not lay down your arms, my dear. You and I, we have the

ball at our feet: but there is a great deal still to do."

Frances made no reply. The corner which she had chosen for herself was almost concealed behind a screen which parted the room in two. The other group made a picture far enough withdrawn to gain perspective. Waring stood near his wife, who from time to time gave him a look, half watchful, half wistful, and sometimes made a remark, to which he gave a brief reply. His attitude and hers told a story; but it was a confused and uncertain one, of which the end was all darkness. They were together, but fortuitously, without any will of their own; and between them was a gulf fixed. Which would cross it, or was it possible that it ever could be crossed at all? The room was very silent, for the conversation was not lively between Constance and Claude on the sofa; and Sir Thomas was silent, watching too. All was so quiet, indeed, that every sound was audible without; but there was no expectation of any interruption, nobody looked for anything, there was a perfect indifference to outside sounds. So much so, that for a moment

the ladies were scarcely startled by the familiar noise, so constantly heard, of Markham's hansom drawing up at the door. It could not be Markham; he was out of the way, disposed of till next morning. But Lady Markham, with that presentiment which springs up most strongly when every avenue by which harm can come seems stopped, started, then rose to her feet with alarm. "It can't surely be—— Oh, what has brought him here!" she cried, and looked at Claude, to bid him, with her eyes, rush to meet him, stop him, keep him from coming in. But Claude did not understand her eyes.

As for Waring, seeing that something had gone wrong in the programme, but not guessing what it was, he accepted her movement as a dismissal, and quietly joined his daughter and his friend behind the screen. The two men got behind it altogether, showing only where their heads passed its line; but the light was not bright in that corner, and the new-comer was full of his own affairs. For it was Markham, who came in rapidly, stopped by no wise agent, or suggestion of expediency. He came into the room dressed in light morning-clothes, greenish,

grayish, yellowish, like the colour of his sandy hair and complexion. He came in with his face puckered up and twitching, as it did when he was excited. His mother, Constance, Claude, sunk in the corner of the sofa, were all he saw; and he took no notice of Claude. He crossed that little opening amid the fashionably crowded furniture, and went and placed himself in front of the fireplace, which was full at this season of flowers, not of fire. From that point of vantage he greeted them with his usual laugh, but broken and embarrassed. "Well, mother—well, Con; you thought you were clear of me for to-night."

"I did not expect you, Markham. Is anything—has anything——?"

"Gone wrong?" he said. "No—I don't know that anything has gone wrong. That depends on how you look at it. I've been in the country all day."

"Yes, Markham; so I know."

"But not where I was going," he said. His laugh broke out again, quite irrelevant and inappropriate. "I've seen Nelly," he said.

"Markham!" his mother cried, with a tone

of wonder, disapproval, indignation, such as had never been heard in her voice before, through all that had been said and understood concerning Markham and Nelly Winterbourn. She had sunk into her chair, but now rose again in distress and anxiety. "Oh," she cried, "how could you? how could you? I thought you had some true feeling. O Markham, how unworthy of you *now* to vex and compromise that poor girl!"

He made no answer for a moment, but moistened his lips, with a sound that seemed like a ghost of the habitual chuckle. "Yes," he said, "I know you made it all up that the chapter was closed *now;* but I never said so, mother. Nelly's where she was before, when we hadn't the courage to do anything. Only worse: shamed and put in bondage by that miserable beggar's will. And you all took it for granted that there was an end between her and me. I was waiting to marry her when she was free and rich, you all thought; but I wasn't bound, to be sure, nor the sort of man to think of it twice when I knew she would be poor."

"Markham! no one ever said, nobody thought——"

"Oh, I know very well what people thought—and said too, for that matter," said Markham. "I hope a fellow like me knows Society well enough for that. A pair of old stagers like Nelly and me, of course we knew what everybody said. Well, mammy, you're mistaken this time, that's all. There's nothing to be taken for granted in this world. Nelly's game, and so am I. As soon as it's what you call decent, and the crape business done with—for she has always done her duty by him, the wretched fellow, as everybody knows——"

"Markham!" his mother cried, almost with a shriek—"why, it is ruin, destruction. I must speak to Nelly—ruin both to her and you."

He laughed. "Or else the t'other thing—salvation, you know. Anyhow, Nelly's game for it, and so am I."

There suddenly glided into the light at this moment a little figure, white, rapid, noiseless, and caught Markham's arm in both hers. "O Markham! O Markham!" cried Frances, "I am so glad! I never believed it; I always

knew it. I am so glad!" and began to cry, clinging to his arm.

Markham's puckered countenance twitched and puckered more and more. His chuckle sounded over her half like a sob. "Look here," he said. "Here's the little one approves. She's the one to judge, the sort of still small voice—eh, mother? Come; I've got far better than I deserve: I've got little Fan on my side."

Lady Markham wrung her hands with an impatience which partly arose from her own better instincts. The words which she wanted would not come to her lips. "The child, what can she know!" she cried, and could say no more.

"Stand by me, little Fan," said Markham, holding his sister close to him. "Mother, it's not a small thing that could part you and me; that is what I feel, nothing else. For the rest, we'll take the Priory, Nelly and I, and be very jolly upon nothing. Mother, you didn't think in your heart that YOUR son was a base little beggar, no better than Winterbourn?"

Lady Markham made no reply. She sank

down in her chair and covered her face with her hands. In the climax of so many emotions, she was overwhelmed. She could not stand up against Markham: in her husband's presence, with everything hanging in the balance, she could say nothing. The worldly wisdom she had learned melted away from her. Her heart was stirred to its depths, and the conventional bonds restrained it no more. A kind of sweet bitterness—a sense of desertion, yet hope; of secret approval, yet opposition—disabled her altogether. One or two convulsive sobs shook her frame. She was able to say nothing, nothing, and was silent, covering her face with her hands.

Waring had seen Markham come in with angry displeasure. He had listened with that keen curiosity of antagonism which is almost as warm as the interest of love, to hear what he had to say. Sir Thomas, standing by his side, threw in a word or two to explain, seeing an opportunity in this new development of affairs. But nothing was really altered until Frances rose. Her father watched her with a poignant anxiety, wonder, excitement. When she threw

herself upon her brother's arm, and, all alone in her youth, gave him her approval, the effect upon the mind of her father was very strange. He frowned and turned away, then came back and looked again. His daughter, his little white spotless child, thrown upon the shoulder of the young man whom he had believed he hated, his wife's son, who had been always in his way. It was intolerable. He must spring forward, he thought, and pluck her away. But Markham's stifled cry of emotion and happiness somehow arrested Waring. He looked again, and there was something tender, pathetic, in the group. He began to perceive dimly how it was. Markham was making a resolution which, for a man of his kind, was heroic; and the little sister, the child, his own child, of his training, not of the world, had gone in her innocence and consecrated it with her approval. The approval of little Frances! And Markham had the heart to feel that in that approval there was something beyond and above everything else that could be said to him. Waring, too, like his wife, was in a condition of mind which offered no defence against the first

touch of nature which was strong enough to reach him. He was open not to everyday reasoning, but to the sudden prick of a keen unhabitual feeling. A sudden impulse came upon him in this softened, excited mood. Had he paused to think, he would have turned his back upon that scene and hurried away, to be out of the contagion. But, fortunately, he did not pause to think. He went forward quickly, laying his hand upon the back of the chair in which Lady Markham sat, struggling for calm —and confronted his old antagonist, his boy-enemy of former times, who recognised him suddenly, with a gasp of astonishment. "Markham," he said, "if I understand rightly, you are acting like a true and honourable man. Perhaps I have not done you justice, hitherto. Your mother does not seem able to say anything. I believe in my little girl's instinct. If it will do you any good, you have my approval too."

Markham's slackened arm dropped to his side, though Frances embraced it still. His very jaw dropped in the amazement, almost consternation, of this sudden appearance. "Sir," he stammered, "your—your—support

—your—friendship would be all I could——" And here his voice failed him, and he said no more.

Then Waring went a step further by an unaccountable impulse, which afterwards he could not understand. He held out one hand, still holding with the other the back of Lady Markham's chair. "I know what the loss will be to your mother," he said; "but perhaps—perhaps, if she pleases: that may be made up too."

She removed her hands suddenly and looked up at him. There was not a particle of colour in her cheek. The hurrying of her heart parched her open lips. The two men clasped hands over her, and she saw them through a mist, for a moment side by side.

At this moment of extreme agitation and excitement, Lady Markham's butler suddenly opened the drawing-room door. He came in with that solemnity of countenance with which, in his class, it is thought proper to name all that is preliminary to death. "If you please, my lady," he said, "there's a man below has come to say that the fever's come to a crisis, and that there's a change."

"You mean Captain Gaunt," cried Lady Markham, rising with a half-stupefied look. She was so much worn by these divers emotions, that she did not see where she went.

"Captain Gaunt!" said Constance with a low cry.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

Lady Markham was a woman, everybody knew, who never hesitated when she realised a thing to be her duty, especially in all that concerned hospitals and the sick. She appeared by George Gaunt's bedside in the middle of what seemed to him a terrible, long, endless night. It was not yet midnight, indeed; but they do not reckon by hours in the darkness through which he was drifting, through which there flashed upon his eyes confused gleams of scenes that were like scenes upon a stage all surrounded by darkness. The change had come. One of the nurses, the depressed one, thought it was for death; the other, possessed by the excitement of that great struggle, in which sometimes it appears that one human creature can visibly help another to hold the last span of soil on

which human foot can stand, stood by the bed, almost carried away by what to her was like the frenzy of battle to a soldier, watching to see where she could strike a blow at the adversary, or drag the champion a hair's-breadth further on the side of victory. There appeared to him at that moment two forms floating in the air—both white, bright, with the light upon them, radiant as with some glory of their own to the gaze of fever. He remembered them afterwards as if they had floated out of the chamber, disembodied, two faces, nothing more; and then all again was night. "He's talked a deal about his mother, poor gentleman. He'll never live to see his mother," said the melancholy attendant, shaking her head. "Hush," said the other under her breath. "Don't you know we can't tell what he hears and what he don't hear?" Lady Markham was of this opinion too. She called the doleful woman with her outside the door, and left the last battle to be fought out. Frances stood on the other side of the bed. How she came there, why she was allowed to come, neither she nor any one knew. She stood looking at him with an awe in her young soul which

silenced every other feeling. Nelly Winterbourn had been afraid of death, of seeing or coming near it. But Frances was not afraid. She stood, forgetting everything, with her head thrown back, her eyes expanded, her heart dilating and swelling in her bosom. She seemed to herself to be struggling too, gasping with his efforts for breath, helping him—oh, if she could help him!—saying her simple prayers involuntarily, sometimes aloud. Over and over again, in the confusion and darkness and hurrying of the last battle, there would come to him a glimpse of that face. It floated over him, the light all concentrated in it—then rolling clouds and gloom.

It was nearly morning when the doctor came. "Still living?"—"Alive; but that is all," was the brief interchange outside the door. He would have been surprised, had he had any time for extraneous emotions, to see on the other side of the patient's bed, softly winnowing the air with a large fan, a girl in evening dress, pearls gleaming upon her white neck, standing rapt and half-unconscious in the midst of the unwonted scene. But the doctor had

no time to be surprised. He went through his examination in that silence which sickens the very heart of the lookers-on. Then he said, briefly, "It all depends now on the strength whether we can pull him through. The fever is gone; but he is as weak as water. Keep him in life twelve hours longer, and he'll do."

Twelve hours!—one whole long lingering endless summer day. Lady Markham, with her own affairs at such a crisis, had not hesitated. She came in now, having got a change of dress, and sent the weary nurse, who had stood over him all night, away. Blessed be fashion, when its fads are for angels' work! Noiselessly into the room came with her, clean, fresh, and cool, everything that could restore. The morning light came softly in, the air from the open windows. Freshness and hope were in her face. She gave her daughter a look, a smile. "He may be weak, but he has never given in," she said. Reinforcements upon the field of battle. In a few hours, which were as a year, the hopeful nurse was back again refreshed. And thus the endless day went on. Noon, and still he lived. Markham walked about the little

street with his pockets full of small moneys, buying off every costermonger or wandering street vendor of small-wares, boldly interfering with the liberty of the subject, stopping indignant cabs, and carts half paralysed with slow astonishment. It was scarcely necessary, for the patient's brain was not yet sufficiently clear to be sensitive to noises; but it was something to do for him. A whole cycle of wonder had gone round, but there was no time to think of it in the absorbing interest of this. Waring had employed his wife's son to clear off those debts, which, if the old General ever knew of them, would add stings to sorrow—which, if the young man mended, would be a crushing weight round his neck. Waring had done this without a word or look that inferred that Markham was to blame. The age of miracles had come back; but, as would happen, perhaps, if that age did come back, no one had time or thought to give to the prodigies, for the profounder interest which no wonder could equal, the fight between death and life—the sudden revelation, in common life, of all the mysteries that make humanity what it is—the love which

made a little worldling triumphant over every base suggestion—the pity that carried a woman out of herself and her own complicated affairs, to stand by another woman's son in the last mortal crisis—the nature which suspended life in every one of all these differing human creatures, and half obliterated, in thought of another, the interests that were their own.

Through the dreadful night and through the endless sunshine of that day, a June day, lavish of light and pleasure, reluctant to relinquish a moment of its joy and triumph, the height of summer days, the old people, the old General and his wife, the father and mother, travelled without pause, with few words, with little hope, daring to say nothing to each other except faint questions and calculations as to when they could be there. When they could be there! They did not put the other question to each other, but within themselves, repeated it without ceasing: Would they be there before——? Would they be there in time?—to see him once again. They scarcely breathed when the cab, blundering along, got to the entrance of a little street, where it was

stopped by a wild figure in a grey overcoat, which rushed at the horse and held him back. Then the old General rose in his wrath: "Drive on, man! drive on. Ride him down, whoever the fool is." And then, somewhat as those faces had appeared at the sick man's bedside, there came at the cab window an ugly little face, all puckers and light, half recognised as a .bringer of good tidings, half hated as an obstruction, saying: "All right—all right. I'm here to stop noises. He's going to pull through."

"Mamma," said Constance next evening, when all their excitement and emotions were softened down, "I hope you told Mrs Gaunt that I had been there?"

"My dear, Mrs Gaunt was not thinking of either you or me. Perhaps she might be conscious of Frances; I don't know even that. When one's child is dying, it does not matter to one who shows feeling. By-and-by, no doubt, she will be grateful to us all."

"Not to me—never to me."

"Perhaps she has no reason, Con," her mother said.

"I am sure I cannot tell you, mamma. If he had died, of course—though even that would not have been my fault. I amused him very much for six weeks, and then he thought I behaved very badly to him. But all the time I felt sure that it would really do him no harm. I think it was cheap to buy at that price all your interest and everything that has been done for him—not to speak of the experience in life."

Lady Markham shook her head. "Our experiences in life are sometimes not worth the price we pay for them; and to make another pay——"

"Oh!" said Constance with a toss of her head, shaking off self-reproach and this mild answer together. "It appears that there is some post his father wants for him to keep him at home; and Claude will move heaven and earth—that's to say the Horse Guards and all the other authorities—to get it. Mamma," she added after a pause, "Frances will marry him, if you don't mind."

"Marry him!" cried Lady Markham with a shriek of alarm; "that is what can never be."

Meanwhile, Frances was walking back from Mrs Gaunt's lodging, where the poor lady, all tremulous and shaken with joy and weariness, had been pouring into her sympathetic ears all the anguish of the waiting, now so happily over, and weeping over the kindness of everybody—everybody was so kind. What would have happened had not everybody been so kind? Frances had soothed her into calm, and coming down-stairs, had met Sir Thomas at the door with his inquiries. He looked a little grave, she thought, somewhat preoccupied. "I am very glad," he said, "to have the chance of a talk with you, Frances. Are you going to walk? Then I will see you home."

Frances looked up in his face with simple pleasure. She tripped along by his side like a little girl, as she was. They might have been father and daughter smiling to each other, a pretty sight as they went upon their way. But Sir Thomas's smile was grave. "I want to speak to you on some serious subjects," he said.

"About mamma? Oh, don't you think, Sir Thomas, it is coming all right?"

"Not about your mother. It is coming all right, thank God, better than I ever hoped. This is about myself. Frances, give me your advice. You have seen a great deal since you came to town. What with Nelly Winterbourn and poor young Gaunt, and all that has happened in your own family, you have acquired what Con calls experience in life."

Frances' small countenance grew grave too. "I don't think it can be true life," she said.

He gave a little laugh, in which there was a tinge of embarrassment. "From your experience," he said, "tell me: would you ever advise, Frances, a marriage between a girl like you—mind you, a good girl, that would do her duty, not in Nelly Winterbourn's way—and an elderly, rather worldly man?"

"Oh no, no, Sir Thomas," cried the girl; and then she paused a little, and said to herself that perhaps she might have hurt Sir Thomas's feelings by so distinct an expression. She faltered a little, and added: "It would depend, wouldn't it, upon who they were?"

"A little, perhaps," he said. "But I am glad I have had your first unbiassed judgment.

Now for particulars. The man is not a bad old fellow, and would take care of her. He is rich, and would provide for her—not like that hound Winterbourn. Oh, you need not make that gesture, my dear, as if money meant nothing; for it means a great deal. And the girl is as good a little thing as ever was born. Society has got talking about it; it has been spread abroad everywhere; and perhaps if it comes to nothing, it may do her harm. Now, with those further lights, let me have your deliverance. And remember, it is very serious —not play at all."

"I have not enough lights, Sir Thomas. Does she," said Frances, with a slight hesitation—"love him? And does he love her?"

"He is very fond of her; I'll say that for him," said Sir Thomas hurriedly. "Not perhaps in the boy-and-girl way. And she—well, if you put me to it, I think she likes him, Frances. They are as friendly as possible together. She would go to him, I believe, with any of her little difficulties. And he has as much faith in her—as much faith as in—— I can't put a limit to his faith in her," he said.

Frances looked up at him with the grave judicial look into which she had been forming her soft face. "All you say, Sir Thomas, looks like a father and child. I would do that to papa—or to you."

Here he burst, to her astonishment, into a great fit of laughter, not without a little tremor, as of some other feeling in it. "You are a little Daniel," he said. "That's quite conclusive, my dear. Oh, wise young judge, how I do honour thee!"

"But——" Frances cried, a little bewildered. Then she added: "Well, you may laugh at me if you like. Of course, I am no judge; but if the gentleman is so like her father, cannot she be quite happy in being fond of him, instead of——? Oh no! Marrying is quite different—quite, *quite* different. I feel sure she would think so, if you were to ask her, herself," she said.

"And what about the poor old man?"

"You did not say he was a poor old man; you said he was elderly, which means——"

"About my age."

"That is not an old man. And worldly—

which is not like you. I think, if he is what you say, that he would like better to keep his friend; because people can be friends, Sir Thomas, don't you think, though one is young and one is old?"

"Certainly, Frances—witness you and me."

She took his arm affectionately of her own accord and gave it a little kind pressure. "That is just what I was thinking," she said, with the pleasantest smile in the world.

Sir Thomas took Lady Markham aside in the evening and repeated this conversation. "I don't know who can have put such an absurd rumour about," he said.

"Nor I," said Lady Markham; "but there are rumours about every one. It is not worth while taking any notice of them."

"But if I had thought Frances would have liked it, I should never have hesitated a moment."

"She might not what you call like it," said Lady Markham, dubiously; "and yet she might——"

"Be talked into it, for her good? I wonder," said Sir Thomas, with spirit, "whether my old

friend, who has always been a model woman in my eyes, thinks that would be very creditable to me?"

Lady Markham gave a little conscious guilty laugh, and then, oddly enough, which was so unlike her—twenty-four hours in a sickroom is trying to any one—began to cry. "You flatter me with reproaches," she said. "Markham asks me if I expect *my* son to be base; and you ask me how I can be so base myself, being your model woman. I am not a model woman; I am only a woman of the world, that has been trying to do my best for my own. And look there," she said, drying her eyes; "I have succeeded very well with Con. She will be quite happy in her way."

"And now," said Sir Thomas after a pause, "dear friend, who are still my model woman, how about your own affairs?"

She blushed celestial rosy red, as if she had been a girl. "Oh," she said, "I am going down with Edward to Hilborough to see what it wants to make it habitable. If it is not too damp, and we can get it put in order—I am quite up in the sanitary part of it, you know—

he means to send the Gaunts there with their son to recruit, when he is well enough. I am so glad to be able to do something for his old neighbours. And then we shall have time ourselves, before the season is over, to settle what we shall do."

The reader is far too knowing in such matters not to be able to divine how the marriages followed each other in the Waring family within the course of that year. Young Gaunt, when he got better, confused with his illness, soothed by the weakness of his convalescence and all the tender cares about him, came at last to believe that the debts which had driven him out of his senses had been nothing but a bad dream. He consulted Markham about them, detailing his broken recollections. Markham replied with a perfectly opaque countenance: "You must have been dreaming, old man. Nightmares take that form the same as another. Never heard half a word from any side about it; and you know those fellows, if you owed them sixpence and didn't pay, would publish it in every club in London. It has been a bad dream. But look here," he added; "don't you ever go in for that

sort of thing again. Your head won't stand it. I'm going to set you the example," he said, with his laugh. "Never—if I should live to be a hundred," Gaunt cried with fervour. The sensation of this extraordinary escape, which he could not understand, the relief of having nothing to confess to the General, nothing to bring tears from his mother's eyes, affected him like a miraculous interposition of God, which no doubt it was, though he never knew how. There was another vision which belonged to the time of his illness, but which was less apocryphal, as it turned out—the vision of those two forms through the mist—of one, all white, with pearls on the milky throat, which had been somehow accompanied in his mind with a private comment that at last, false Duessa being gone for ever, the true Una had come to him. After a while, in the greenness of Hilborough, amid the cool shade, he learned to fathom how that was.

But were we to enter into all the processes by which Lady Markham changed from the "That can never be!" of her first light on the subject, to giving a reluctant consent to

Frances' marriage, we should require another volume. It may be enough to say that in after-days, Captain Gaunt—but he was then Colonel—thought Constance a very handsome woman, yet could not understand how any one in his senses could consider the wife of Claude Ramsay worthy of a moment's comparison with his own. "Handsome, yes, no doubt," he would say; "and so is Nelly Markham, for that matter,—but of the earth, earthy, or of the world, worldly; whereas Frances——"

Words failed to express the difference, which was one with which words had nothing to do.

THE END.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS.

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