

A G N E S.

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ETC. ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

Lady Charlton's Visit.

ROGER TREVELYAN showed a little anxiety next morning about his wife's toilette—not that he said much to herself on the subject, but that Agnes, whose faculties of observation were a little excited, divined that he had intimated to Mademoiselle Louise that her mistress's dress required special care, which, on the whole, was not a mode of action agreeable to Agnes. Her relief was great, however, when she found herself permitted to put on the dress which she herself suggested, and which was the most simple she possessed. It was, besides, one in which Agnes felt happier than usual, seeing that it was made as nearly on the model of her old grey Windholm dress as an elegant Parisian *confection* permitted. It was a refined version of the blacksmith's daughter which appeared in this second grey gown, and Agnes was vaguely conscious of the

difference ; but still, notwithstanding the difference, it was the same ; and then Louise took the opportunity of applauding the good taste of madame. This was a compliment extremely grateful to her feelings at the moment. Had it really been good taste, and not a stupid girlish fancy, that made her like her gown of grey ? And was that why Roger had ordered for her another dress so nearly the same, though so much more dainty ? This latter idea, however, spoiled her pleasure a little, for she had accepted the grey dress not as a proof of her own good taste approved by her husband, but as one of those delicate flatteries of love which are all the more exquisite when they have nothing to do with taste. If it was not that the dress in which he had first seen her was beautiful to Roger, apart altogether from its intrinsic qualities, his gift of a second like it became an ordinary gift, about which there was no need for any particular sentiment ; and, in fact, this consideration restored the composure of the young wife as she completed her simple toilette. And as the morning passed, Agnes could not help smiling a little at her husband's anxiety. He went round the room, pulling the things about, with a vain attempt after that elegant disorder which can only be made by a woman. Roger's efforts resulted

simply in a general aspect of untidiness, which offended the eye of Agnes ; but, unfortunately, her ideas were still in a rudimentary state on this point. She put the disordered articles "straight" again, with a rectangular correctness which was more like the blacksmith's parlour than Mrs. Trevelyan's drawing-room, and Roger paused with dismay to perceive that in this particular Agnes had not seen her deficiencies. The only thing he could do, was to toss some books on the table after his own fashion, and retire to the window in a little fume of impatience. "Lottie Charlton has not half the head, nor the heart—nor anything," the vexed husband said to himself ; "she is no more to be compared to Agnes than—than Louise is ; but how different *her* room would have looked!"—and the young man glanced with vexation round the tidy apartment. As for Agnes, the only thing she could see to find fault with was the "litter" on the table, and when Roger dragged her shawl and hat into the room and threw them down on the sofa, she thought he was mad. Before Lady Charlton made her appearance, Mrs. Trevelyan took away the hat, and put back some of the chairs into "their proper places ;" and this aspect of affairs produced, as might have been expected, its natural effect upon the visitors, whose eyes were

very widely awake to signs of this description. Roger, who had been absent for a moment, and who entered with them, had to rush about, bewildered, and seek chairs for his amused visitors from the prim row which stood against the wall.

“I believe you don’t know our county, Mrs. Trevelyan,” said Lady Charlton. “I assure you it is one of the best counties in England for society, as well as other things. You will find us a little odd-fashioned, I dare say, if you have been used to going a great deal into the world.”

“Oh no—not at all,” said Agnes, with a sudden blush covering her face.

“No?—to be sure, you are very young,” said the visitor. “I do not, for my part, approve of bringing girls out too young. My Lottie was only seventeen when she burst into society—and of course people will say she is fifty in a year or two—but an only daughter is always wilful. I cannot think how my friend Roger managed matters so slyly. I actually never heard a word of his marriage till I had the pleasure of seeing you.”

“A noisy wedding is always a horrible bore,” said Roger, coming to the rescue. “I suppose ladies like it, but it’s something too serious to the chief sufferer.”

“That is because nobody takes any notice of

the unhappy bridegroom," said Miss Charlton. "He is a kind of necessary evil; the best thing would be to keep him in a box until the moment when it is necessary for some one to take the bride away. The wretch always looks like an ogre, ready to eat the poor girl up and pick her bones. Now, didn't he, Mrs. Trevelyan—I appeal to you?"

"Don't talk such nonsense, Lottie, I beg," said her mother. "I feel sure Mrs. Trevelyan thought nothing of the kind. It will be so nice for Roger to show you our fine scenery for the first time. Which is your own county? It depends so much on what kind of landscape one has been used to, whether one appreciates it or not."

"Oh, I have always lived—not very far from London," said Agnes, reading a warning, which only confused her, in Roger's eye.

"Not very far from London," said Lady Charlton—"but in which direction? London is such a large word. If it was in Surrey, I am sure you must know the Umfravilles. *She* is *such* an old friend of mine."

"But it was—in—Middlesex," said poor Agnes, more perplexed than ever.

"Oh," said Lady Charlton, "then we know quantities of people there. Why, we spent last Christmas at Wentmore, and I think every soul

in the county came to dinner while we were there. We must have met you, or some of your family. What an odd coincidence, Lottie! Mrs. St. Maur is charming, is she not?"

"I am afraid you must not expect my wife to know many people," said Roger, who was a little flushed, while Agnes, driven to her wit's end, had lost her usual grace and sat bolt upright in her chair, in a state of mind indescribable, feeling herself an impostor and pretender who was about to be found out. "She has always been a little recluse. I don't think a French girl brought up in a convent could have seen less of the world."

"Oh, a convent!—were you brought up in a convent?" said Miss Lottie, who began to enter into the spirit of the sport. "Then you are sure to have a beautiful accent, and I *must* have you to talk French with me. *J'ai l'accent le plus detestable, moi.* It is all along of not being properly brought up. Mamma ought to have had us taught before we could speak—but I assure you it is quite odious to hear us, both Jack and me."

"I do wish you would not talk such nonsense, Lottie," said her mother, unconsciously defeating this new line of attack. "If you do not speak French well, it is entirely your own fault. But as for knowing people, I am sure, when Mrs.

Trevelyan and I come to talk it over, we shall find that we have several mutual friends. I assure you it is quite extraordinary to find how people are linked together. I always say everybody is connected with everybody else, and I don't think I ever talked to anyone for half an hour, without finding out that some one else was the dearest friend of both. But in the meantime, you have not given us any of your news. How is Beatrice? Is not she charming, Mrs. Trevelyan?—such a good manner, and *still* so handsome. I remember when she was one of the prettiest girls in Cornwall. But *that* passes, you know; and that great friend of hers, Mrs. Cadogan. Poor thing, what a sad, sad story that was!”

“What was?” asked Roger, eagerly. “We have been away all summer, and neither Agnes nor I are up in the news.”

“Ah, honeymooning,” said Lady Charlton, with a smile; but she gave her daughter an expressive glance. And all this time Agnes sat upright in her chair, with words fluttering upon her lips, which Roger's look prevented her from uttering, and with a miserable sense of guilt, as though she was there in disguise and might be found out at any moment. Why might she not say that she did not know Beatrice, and was innocent of any news about anybody? After

all, it was not a crime to be ignorant of people who had never come in her way. Even Mrs. Rogers, the baker, who was considered very particular in Windholm, would never have dreamt of demanding that a new-comer should know all the bakers of her district. But this suggestion came much later, when Agnes had time to think, and began to see faintly a dim gleam of absurdity in the situation, which lightened its weight.

In the meantime, the horror and pain were unmitigated, and the poor young wife sat silent, not only like a culprit, but like a fool, without a word to say.

And then a narrative ensued, to which she listened abstractedly, with wretched attempts to appear interested. But it was full of names which she heard for the first time, and personal allusions of which she could not possibly understand the meaning. Notwithstanding Roger's anxiety, he grew interested after a while, and he and Lady Charlton and Lottie maintained the conversation briskly, leaving poor Agnes so solitary, so ignorant, so foreign to the society which they all knew, that, if she had relaxed her self-control for a moment, she might have burst into tears or fainted—two things equally horrible to think of. Agnes, however, though feeling all the pain of her position vividly, had fortunately a

power of self-control hitherto unknown to herself. She was like a young soldier who finds himself armed without knowing it with the weapons most essential to his safety, which he uses only by instinct, without any training. Agnes had come into the world with all that armoury for which, in her peaceful life, she had found no use; and there was something piteous in the sensation with which she became aware of the shield and buckler which nature had provided her with, but which, up to that moment, she had never wanted before. She smiled over this unsuspected corselet at her enemies when they made a feint of appealing to her. It was evident to Agnes that Lady Charlton and Miss Lottie were as conscious of her ignorance as she herself was, and she held her shield all the more firmly in consequence of these attempts to make her failure apparent.

“Now we must really go,” said Lady Charlton; “I am afraid you must think me a sad gossip, but it is so pleasant to have so much to tell! You must have made your husband quite careless of everything but yourself, which is very naughty of you; though, to be sure, there is nothing else to be expected in a honeymoon! Good morning, Mrs. Trevelyan. Roger is an old friend of ours, and we must see a great deal of you,” said my

lady, graciously. She looked at Roger as she spoke, but still it was Agnes whom she addressed.

“Good-bye,” said Miss Charlton; “mamma will never let you rest till she has found out that you know some people we know. It is her passion,” said the younger assailant with a smile, not knowing in the least that the young creature she was speaking to—younger than herself by several years—had in her desperation clutched at her natural weapons, and was no longer a defenceless creature, unable to protect herself.

“Good-bye,” said Agnes. “But I should like Lady Charlton to know that what Mr. Trevelyan said was quite true, and that I don’t know anybody;—except some poor people, whom I am sure you did not meet in Middlesex,” she added, drawing her breath a little quick, and smiling in her turn, with eyes which saw the sport as distinctly as Lottie did. The two ladies went out of the room quickly after this, with a sense of discomfiture which the simple words of Agnes seemed totally inadequate to produce.

“Goodness, what an impertinent girl! What does she mean by her poor people?” Lady Charlton said, with a flushed and uncomfortable countenance; and even Miss Lottie withdrew downstairs with a consciousness of defeat.

Naturally, the moment after their exit was an

anxious one to the husband and wife, both of whom preserved a kind of breathless silence, expecting the other to speak. Roger, for his part, expected Agnes to burst into tears and make her complaint over her visitors' rudeness; and Agnes, who felt herself wounded, expected, perhaps, an apology from her husband, perhaps some tender consolatory speeches, perhaps a little admonition, and entreaty that she would try to talk to his friends. But as each waited for the other to begin, there ensued an uncomfortable expectant silence, which was exciting, and felt to each like a defiance. It might have been better for both if they had spoken; but neither did speak, and the uncomfortable pause settled down between them as if it had been something actual and tangible. When the opportunity was lost, both concluded that it was not for her or him to begin complaining; and so a sense of mingled disappointment and relief, and tantalizing failure, took the place of their usual sympathy. The honeymoon was over for ever and ever. After a few minutes, Agnes drew her chair to the fire with a nervous shivering to which she was subject when she had been anyhow excited, and Roger took up his hat.

"This day is lost for any sight-seeing," he said; "that's always the way with morning visitors; they waste one's time dreadfully. I'll

go and have a chat with Jack Charlton before dinner, and perhaps bring him up to see you. I think you'll like *him*."

"Will he ask me how many people I know?" said Agnes, not without a gleam of humour; but Roger made believe that he had not heard the question, and hurried off downstairs, very well inclined for a quarrel with somebody.

As for Agnes, she did not feel very gay when she was left alone. Her Table Round had melted into thin air before her eyes. Roger's friends were not the sweet and thoughtful creatures of her imagination—the women of books and poems. Barring that they were better dressed and had a more refined mode of speaking, they were wonderfully like the baker's wife at Windholm, who gave tea-parties sometimes, and was an authority. Agnes felt that they had come not on a mission of kindness, but to find her out and confuse her, and make her commit herself, if possible. And not only they, but Beatrice, her husband's sister, to whom the heart of the young wife yearned, but who had not so much as told her friends that her brother was married! Her cheeks flushed with a painful heat and colour. They had done their best to humiliate her, and that in the eyes of her husband. Agnes did not cry over it, as she would have done had she been the defenceless

creature they thought her. She did not cry, because she had found weapons thrust into her hands quite suddenly, without knowing how, as if it had been by some unseen second, and had made sudden use of them also without knowing how; but all the more for that she felt the dastardly character of the attack, and resented it in her heart.

That, however, was only one part of the business. The assailants were full of unkind intentions, but in themselves they were nothing to Agnes; the worst of all was, that she had been left to bear their assault alone. Perhaps Roger had done it in kindness, thinking it best so to divert their attention; but, in reality, he had gone over to their side, and interested himself in their talk, and left his helpless wife alone in her ignorance. In this mild way, one of the hardest of a woman's trials, the pain of seeing her husband comport himself unworthily, came suddenly upon the young wife. She thought it was not any wounded feeling on her own part that moved her; the pain was because he had not done what he ought to have done. He ought to have come to her side openly and frankly; he ought to have said, "My wife knows no one whom you know, Lady Charlton; she has to make acquaintance yet with the world. We two have our life before us, and we mean

to make our friends together." But that was not in the least what Roger had done; he had made faint apologies for her, and silenced her with his eye, and gone over to the enemy's side. This was the idea that Agnes contended with, slowly and painfully, as she sat over the fire. It was not a sudden awakening out of the love-blindness into an enlightenment which is fatal to love; for true love, even in the heart of a young woman of twenty, is a healthy plant, and can bear a great many shocks. It was only a dim sort of consciousness, struggling into light against her wish, that Roger, who was so fond of her, had not stood by her at the first critical moment. He loved her, but his courage had failed him, and for the moment he had left her to her fate. It was an unpleasant sort of spectre to come face to face with in these early days, and the sight of it chilled her so much that she felt cold, and shivered, and drew still closer to the fire; and then naturally softer thoughts intervened, and she began to excuse Roger. Very likely it was to divert the attention of these keen-sighted women from her ignorance and awkwardness; but then it was of itself a pang to believe that Roger had begun to be conscious of her awkwardness. Anything in the world that she might have chosen to do in the Windholm parlour would have become

full of grace to the chief spectator from the mere fact that she did it. And Agnes, like most other young wives, found it a little hard, a little strange, to wake up in the new world, where she had expected to be better loved, and to find that she had now to be judged by reasonable rules, and that those prepossessed eyes which saw nothing but good in her had lost their heavenly glamour. And yet Roger was entirely to be excused when she came to put herself in his position, and to look at matters from the other side. It was hard upon him to have a wife who knew nobody; who sat with her mouth shut in stupid silence, or could open it only to commit herself and show to everybody what a *mésalliance* he had made.

And then Agnes asked herself why she could not have taken it more lightly; why she could not have laughed without effort, and said naturally as she would have said to any woman in Windholm, "I don't know anybody; but I am very fond of stories, and I should like to know all about the people whom Roger knows." That would have been, if only she had been equal to the situation, the thing to do. But instead of this she had looked nervous, and frightened, and hesitating; had grown pale and grown red, and smiled a wretched forced smile, and felt herself abandoned and desolate, which it was very foolish

to do. The only excuse she could find for herself was, that she had not in the least expected to meet with this mode of attack. She had taken it for granted that it was quite natural she should know nobody. Vague terrors had indeed crossed the mind of Agnes, of conversations in which she would not be clever enough nor educated enough to take part; but then she had always consoled herself with thinking that brilliant talkers stood in need of listeners, and that in that graceful capacity she might distinguish herself. And then she tried to believe that she would behave herself better next time, and would not let herself be so utterly discouraged by the terrible discovery that she had never dined at Wentmore, nor known anybody that it was right to know in Middlesex. Notwithstanding, Mrs. Trevelyan's thoughts were not of an agreeable description as she sat and shivered over the fire.



CHAPTER II.

Jack Charlton.

THE worst of this unlucky commencement was, that Roger and Agnes had no conversation about it, nor ever opened their hearts to each other on the subject. If he had unbent so far as to say that Lady Charlton was rather impertinent, but then that she was a very old friend; or if she had unbent so far as to say, that she had been very stupid, but meant to do better next time—which two speeches were on the very lips of both all the long day—the little crisis would have been over in a moment; but neither of them took this simple step. They went on as if nothing had occurred—and, to tell the truth, forgot, after awhile, that anything had occurred, as was natural; but neither of them lost a certain impression, fixed upon them like the impression of a seal upon wax—on Roger, that his wife, though he loved her better than any-

body in the world, was, after all, only a blacksmith's daughter, entirely at a loss in good society, requiring to be apologised for, and to have her antecedents carefully concealed; and on Agnes, that her husband had failed her in her first grand moment of necessity, and could not be depended upon should other moments of necessity arise. But for this mutual consciousness, which lay deep down at the bottom of their hearts, nobody could have known—nor, indeed, did they themselves know, any difference. And Lady Charlton was rather kind, on the whole, and other people called; and, after awhile, Mrs. Trevelyan found herself a member of the English society at Florence, which was more lawless and amusing, in some particulars, than the same kind of coterie would have been at home. There were, indeed, various people admitted into this circle whose antecedents would not bear too close an inquiry; but then, to be sure, Agnes knew nothing in the world about that. As for Roger, he found hosts of friends coming and going; and the leisurely examination of the picture-galleries, and the French conversation, and all the virtuous intentions with which the young couple had settled themselves in Florence, naturally fell a little into abeyance; but this did not in the least interfere

with what is called their happiness. Agnes, though a thousand times more visionary in her ideas of society than her contemporaries of higher rank, was twenty times less exacting in her own person than most of the young wives who knew no reason why their husbands should withdraw from their perpetual society. Notwithstanding the faint preliminary light which Lady Charlton's first visit had shed on Roger's character, it was not the less true that his presence was the chief joy to Agnes, and that without him the new world in which she found herself was a very blank and disappointing world. But then she had been brought up to recognise the daily necessity which made man "work and labour till the evening," and it had never entered into her ideal of life to hope that her husband could remain always by her side. Accordingly, it did not occur to her to grumble when he went out with Jack Charlton, or when he became a member of the English Club, and was sometimes beguiled there even in the evening. Agnes, in her innocence, treated this much as she would have treated her father's occasional absence in the evening, when some work of more than ordinary importance had to be finished. She was sorry for Roger, who was "obliged" to leave her, and a little sorry for

herself, thus left alone to the company of the fire and a novel. But then it was part of her creed that men were "obliged" to do many things in the way of their natural occupation which were far from agreeable; and she accepted the club as a kind of forge of a different order, at which Roger, like Stanfield, was now and then compelled to work overtime.

And, in the meantime, she too returned the calls that were made on her, and was sometimes taken to the opera, and drove to the Cascine; and when she had nothing else to do, contented herself in her own rooms, or, as she called it, at home. It is not to be supposed that she got on quite well in society, or made any sensation there, or even felt comfortable or at ease after the first shock; for, indeed, Agnes had it impressed on her mind continually that she was in a foreign country, and was driven to silence over and over again, while the people round her discussed those other people whom everybody ought to know. Perhaps, had the conversation been about ideas or about books, the result would have been a similar one; but then Agnes had no experience, and was not aware that literary talk and scientific talk are in general highly unsatisfactory, and, on the whole, inferior to that talk about people, which, if she only had known the people, might

have been amusing enough. What the ignorant young woman wanted, without knowing it, was that talk about everything which is only to be had among people of the highest class—not, perhaps, of rank, but of intelligence; that running commentary upon things, and persons, and books, and ideas, and everything that comes and goes in the universal mind, which is the only talk worthy of being called conversation, but which is not an article to be met with in morning calls, or evenings at the opera, or at an occasional dinner-party. When she heard Lady Charlton and her “set” discussing their friends, and the news, and the fashions, and making up parties, and recounting experiences, Agnes, who stood in the position of a foreign spectator, decided within herself, with some amusement, that the talk at Mrs. Rogers’ tea-parties was precisely of the same kind; though the rides, and drives, and dances, and dinners were not practicable on the lower level. As she became convinced of this, her timidity naturally relaxed a little; and there were a few people who began to observe that young Trevelyan’s wife, when you really could get a chance of talking to her, was not by any means such a simpleton as Lottie Charlton reported her to be; and then it began to dawn upon

several intelligences that Agnes was pretty—very pretty. Her eyes had a kind of eloquence which was irresistible in its way; and then, when you fairly got possession of her ear, she was a graceful listener, and said “yes” and “no” in the right places, and looked as if she heard what you were saying. One of the chief proofs of this latter fact was manifest in the person of an old lady well known in Florentine society who took a great fancy to Agnes.

“She is a very nice young woman,” this personage was known to say. “I told her my famous story of Lord Westhampton and the doctor, the other day, and she looked as if she had never heard it before, and was quite interested. I like to see young people like that; it reminds me of the time when everybody was young, and believed everything you liked to say. When I had done, she asked me in the prettiest way, what became of the doctor? I tell you she is a charming young woman; that is the kind of sentiment one likes to see.”

“And, of course, you satisfied her curiosity?” asked some one who was by.

“My dear, I did a great deal more than satisfy her curiosity,” said the old lady. “I told her all about the Westhamptons down to the third generation; and when I had got as

far as Minnie Stanley, my Lord Westhampton's great granddaughter, what do you think she said?"

"It must have been something very extraordinary if she survived all that," said Jack Charlton, who was really a little curious to know.

"She laughed the prettiest little laugh in the world, and she said, 'It would be very pleasant if everybody told stories like you.' And then I said, 'My dear, these are not stories—they are quite true;' and then my pretty young creature laughed again, and said, 'Lady Somebody or other (you know, I always forget names) would have asked me, Is not Mrs. Stanley a very charming person? I like the stories a great deal better.' And that is why I say Mrs. Trevelyan is a very nice young woman, and no more a fool than you or me."

"I never said she was a fool," said Jack Charlton, who was a little nettled by this reference to his mother, which old Lady Betty gave with a charming imitation of her manner, which was not lost upon any of the company. They called her Lady Betty because she was popularly believed to have been born in Queen Anne's time, and knew everybody's history since that refined epoch; but she called herself Lady Elizabeth Wardour, and as such was known to Mrs.

Trevelyan, who was amused by her, and had a great pity for her, as young and happy women have for old and solitary ones. It went to Agnes's heart to see the weird gaiety and vivacity of this old woman, though she had not the least idea that Lady Betty stood up for her and was her champion. Probably the young wife would have smiled, had she known it, at the idea that she, so happy as she was, could get any credit or profit from the fact of having listened to Lady Betty's stories, and given to them that sympathetic interest which any real story of her fellow-creatures, great or small, naturally produced in her. She was seated by herself that evening while they discussed her, alone in her little drawing-room on the second floor, on the Lung' Arno. The room was not so stiffly proper as when Lady Charlton had made her first call. Habitation and use had done something to this end, and the sight of other people's rooms naturally had had a certain effect upon Agnes. There was a bright fire, and the lamp on the table, and by it a pretty work-basket, which Roger had bought for her at a "ladies' sale;" and she had some work in her hand, which had dropped on her knee as she sat alone. A sentimental observer, knowing that Roger was merely at the club amusing himself, might have made a

very pretty picture of the pale, drooping, melancholy young wife, thus forsaken and left by herself to listen to the roll of the carriages in the stony street, conveying other young wives to all kinds of pleasure, and bitterly brooding over the wrecks of her happiness. But, to tell the truth, Agnes was not in the least unhappy. Roger was out, poor fellow, being "obliged" to go; and when she heard the carriages, Mrs. Trevelyan congratulated herself that she was not "obliged" to go out in the teeth of the Tramontana, but could stay here by the bright fire, in this corner, which was home for the moment, and "think over everything." Sometimes she did a few stitches of her work, which, indeed, was not of much importance; but oftener she let it fall on her knee, and resigned herself to that thinking, in which there was a greater charm than in any other amusement in the world. For, to be sure, all sorts of bright uncertain lights were still flashing about the firmament, notwithstanding that the great avenue of youthful dreaming had come to its definite conclusion in this little distinct individual establishment, in which she sat peacefully expecting the pleasant moment when "Mr. Trevelyan," head and master of the same, should come in. This was how Agnes was sitting when Jack Charlton, who

expected to find Roger, was shown in the room.

Now, Agnes did not quite know what to make of Jack Charlton. Indeed, he was one of the men so common now-a-days, who have but a faint idea what to make of themselves. He was only his father's second son by bad fortune, whereas it was clear that Nature and Providence had intended him for the first. He had all the easy, careless, comfortable ways of a pre-destined country gentleman. He was not clever to speak of; and though very good and trustworthy and kind to most people who came in his way, he was far from having any taste for work, especially for work of the brain. Had he been the Squire, as he evidently ought to have been, Jack would have been quite capable of looking after his affairs and managing his home farm; or even had he been the Rector, which was the next best, he would have been an honest clergyman—not a great preacher, certainly, but kind and sympathetic, and a good friend to his parish. But Lady Charlton had balked the first of these arrangements by the interpolation of an elder brother between Jack and the estate; and the set into which the young man had been thrown at Oxford had balked the second by persuading him that he had “doubts,” and could not con-

scientifically swallow all the Articles. The consequence was, as he was rather indolent and had little inclination for work—and rather shy, and could not speak half-a-dozen words in public without the most painful struggles—that Jack had devoted himself to the Bar, with such hopes of advancement as might be expected under the circumstances. His mother and sister were lugging him about the Continent at this moment, much to his fatigue; but he submitted, under the dutiful idea that “it was good for Lottie”—for Lady Charlton, unhappily, by this time was Lady Charlton dowager, and had yielded up her state and dignity at home without having reconciled herself to her reduced splendour. Such was the young fellow who lounged into Mrs. Trevelyan’s little drawing-room, of which he had previously received the *entrée*, in search of Roger, disturbing all her meditations. Jack was slightly embarrassed when he found that Roger was not there, not having an idea what to say to the young wife, about whom he had heard so many speculations; but he lingered with mingled shyness and civility, and a passing momentary idea that it was a shabby thing of Trevelyan to leave such a pretty young creature all alone.

“I think he will be back soon,” said Agnes.

“Will you wait for him? He was obliged to go out after dinner, but now it is about his time to return.”

“You don’t go out very much in the evening, Mrs. Trevelyan,” said Jack, who did not know what to say.

“No,” said Agnes, “I am not very much used to it, and I prefer, when I can, to stay at home.”

And then there was another pause. The visitor gave an unconscious glance round the room, which was comfortable, to be sure, and not so ungraceful as of old; but it seemed to him, a member of a large family, that a solitary room, even when bright with firelight and lamp-light, was but a poor home for a young woman; and he wondered, in passing, how Lottie would like it. And then, as Agnes was quite as much in difficulty as he was, he bethought himself of Lady Betty, and made a new start.

“I have just come from hearing your praises,” he said. “Lady Betty is an enthusiast, Mrs. Trevelyan. She values an appreciative audience; and she is in ecstasies over something you said——”

“Something *I* said! I thought it was she who had said everything,” said Agnes, with a smile.

After all, she could smile, this frightened little wife of Trevelyan's. "Ah!" said Jack, who was a good son, and had not quite forgiven the reference to his mother; "but, notwithstanding, Lady Betty is much elated that you prefer her stories to other people's gossip. She had left you sufficient time to make the comparison—or at least, as she said——"

And then Trevelyan's wife blushed scarlet with conscious guilt, but recovered her composure presently. "It is quite true," she said; and this time it was evident that she meant what she was saying—"I know very few people either here or—or at home," said Agnes, who somehow found it easier to make this speech, which she had prepared for a long time, to Jack than to his mother and sister, "and I think it is a little—stupid—of people to go on asking me; but I like stories of every description," she said with a little haste, and drew forward the novel on the table, with a momentary smile, to illustrate the truth of what she said.

Jack was not clever, but he understood, perhaps better than Lottie would have done, who was a young woman of very good abilities. He said, "I will wait for Trevelyan, if you will let me. Are you fond of the opera, Mrs. Trevelyan? I see you sometimes there."

“ Oh—yes,” said Agnes, who had been slightly excited while she delivered her little speech, and now had fallen back. She began to think she was being examined as to her tastes, and naturally had little inclination to respond.

“ Perhaps you are like me,” said Jack ; “ they drag me about to all the pictures and places, and I dare not say what a bore it is. If I were to confess, I should get snubbed horribly. I do not think I have any soul for the fine arts,” he continued ; “ perhaps you are like me ?”

The chances are, that if Agnes had been a well brought-up young person she would have agreed with Jack, and the two would have made very merry over their deficiency, according to British custom, which would have by no means hindered either from some appreciation for, and even some knowledge of, art. But Agnes stood altogether at a different point of view.

“ No,” she said, “ I don’t think I am like that. The worst is, that I never know what to admire. It is so much more difficult both with pictures and music than it is with books. One knows a good book by—by instinct,” said Agnes ; and then she paused and gave Jack an inquiring look, which was very puzzling to him. He did not in the least know what it was that she was

asking him, or fathom the momentary doubt that had come into her eyes.

The truth was, it had occurred to Agnes that possibly Jack Charlton did not possess even that rudimentary knowledge. This doubt rather startled her for the moment, and brought her confidence to a conclusion; and, before her visitor could make any attempt to renew the conversation, Roger had come in. Mr. Trevelyan was by no means charmed to see his friend there; not that the most distant idea of jealousy entered the mind of the young Englishman, who had had no training in that particular; but he had an uncomfortable idea that Jack Charlton might have been putting questions to Agnes, and might have found her out.

“Mrs. Trevelyan and I are exchanging confidences,” said Jack, “on the subject of the fine arts. Don’t interrupt us, Trevelyan. I think they are a dreadful bore, and have the courage to say so; but I don’t think your wife is quite of my opinion—or if she is, she does not own it, like me.”

“What does she say?” said Roger, throwing himself down in a chair. He looked at Agnes with a certain cloud on his face, and hurried warning in his eye, which it was always a great pain to her to see. Evidently he was afraid she

had been committing herself—showing her ignorance, and saying something that she ought not to say.

But Agnes was not in the mind to repeat her harmless little confession. “I suppose it is because I don’t know any better,” she said; “and I daresay Mr. Charlton does not mean anything. Everything is a bore, is it not?” she continued, lifting her serious eyes, in which there was no laughter, to Jack’s face. This was the second perplexed look he had undergone, and he did not know what to make of it. He laughed, but he grew red, and determined henceforward to leave Trevelyan’s wife alone, and make no efforts to draw her out.

And after Jack Charlton was gone, there was all but a quarrel between the husband and wife, Roger having set his heart on knowing what she had said. Much more clearly than if he had said it in words, Agnes read in his eyes that he was afraid she had said something to show her ignorance; and naturally she was indignant and not disposed to satisfy him, though when it was told, there was nothing that Roger could find the least fault with in her words. And thus again it occurred to the unlucky young man to impress upon her his doubts and fears and want of faith.



CHAPTER III.

Lady Betty.

“**M**Y dear, I like you very much indeed,” said Lady Betty; “if you will come to me, I will put you up to everything. I am an old woman now, but I was once young, though you would scarcely think it, and they brought me up like a little nun, exactly as they have done with you.”

At this speech it was scarcely possible for Agnes not to blush; for though she had been quite unaware in her own person of there being anything to be ashamed of in her parentage, she had learned from Roger’s eyes that she was an impostor, and it was difficult for her, honest and true as she was, to let old Lady Betty deceive herself (as Agnes thought) on this point. As for Roger, he was still more embarrassed than Agnes, and hastened, as he had a habit of doing, to answer for her, in case she might commit herself if she spoke.

"Yes," said Roger, "precisely like a little nun—that is the word. The worst of it is that when people are brought up like that, it makes them uncomfortable about themselves afterwards, and they get confused——"

"My dear Mr. Trevelyan," said Lady Betty, "I wish you would go away. It is you who are uncomfortable, I assure you, and nobody else. As for *her*, it is ages and ages since I have seen such a pretty-behaved young woman, and she has not the least intention of getting confused. There! go to your club, there's a dear. I hope, my love, you don't set yourself against clubs; they're a blessed institution for men that have nothing to do. We never could put up with them, you know, or survive marriage so long as some of us do, if it was not for the club, where they can amuse themselves in their stupid way. There! he's gone, and we can have a little peace. My dear child, you are as good as gold, and I am a very so-so sort of old woman. *Così così*, as they say here; but the truth is, I have taken a great fancy to you."

"Indeed I am very glad," said Agnes, with timidity, scarcely knowing whether she was right in putting her hand into the thin yellow hand which was put forth to meet it. Lady Betty, however, took it and patted it kindly with the

meagre old fingers of one hand, while she held it in the other. Lady Betty was not like the Elizabeth of the picture, but at all events she was a woman, and had been a mother in her day, and was kind. And Agnes was so far from expecting anything, and so little occupied with herself, that she took it all quite seriously, and was as much touched as surprised.

“I am a poor, lonely old woman,” said Lady Betty. “I have lost everything in the world; that is to say, I have two sons and two daughters, but they are all away from me—married, you know, and made an end of. It is a terrible thing to have a daughter married, my dear. She belongs to you just enough to give you a wound, when she lets you see she neglects you. When I was like you, I used to have a sort of contempt for the wretched old women that were always running about the world. I used to say, ‘Why don’t they stay at home?’ as, I daresay, you are thinking of me, if you would but say it. But what could I do at home, in an empty house? I keep on trying to amuse myself a little, and go where nobody wants me. I daresay it’s undignified, but I can’t help it. Why should people ever get old? For my part, I begin to think we should be killed off when we come to a certain age. The only happy old women are those that knit stockings

and make flannel petticoats ; but you know, unhappily, that has never been my *rôle*."

"Indeed, I am very sorry," said Agnes, who grew more and more embarrassed, and did not know what to say. But her eyes were a great deal more eloquent than her words, and spoke such a wistful pity, that Lady Betty, who perhaps only half meant what she was saying, began to be proud of her own power of awakening sympathy, and went on instinctively increasing in pathos as she continued.

"Yes, I am sure you are," she said ; "that is why I like you so much ; you are so fresh and sympathetic. That Lottie Charlton, for example, though I suppose it is not five-and-twenty years since she was born, is as old as I am ; but as for you, your heart is so big that you have a corner in it for everybody that is desolate. Yes, my dear, I am a very lonely old woman !" said Lady Betty, rather enjoying the effect she produced. "My children content themselves with knowing that I have enough to live on, and all that. As for companionship, I can hire a companion if I have a mind ; and sometimes I do, and lead her the life of a dog, till I get tired of it. It's stupid work torturing anybody except your lover—or perhaps your husband, in some cases ; and my poor old Wardour is dead ages ago, and I am too old for that sort of thing, you know. So I have

to content myself with rushing about here and there, and seeing all the folly that's going on, and laughing at everybody. People are such fools, my dear, when you are old enough to see it, and have outlived your prejudices; and that is all I can make nowadays of the remains of my life."

"But——," said Agnes; she was too timid of herself to utter the idea that came to her lips. She paused there, looking with troubled and anxious eyes, which expressed her thoughts, at the wrinkled, vivacious old face which inspected her so keenly, and enjoyed the disturbance in her looks as any other great artiste might have enjoyed the plaudits of a theatre; and then the great pity of the young and happy woman overcame her fears. "I have no mother!" said Agnes; "perhaps what I am saying is very stupid;—but I would be so glad—if I could be any—good to you," she said, with her heart beating loud. The tears came into her eyes, so that Agnes could not see quite clearly the glance of triumphant amusement which for the first moment was apparent in Lady Betty's face. The next, Agnes felt herself taken into her companion's arms and kissed with effusion, which was a response for which she was not prepared; and then Lady Betty burst into a shrill laugh, which was the finishing stroke.

“ You dear, sweet, innocent, good, believing child !” cried the old lady. “ Good Lord ! to think what Roger Trevelyan would say ?—as if it was not bad enough already that this little angel should take *me* up, to be sure, and carry me on her shoulders ! My dear, you don’t know enough about me !” said Lady Betty, wiping from her eyes tears, of which it was difficult to say whether they were caused by laughter or by emotion ; “ I am a naughty old woman. Your friends would not like to see you making a mother of me. Don’t tell your husband what a sweet offer you’ve made me. But I’ll tell you one thing, my darling,” said the old lady, into whose heart by this time the idea had actually penetrated, and who had begun to cry a little, in a whimpering, old-womanly way—“ I’ll never forget it, for my part. I shall be like one of the fairies that the good princesses, you know, always met with in the shape of old women. I can’t give you three eggs to break whenever you are in any difficulty ; but, my dear, as sure as you’ll meet with troubles enough by-and-by, as long as I live you may always reckon on a friend. You dear, little, good, generous soul !” cried Lady Betty, once more enfolding Agnes in a sudden embrace, “ I’ll go away and leave you—it’s the best thing I can do ; and never tell anybody what you have

just said. But I'll never forget it, for my part."

With which strange speech the little old woman rushed out of the room, leaving Agnes in the profoundest bewilderment, and, to tell the truth, a little ashamed of herself. Notwithstanding Lady Betty's adjuration not to tell Roger, Mrs. Trevelyan waited most anxiously for an opportunity of consulting him, and finding out, if possible, why her offer of kindness had sounded so preposterous; but, as it happened, she was spared this trouble by the entrance of Lady Charlton, who came in just then, with Lottie, as usual, following five minutes after. And Lady Charlton had a more than usually serious face.

"I thought Roger was not here!" she said, with a curious implication that, somebody being to blame, she was relieved to find that he was not the culprit. "My dear Mrs. Trevelyan! I am older than you are, and know more of the world. As your husband's old friend, would you forgive me if for once I said what I think?"

"Surely," said Agnes, more and more surprised, and feeling the colour rise to her face; "indeed, I should be glad if you always said what you think when you speak to me."

"Thank you; but that might not prove always possible," said Lady Charlton. "I met Lady

Elizabeth Wardour at the foot of the stairs. Pardon me, my dear Mrs. Trevelyan, but *may* I say that I don't think your husband would like you to cultivate her acquaintance? You understand that I speak as his friend."

This speech made Agnes's cheeks, which had begun to glow before, scarlet; a little movement of indignation escaped her against her will.

"Roger is in the habit of telling me what he wishes," said the young wife. "It was he who introduced me to Lady Elizabeth; I only know her through him."

"Oh, yes," said Lady Charlton; "but, you know, gentlemen always trust to a woman's finer sense not to go too far. Of course, we all see her in society. Lottie, perhaps you will do me the favour to go downstairs and look in the carriage for my vinaigrette? I seem to have left it there."

"Nonsense, mamma!" said Lottie; "as if I did not know all about Lady Betty. I am too old to be supposed so innocent. She mayn't be all that she ought to be, but she's great fun!" said the independent young lady; "better fun than anybody in Florence, and I don't know what on earth we should do without her. I mean to stand up for Lady Betty, for my part."

"Lottie, I wish you would not talk such

nonsense!" said the disturbed mother. "We all receive her, you know—things never went so far as that; but it is quite dangerous for Mrs. Trevelyan, who has been brought up so quietly, to form a friendship with such a person. I think it right to tell her so, as Roger's friend."

Agnes had by this time recovered her composure, at least. "I will speak to Roger when he comes in," she said, "and I daresay he will tell me what he thinks. Perhaps, since you think her safe for Miss Charlton, he may think her sufficiently safe for me."

Lady Charlton opened her eyes, for it was the first time Agnes had attempted a blow in self-defence; and Lottie laughed, for, like many young ladies of her years and character, she attached herself by instinct to the revolutionary side.

"Jack would say that was very straightforward hitting," said Miss Lottie. "Mamma thinks you are more manageable than I am, Mrs. Trevelyan; that is why she makes an example of you."

"Lottie, you are enough to wear out the patience of Job," said Lady Charlton; "but as for my daughter, Mrs. Trevelyan, the circumstances are different, you know. She has been a great deal in society, though she is so young;

but for a young person who is not familiar with these things, and so quietly brought up as I understand you have been——. I beg your pardon, I am sure, if I have said anything wrong—I meant it all in kindness, as Roger's old friend——”

“Thank you,” said Agnes—and then there was a little pause, in which naturally there mingled a certain embarrassment; then Mrs. Trevelyan made a little exertion, though it was with difficulty, and against her will—“My husband is with your son, I think,” she said, somewhat stiffly; “they went out to ride.”

“Oh, yes; Roger is with Jack,” said Miss Lottie. “I don't know where they were going—to try some horses, I think. You know we have races here at Easter, and everybody is looking forward to them already. It is so horribly slow in Lent.”

“Races are a very dangerous amusement for young men,” said Lady Charlton; “they always bet—and I am sure Jack, for one, has nothing to lose,” the mother added, with a sigh.

It did not occur to Agnes, who was occupied with her own difficulties, that this speech could in any way interest herself. She knew nothing about betting, and, indeed, was scarcely aware what the word meant; and it never occurred to

her to think of Roger and the races together as two things which could have any influence on each other. Accordingly, she permitted the mother and daughter to keep up the conversation chiefly by themselves for a few minutes; and then Lady Charlton, who had delivered her shot as she intended, was good enough to go away.

When Agnes was left alone, she was, to tell the truth, a little sad and discouraged by this grand but partially uncomprehended failure of hers. It seemed so natural, when a desolate woman complained to her, to say, in the tenderness of her heart, "I will be to you as a daughter." True, Lady Betty was not at all like Elizabeth in Agnes's favourite picture; but then is there not a claim still more sacred than even that of choice and friendship—the claim of need? Mrs. Trevelyan did not know what to make of it as she sat alone thinking it all over. She felt ashamed of herself for having offered her affection so easily, and perplexed and unhappy about the cause of its rejection, and by Lady Charlton's warning. If Lady Betty was a soiled and unworthy woman, why had she been brought to the innocent young wife? And then at the bottom she was profoundly, painfully sorry for the poor old lady, who had kissed

her, and cried as she did it. What did Agnes know about the life this forlorn creature had lived? Or if she had been told all its particulars, how much would she have understood? She put together in her inexperienced mind the two particulars of age and desolation, without making any account of the alleviations which Lady Betty herself had frankly mentioned; for Agnes did not understand in the least how to go about everywhere; and to amuse herself, and see all the follies of the world, and laugh at them, could not afford the least compensation for the misery of having nobody near her that loved her, or whom she loved. The pity in her heart was so great, that a romantic youthful idea of asking Roger to invite Lady Betty "after we are settled," and of converting by her love and care the old woman of the world into that happy and sweet old lady, whose presence makes a family perfect, in a book, came into Agnes's mind; but at least, at the present moment, there was no immediate possibility of carrying this project out.

As for Lady Betty, she drove away in her damp little hired brougham, whimpering still in little gasps, with little laughs between. She was touched, and she was pleased and amused, and yet at the bottom felt in her heart an occasional spasm of horrible self-consciousness, that

felt as if it would kill her. "I wish I could do something for her," she said to herself. "I wish I could give her three eggs, with a fairy chariot in one, to carry her wherever she liked, and a fairy purse in the other, to give her as much as she wanted;—though I am sure I need that more than she does," thought the poor old sinner, "and a fairy something in the third to keep her always happy. When she goes home, I'll get Lizzie to introduce her, and take her about; that will be better even than the three eggs. Lizzie was always a dear, and I know she'll do that much for me." But unfortunately, by the time Lady Betty was dressed for the evening, the comical side of the situation had taken her fancy. "I went to see young Trevelyan's wife to-day," she said to an admiring audience in the first house she visited. "She is a darling, I can tell you. What do you think she said? She offered to be a daughter to me in my old age. She said—

" 'Matthew, for thy children dead,
I'll be a child to thee.'

I forget the third line, but it ends with, 'Alas, that cannot be;' and then my children are not dead, you know. I told you she was a dear!"

And it may be imagined how the general company laughed and amused itself at the innocence of young Trevelyan's wife.



CHAPTER IV.

The First Quarrel.

T was some time after this little scene ere the report of it reached Roger Trevelyan's ears. He heard of it, of course, in the most unpleasant way at his club, where everybody was laughing at the wonderful simplicity of the young woman who had offered to be a daughter to Lady Betty; and it was more by instinct than by direct information that he divined that his wife was the heroine of the story. He went home, thereafter, as was natural, with a very cloudy countenance, turning over his own misfortunes in his mind, and feeling very sorry for himself. It was not in the least that he regretted his marriage, or was shaken in his love for his young wife; there were still many moments in which he said to himself, "There is no one like her," and compared her with the other English young ladies, much to their dis-

advantage—Lottie Charlton, for example, supposing he could ever have been so ill-advised as to choose her instead.

But, on the other hand, it was unquestionable that there were terrible drawbacks to his felicity, and that he was vexed beyond measure by such an error as this, which held them both up to the ridicule of the world. “If she had had even the smallest knowledge of society, she would have known that Lady Betty was not a woman to be intimate with,” he said to himself; and the young husband even went further in his vexation, and whispered to his own mind that Agnes should have known by instinct that she was committing herself. He went home through the spring rain with the decided intention, for the first time, of finding fault with his wife. He had found fault with her before in many ways, comprehensible enough, but always veiled under the guise of advice or sport, and softened by caresses; but for the first time he felt it was absolutely necessary that he should “speak seriously” to Agnes. It was, as it happened, a miserable day—a spring day, such as leaves even to sunny Tuscany very little to say against foggy London. All the Apennines had disappeared, and so had the softer heights that keep watch over Florence. The Arno itself

was but a vague mass of fog between two damp and indistinct lines of houses ; and the cold went to Roger's heart as he threaded his way through the mud to his lodgings. All this naturally heightened the seriousness of his intentions in respect to his wife. When he went in, he found her working by the fire, a little pale, and very lonely. Since he had found so many friends, Agnes had been left very much alone—a circumstance, however, which happily the blacksmith's daughter accepted as the order of nature, and did not make herself unhappy about. She had never known or expected anything else than that her husband should have his occupations out of doors, like all the husbands she had ever known ; and consequently, Roger's return home was not made disagreeable to him by reproaches. But she did look a little lonely, to be sure, that morning, which, perhaps, was because Roger had been to see Jack Charlton, and had found his mother, and sister, and some friends of Lottie's gathered together in a comfortable little coterie, talking about everything in earth and heaven, and laughing at everything, and looking very bright and pleasant, like one of John Leech's pictures, coloured and animated. From this scene, to come to Agnes, in her grey gown, with her head, which always looked a little weighted down by its load of hair, stooped over her work, and not

a soul near her, struck Roger with a momentary compunction. However, he was too much in earnest at the moment to be diverted from his intention by a tableau, which Lottie Charlton would have said had been got up for the occasion. He shut the door, not so gently as usual, and put down his hat on the table, and went forward to the fire in his muddy boots; and this was how he began to “speak seriously” for the first time to his wife:—

“Agnes, what is this I hear about Lady Betty?—some ridiculous story she has been telling. She tells ridiculous stories about everybody; but I did hope you had more sense than to give her an opportunity. People in our position, as I have told you a hundred times, have a double reason for being careful. What does it all mean?”

“What is it, Roger?” said Agnes. But he saw at once that she was guilty by the tell-tale blush that rushed to her face.

“What is it? You know very well what it is. I see you can’t look me in the face,” said Roger, much provoked. “Some absurd sentimental foolery about being a daughter to her—a daughter to that woman! I don’t know that, up to this moment, I have ever said a word about your relations—but if you

think to improve upon them by making an alliance with that wretched old woman, I tell you things are bad enough as they are, and you are doing all you can to make them worse—to make them insupportable,” said Roger, with a little of the excitement which he had inherited from his father—“which they will be, if a confounded old hag like that gets an opportunity to put her finger in the pie.”

If a volley had been suddenly fired at her out of the fog outside, Agnes could scarcely have been more surprised. She looked up at him with a little alarm and a little dismay, but no distinct sensation of being wounded as yet.

“Are you angry, Roger?” she said, with a vague sense of trouble. “I did not know anything about her but what you told me. I don’t know how to be rude, as some of those ladies do. What ought I to have said?”

“By Jove, Agnes, you are enough to drive a man mad!” cried Roger; “doesn’t everybody know all about Lady Betty? And how can you expect a man to keep always recollecting that his wife is a little ignoramus, and knows nobody? Why, what’s the use of instinct, and all that stuff, if you don’t know what’s what, without having constantly to have things explained to you? I tell you what, Agnes—a woman in your

position, with so many drawbacks, ought to take a little pains to learn. You ought to go about and see people, and find out what's said about them. How on earth will you ever learn how to behave yourself when you are Lady Trevelyan, if you keep always stuck into a corner here, working at your needle?" said Roger, throwing down on the table with some force a paper-knife he had been playing with; "that might all be very right and virtuous at Windholm, but it does not do you any credit here."

By this time the unexpected volley had begun to take effect, and the tears were coming hot to Agnes's eyes. But she was already sufficiently experienced to know that tears were much out of place at this moment; and, at the same time, as she was not angelic, there arose in her mind a sense of injustice and an instinct of self-defence.

"Roger, I do not know what you mean," she said. "It never occurred to me that you would introduce anybody to me who was not fit to be made a friend of; and I never said anything about being a daughter to her. I was very sorry, and I said, if we could be of any good to her——"

"*We*, by Jove!" said Roger. "I wonder she did not burst out laughing in your face! She

knows how much sympathy she would have got from me. My dear," said the young man, in a tone adapted to this horrible and unchristian title, "it is extremely easy to cry—but we have now arrived at a point when it is my duty to speak to you seriously. I have not the least doubt, if I had been one of your father's workmen, that it would have been highly exemplary of you to sit at home all day sewing, and waiting for my return; but, unfortunately, you are in a position of life which requires more active exertion. If you are ever to qualify yourself for that position, now's your time. I have my own duties to attend to," said Roger, with some loftiness; "and besides, it is ridiculous to see man and wife going about continually together, like two hounds in a leash. What I have to request is, that you will think a little about what becomes you as my wife. It is your business to make yourself acquainted with the usages of society, and to conform to them; and not to rush into everybody's arms that flatters you, but to show a little discrimination in the choice of your friends. There is nothing whatever to cry about in what I have said; I thought you were above crying at every trifle, as some women do. All that I have said is in the way of advice. It would be a great deal better to think it over like a rational creature

than to fly out into tears and passion, and make a scene."

Agnes had been about to make a little appeal to his tenderness, and promise everything in the horror of being thus set apart and separated. She was going to say, "Help me, Roger; stand by me; tell me what to do, and I will find courage for all!" but Roger's conclusion stopped her mouth. She stifled her tears without quite knowing how, and restrained herself with an effort which demanded all her strength, and left her none to make any reply. Perhaps Roger, on his side, was afraid to mar the excellent effect of this address by lingering, and possibly being tempted to kiss and be friends. Before she was aware of anything but the necessity of surmounting her agitation, he was gone; and the only evidence of the interview, which at this moment seemed to Agnes the greatest event in her life, was the paper-knife, rudely thrown down among her innocent work. But she did not stop to look at that, or to cry out her stifled tears, as might have been expected; she took up her work and went on, with hasty hands, and a needle which flew through the insensible muslin; and after that first phase of her excitement was over, she got up and went to the window, and stared blankly out, as if with some idea of finding out the meaning

of it all in the fog and dropping, feeble rain. Her cheeks were burning with a feverish, persistent flush, which had never dyed them before ; and it was not till perhaps an hour later that Agnes broke forth into the flood of stifled tears which, by this time, had grown to such violence, that, in spite of all her efforts to restrain herself, her sobs came like those of a child. Then she rushed away to her own room and locked herself in, that nobody might be the wiser. It seemed to her as if by these sobs she was betraying herself and accusing her husband ; but, with all the strength she possessed, she could not stop them. This was how the first great storm arose upon the quietness of her life.

To be sure, people talk a great deal of nonsense about the first quarrel. When the husband and wife are well matched, or when the husband has the best of it, it is a thing facile enough to get over, and not a matter of despair on either side ; but when a man is married to a woman whom he dimly suspects to be in some particulars his own superior, this grand period is critical and dangerous. When Agnes had recovered from her sobbing, and when the smoke of the battle and Roger's heavy guns had cleared off a little, it is impossible to deny that across that mist the young woman saw her husband appearing under

a guise very different from any he had borne before. She had owned to herself already, in her heart, that society was not what she took it to be, but something much more petty and commonplace than her imaginations; but she had guarded herself from any such discovery as to Roger with an instinctive trembling. She had found out that he did not stand by her in her little difficulties, and that his watchful and alarmed eyes made her feel herself an impostor; but that was all. Now, however, across the red light of the first battle, notwithstanding all Agnes's efforts to shut her eyes to it, there rose the figure of a man who was not Roger; at least, who was not that Roger who had come into the Windholm parlour like a revelation, and had won all her heart. The more she tried to hide it from herself, the more the new outlines grew in distinctness. If this was Roger, she had to make a new beginning, and learn to know him over again. As this thought grew over her, her sobs stopped as if by magic. It was something too serious for sobs that had happened to her. Such was the sad effect of that innocent mistake about Lady Betty. Half-a-dozen words, drawn from an unsuspecting young woman by the profoundest pity, was all the offence; but it kept English society in Florence in amusement for a week, and

drove Roger Trevelyan frantic, and lifted the veil of illusion that all this time had hung between him and his wife. And what was 'perhaps worst of all, when Roger recovered his temper, was, that it revealed to himself something very much like what it had revealed to Agnes, and made him feel small, and shabby, and poor in his own eyes as well as hers. A man can get over being meanly thought of by others, but he cannot get over it when it is in his own mind that this idea arises; and by this means disenchantment arrived to both of them.

When Agnes met her husband at dinner, she was pale and worn out, and had not very much to say; and when Roger met her eyes he shrank a little, and felt disposed to say, as his father might have said, "Why the deuce do you look at me like that?" He went out to his club that evening, and Agnes did not ask a question; but when she sat down again by her drawing-room fire, alone, she was not placid as before. She pushed away the novel she was trying to read, and went back again, without wishing it, to that brief and sudden interview. It appeared, at this moment, by far the greatest event that had ever occurred in Agnes Trevelyan's life.



CHAPTER V.

After.

THOUGH we have been thus candid about the married life of these two young people, whose marriage was so entirely a love marriage "on both sides," as people say, it is not in the least to be supposed that things went to any tragic length of mutual distrust and jealousy between the Trevelyan's. Love, when it is real, is sturdy and long-lived, and can bear a great deal of disenchantment. When Agnes came to herself after this rude shock, she addressed herself, as was natural to William Stanfield's daughter, to a reconsideration of her position altogether, and her duties. No doubt there was justice in what Roger said. If she could but talk readily, and without any particular regard for other people, as Lottie Charlton could do, there might be some hope for her; but how she, young, shy, and ignorant, could ever hope to make for herself an inde-

pendent footing in "society"—how she could learn all about other people, and understand what was permissible and what was non-permissible in the way of friendship—seemed to Agnes as near impossible as anything could be that had been done by other human creatures before her.

She did her duty all the same, like a martyr. She went out in another damp hired brougham like that of Lady Betty, and called religiously upon everybody who had called on her, and made the most heroic exertions to talk as often as she found her people at home; and when she had a chance of a *tête-à-tête*, Agnes could get on. Her entire absence of any pretension, her sweet reception of all the matronly counsels that were naturally addressed to so young a wife, found favour for her in the eyes of the ladies who were elderly, and could appreciate so sympathetic a listener; but with her own contemporaries, Agnes was much more at a loss. She could not enter into their talk of gaieties, past and present—her humble breeding gave to her natural refinement a certain antique air of deference and respect for everybody, which amused those lively young women; and when by chance she got into the midst of a group of them, all talking across each other, it is impossible to imagine any human intelligence more bewildered than that

of Agnes, who turned from one to another, without being able, in her own person, to find a word, except the direst commonplace, to say. Her looks, as she emerged from such a trial, might have served as a beacon to all village maidens desirous of attempting the *rôle* of fine lady. But indeed, if Agnes had had any ambition for that *rôle*, she might possibly have succeeded better. She came out with flushed and fatigued looks, sick to death of the weary effort, wondering if, after all, it would not be a relief to go and have a good talk with Mrs. Rogers, the baker, now that it was proved to her, on the best authority, that Mrs. Rogers, the baker, gave rather a piquant version of the ordinary intercourse of society. Lady Betty she was obliged to avoid, after that unlucky utterance which she had made in the fullness of her heart; and though by times Mrs. Trevelyan got up from the corner of a sofa, where some kindmamma had been impressing upon her a whole code of laws and regulations, with a soothed and comforted heart, her general sensation after those morning calls was of that utter discouragement which arises when one feels that one has done one's self injustice—that one has disguised all one's good qualities, and looked insipid and stupid and useless, and made a total and entire failure.

After all, what Roger said was true. If he had

been one of her father's workmen, Agnes would have worked for him with a sense of perennial strength and happiness; if he had been sick in body or mind, she would have made him the tenderest and most devoted of nurses. And if, instead, he had been a workman of another kind, an artist or professional man of any description—one of the exceptional classes, who are of no rank and yet may be of all ranks—Agnes would have been in her true element, an ideal wife. Even, perhaps, had it so happened that Roger had been of the very highest level of society, at that point where rank itself loses distinction, being looked on from above—there, too, Agnes might have made and kept a womanly exceptional place, entirely worthy of her. But, unfortunately, Roger was neither high enough nor low enough for such a result. He was a young man who would have been very much dependent upon his wife for his social standing in any other circumstances, seeing that the immediate antecedents of his family, and the unsavoury reputation of Sir Roger Trevelyan, stood dead in his way. In order to be a good wife to him, it became her duty not only to make herself acceptable, but, if possible, to fascinate society; and this, of course, she was utterly unqualified to do.

In short, Agnes Stanfield was, as wife of Roger

Trevelyan, a failure. She felt it herself vaguely, with wistful hopes that he did not share that conviction; and *he* felt it, which was worse, and thought of Beatrice's letter now and then with a strange bitterness; angry at his sister for foreseeing what would happen, yet having a higher opinion of her, because her prediction had come so exactly true. All this was within the first year after their marriage, and all the time they still loved each other with a love which would have asserted itself as the great primitive power of their lives, if anything had occurred to drive them back upon first principles. Roger was very fond of his wife, but he felt sure that she would commit and compromise him, if he did not keep his warning eye upon her. He kept watching her when they were together, in constant alarm for some *gau-cherie*, such as Agnes never would have committed but for the panic he kept her in; and yet he goaded her on to spasmodic efforts, of which, in his own mind, he predicted the failure. And Agnes had not in her innocent heart a thought which was not entirely consecrated to her husband; yet she knew that in her difficulties she could put no trust in him, and that he was much more likely to abandon than to stand by her, if she erred in her ignorance. These two distinct conceptions of each other came between them

and their union : they were not simply a husband and wife, but a husband with an unsatisfactory idea of his wife, and a wife with an unsatisfactory idea of her husband, always present. Such things occur often enough in actual life. Sometimes they disperse and come to nothing, as the two people concerned grow older and wiser, and learn to disjoin the real from the imaginary ; sometimes they deepen into weary indifference, or tragic disdain ; sometimes they do neither one nor the other, but continue as they are, throwing a certain vague sense of failure into two lives. It was not that they ceased to love each other, or ceased to be happy ; but the life into which they had actually fallen—the real life, was not that life for which they had hoped. Others might find it, perhaps ; but for these two, or, perhaps it would be more just to say, for Agnes (her husband not being either visionary or imaginative, to speak of), she had, without saying it to herself, a vague sense of something lost. She had drawn her lot, and it was not the perfect lot ; and, to be sure, she was too young and inexperienced to be aware that most other people have the same idea, and that the ideal life lives only in dreams.

In this way they went on, till all the dull days of Lent were tolled out, and Easter had

come. Agnes did not make much advance in her culture of society, but she had begun to impress a distinct idea of herself and her character upon some members of the set to which Roger belonged. These young men behaved to Mrs. Trevelyan with a degree of deference which gave Agnes some consolation. They did not address her in the free-and-easy way with which they treated Lottie Charlton, who rather liked to be considered as one of them. As for Agnes, though she did not talk much, they were all as respectful to her as if she had been a princess in her own right; though perhaps it was her beauty, which increased as her mind expanded, which gained her this distinction. And several elderly women who formed part of the English community at Florence that winter, spoke almost tenderly of young Trevelyan's wife. Such was the utmost extent of her success; for, as to her own contemporaries, she did not speak their language nor understand their ways. In these lonely days, Agnes made a great many visits to the picture which had first roused her dormant sense of art. Some people who remarked her there, gazing at it wistfully, set her down for a young painter, studying for a copy; and nobody had the least idea of the new world of thoughts, such as Mary could say only to Elizabeth, which were rising in the bosom of the

young woman who had no mother and no sister, and, indeed, "nobody belonging to her," as she herself would have said.

By this time, however, the hope of going home, as Roger had promised to her father, began to occupy Mrs. Trevelyan's mind. To go home was something, though Agnes had but very vague ideas what it meant. It did not mean going back to the blacksmith's parlour; it did not mean going to the Hall, as would have been natural for Sir Roger Trevelyan's son: it meant she could not tell what—something altogether uncertain, which awoke some hope and some fear in her mind. It could not be otherwise than a happiness to see her father; and yet Agnes could not conceal from herself that her entire life and expectations had changed since she parted from her father. She was not yet a year older, but she had gained experiences which she had never anticipated, and lost hopes that looked like certainties. She could not speak to him of those things which came into her mind when she stood before Albertinelli's picture. She could not speak much to him of Roger—she was no longer her old self, to give him pleasure, but another woman; and then there came into her heart a timid suggestion, which was cruel to think of—

that perhaps it would be better for all of them if they did not go home.

The same thought was no doubt in Roger's mind. He was very gloomy after those races were over which Lady Charlton had stigmatized as being a very dangerous amusement for young men. He had betted and lost money, though he did not tell his wife; and it may be imagined that Stanfield's five hundred pounds, which the blacksmith thought a liberal allowance for a year, was done long ago. Roger was in much anxiety for some time, having entered into some desperate borrowing transactions, which, like the other, he did not speak of to his wife. And then the milliner's bill came in from Paris. "Much good it has done," he said bitterly, and thrust it into his pocket. He was not himself aware what he had expected or hoped when he ordered all these fine things for Agnes. Perhaps, since human nature is full of vanity, and a man is apt to think that what has conquered his regard must take all the world by storm, he had anticipated for his bride a great success in that easy society abroad which might serve as a stepping-stone to society at home; but that hope had been disappointed, as was apparent enough. And the French maid and all the expenses he had lavished upon his wife's outfit were so far lost. Things were getting now

to a point at which it was no longer possible to uphold the "appearances" which he had been keeping up in Florence, and it was necessary to take some definite step. With this idea in his mind Roger walked into his wife's little drawing-room, and established himself in the favourite position of an Englishman before the fire—or at least before the place where there might have been a fire, had not spring come early and bright with the Easter offerings, to prove that, after all, this was Tuscany and not England. But Roger, at that moment being otherwise occupied, did not observe the absence of the fire.

"Agnes," he said, suddenly, "all the world begins to move; it is always so after Easter. I think we must go too. What do you suppose I have been planning? It is only March yet, and there is plenty of time. I want to take you to Naples, if you think you can bear the journey—for that matter, you are not at all a bad sailor; we can go there direct from Leghorn, without much trouble. After seeing so much as you have done, I should like you to go there."

Agnes's heart leaped up and began to beat loudly, as had unfortunately become the case with her when she began to discuss matters with Roger. "But I thought," she said, "that you had promised to go home."

“Oh yes,” said Roger, with a volubility and readiness which might have convinced Agnes, if any suspicion had existed in her mind, that he had thought over the whole matter and was prepared for that objection—“oh yes; but there is plenty of time. We don’t need to settle down, you know, as we have done here, unless we like it—and the sea keeps it cool there—not like this suffocating place; and then it is always so easy to return direct from Naples. I don’t mean, however, to take you to Naples, which is odious at this time of the year; I mean to take you to Sorrento, which is charming; and then we’ll take it quietly and do Pompeii and all that. The Charltons are going, but we can steer clear of the Charltons—for, of course, my lady does everything like a milady; whereas, I think we had better be a little economical this time.”

“Yes,” said Agnes, with anxiety. “I hope you will tell me, Roger, if I spend too much. If I knew what we have, and how much we could afford——”

“Oh, don’t you trouble about that,” said Roger; “you have enough to do with yourself at present, my darling. It is time enough to bother you. The fact is we have not got anything,” said the young man, laughing, as if that was the most ordinary state of affairs. “By-the-bye, as we are

talking of that, I forgot to ask you—is Louise a great comfort to you, Agnes? would it be a great sacrifice to you if she were to go away?”

“Louise a great comfort to *me*?” said Agnes, with a little surprise; and then she added, laughing in her turn, “I think I am a comfort to her, Roger, if that is what you mean.”

“That is not what I mean in the least,” said Roger. “I can’t be expected to take much interest in that. No doubt it is a comfort to have a mistress so little exacting as you are; but, indeed, I wanted to ask you if it would be a great sacrifice to you to give her up; I wish you would, if you didn’t mind. You can always get an Italian, you know—and it would be good practice for the language; and then you know, my darling, the expense——”

“Yes, Roger, I know,” said Agnes; “or at least I don’t know, which is much worse, if you would only think it. But *you* know I never wanted Louise, and I shall be very glad to have her go. Her talents are wasted upon me,” said Agnes, with a faint deprecatory smile. “She says herself that she wants opportunity here; on the contrary, I shall be very thankful if you will try to get her a place and let her go.”

“I try to get her a place!” cried Roger. “No, no, nothing of that sort. It would be

better to tell our secrets ourselves than to get her into the house of some of our acquaintances to tell them all about us. No, no, not the latter part of your demand; but, if you have no objection, I'll send her away."

And, after a little conversation, he left Agnes to herself and went off upon one of his many occupations. As for Mrs. Trevelyan, she kept still on the same chair, in the same attitude, wondering what she should say to her father, but feeling at the same time a certain vague relief and ease in the thought that there was to be at least some postponement of the return. She thought herself, it is true, an unnatural monster and wretch for feeling so, as many a young wife has done before her, and went back with a pang to the life for ever gone and past, in which she had been her father's joy, and he everything to her—playmate, teacher, companion, and friend. But that was past and ended, and never could come back; and as for this new life—this existence which had developed such unthought-of conditions—Agnes could not explain to herself her reluctance to bring it under her father's eyes. She was afraid, at the same time, of his disapprobation and of his pity. She did not want him to blame her husband, nor to be sorry for her, nor to see the disadvantages under which she lay; and she felt

by instinct, that now the wooing was over, and the period of romance, which makes almost everything possible, Stanfield and Roger would be insupportable to each other. She knew it—and the sense tore her heart asunder; had they been necessarily together, she would have made her life wretched by innocent vain attempts to bring them into harmony—as so many women do with disastrous consequences; as it was, she had to bear in silence the inexpressible pang of feeling that she was glad not to go home.

And in a very short time after, they were settled at Sorrento, with such an attempt at comfort as was possible under the circumstances, in a suite of rooms in an old, half-ruinous palace, with a garden full of orange-trees, and a terrace which looked on the sea. Nothing under heaven could be lovelier than their surroundings; few things could be less comfortable, according to the primitive, untravelled English ideas which Agnes had brought with her out of her humble level of life; and her nerves were a little excited and upset by various circumstances. Perhaps on the whole, at that moment, a tidy little English parlour, with all its trifling everyday solacements, a sunny little English flower-plot, a prospect limited by a few trees, would have

satisfied her more than the unspeakable forlorn beauty, which overwhelmed her young mind, overworn and unduly stimulated as it was. Even Mademoiselle Louise, by mere force of being familiar, would have been, as Roger had expressed it, a comfort to the lonely young woman. Roger himself was very good and kind; but, to be sure, he was "obliged" to be out often when his wife could not accompany him; and when this was the case, Agnes spent her evenings on the terrace with a sense of absolute loneliness, which, perhaps, did not do much credit to her appreciation of one of the most beautiful landscapes under heaven. The sun setting over Ischia—the purple evening glow on Vesuvius, the sound of the Ave Maria dropping suddenly into the glorious blue of sky and sea and air, just at that charmed moment when the light throbs and trembles before it turns into darkness, and day, in the twinkling of an eye, becomes night—conveyed to Agnes rather a sense of contrast cruel and intolerable, than that tranquillizing calm which a more experienced sufferer might have felt in it. To the young creature whose nervous system was all out of order, and whose mind was waking up, and her senses, so far as external beauty was concerned, only coming to her, this loveliest scene on earth was full of vague excitement,

stimulation, and a kind of despair. It was like seeing happiness pure and perfect, and knowing that she had no share in it, and never could hope to have. At her age, that atmosphere seemed to necessitate happiness; it suggested union, comprehension, sympathy, which, indeed, are ideas which occur to most people in the lingering light of a summer evening, bringing impatience to the young and recollection to the old. Agnes was at the impatient age, and did not know how to support the absence of happiness, active and conscious; and even the moderation, and almost wisdom, which she had, to a certain extent, inherited from her father, stood her in no stead against the charm of these wondrous nights and the solitude of her soul. It seemed so strange, so out of nature, that she should not be happy when all the world lay visibly before her in such a silent ecstasy. And then, when the skies darkened—if that softened glory could be called darkness—now and then there would come a sound of singing from the violet sea. Perhaps it was some one lamenting in a sweet pretence of woe over the hard-heartedness of that “*sgrata Sorrentina*,” who “*Non ha maje di me pietá* ;” perhaps it was the voice that invokes Santa Lucia to the agile bark of the fisherman; and then this was what they sung:—

“ Mare si placido,
Vento si caro,
Scordar fa i triboli
Al marinaio.”

But the placid sea and the evening breeze did not have the same effect upon Agnes as upon the mariner. Instead of making her forget her troubles, it made her impatient of them—impatient as she had never before been, nor had a chance of being, in all her innocent life. And then, when she had about got to the farthest limit of her endurance, Roger would come home—

“ Here you are again !” Roger would say—for the chances were he came in disposed to be very amiable, not being altogether without a sense of guilt—“ and you know, my darling, it is not perfectly wholesome after sunset. You must remember that this is not England. Come along indoors ; but, after all, it *is* glorious, by Jove ! I don’t wonder you like it. Those fellows down at the Sirena never give one a chance to look at anything—except that young spoon, Cochrane, who is getting up a grand passion for Lottie Charlton, save the mark ! One needs to come to you, Agnes, to feel how beautiful it is.”

And then, somehow, it did all of a sudden grow sweet to the poor little wife, notwithstand-

ing that her nerves were still as much out of order as ever.

“Yes,” said Agnes, softly; “somehow it is hard to get the full good of anything when one is alone.”

“But for all so lovely as it is,” Roger would say, picking up her shawl, and wrapping it round her, “I cannot have you staying out any longer. We can have the windows open, which is almost as good as being outside; and I told Antonio to light the lamp. Come in and have some tea.”

And the chances were that he made her lie down on the sofa near the window, and brought her tea to her, and sat by her—with the serene gloom of the great room on one side, faintly lighted by the tall lamp with its three unshaded lights, and showing here and there upon the walls a gleam of half-obliterated fresco; and, on the other hand, through the marble balustrade of the balcony, the gleam of that violet sea, the distant mass of Ischia lying against the fading glow of the west, and all that world of exquisite blue air warmed through and through with the departed sunshine, and sweet with blossoms, which it is so hard to believe can carry danger and pestilence. From which any one interested in Agnes Trevelyan will at once perceive that her

life was not by any means, so far as it had gone, a painfully exceptional one, affording scope for despair and misery, but only an ordinary life, made up of some things that were bitter and some that were sweet—a life to which a woman outliving her first ideas of romance and perfection might manage very well to accustom herself, and live cheerily enough for lack of a better; which, after all, is the best that can be said for most of the lives that are considered happy among men.

And it was here, as might have been expected, that little Walter was born.



CHAPTER VI.

Roger's Letters.

ROGER TREVELYAN had a great many good qualities, as the reader may have perceived. Indeed, there is very little to be said against him in a general way, except that he was not the man to make an exceptional marriage, and that it was a very exceptional marriage that he had made. He had not philosophy enough to give up the world, and he had not courage enough to brave it; and in consequence, all that he was fit for was to lose his temper in spasmodic attempts to make his wife like everybody else, as he had done at Florence, or to give her tacitly up and carry on his social intercourse without her, as he was doing at Sorrento. Both of these expedients were ill-advised and unfortunate; but then the poor young man knew no better! He had seen a little clearer when he was a lover, and had recognised in Agnes the exceptional woman, who

was still less at home in her own class than in that which he could transplant her to ; but unfortunately, from the moment when Roger began to form his wife's mind, he had also begun to see in her a blacksmith's daughter, quite ignorant of the usages of society, and to ignore the finer qualities which were above all usages, and which, if he had but stood by her and trusted in her, might have more than justified him in his marriage. Nevertheless, he knew in his heart that the man who had so sweet a wife to come home to—even though Lady Charlton informed everybody that he had made a *mésalliance*—was, after all, not a man to be pitied ; and the circumstances were such as to make him very tender of her when he returned to her.

When the baby came, it naturally caused a great commotion and crisis in the mind of the young father. His pecuniary affairs were in a sufficiently uncomfortable state before that event ; but an incident of this kind is naturally suggestive, and Roger could not but ask himself, with a little horror, what was to become of them all if this baby should be but the commencement, and Agnes, not finding herself successful in other points, should launch into this branch of social economy as some women did. And then it occurred to him, when he looked at

the wonderful little living creature which belonged to him, that this was another Trevelyan, heir to all the honours that remained to the family, and that it was his duty to acquaint Sir Roger of his grandson's birth. Along with this, he had another letter to write to Stanfield of an equally embarrassing character, for it was necessary to persuade the father of Agnes that they had not intended to break their promise of returning, but had deceived themselves as to Agnes's power of supporting the journey home. A man with two such letters to write may be excused for a little preoccupation, and even a little temper, if that is ever excusable—especially a man whose wife, in blind feminine indifference to everything that is reasonable and prudent, is lost in idiotic happiness over a struggling little helpless morsel of humanity, good for little but to increase its papa's embarrassments. To be sure, Agnes, radiant in her motherhood, and capable of thinking Heaven itself less blessed than the great bare painted room where her baby lay, was a pretty sight, and worth looking at; but all the same, it was provoking to see her so happy when her husband had so many drawbacks to his natural pleasure. "I wish she only had it to do," he said to himself, with a sulky intonation that was not unnatural under the circumstances; and he took a long time to gather together his writing

materials, and closed the green persianis over the windows with a certain obstinacy, shutting out the landscape, the glimmer of the sea, and the floating music. Then something was the matter with the oil, and the thin long tongues of flame which came from the lamp on his table gave forth fully as much smoke as light; and Roger's ideas, never very ready to answer when called, seemed to abandon him altogether in this emergency. He threw open the persianis again, though he had but lately closed them, feeling stifled for want of air, and admitted once more the sea and sky to partake his musings. The only effect they had upon him, however, at this moment was to make him wonder what the fellows at the Sirena might be about, and to think with momentary envy of their free and unshackled condition, which was so much easier than his own.

At this point Roger was greatly tempted to abandon the desperate business of letter-writing and wait till the morning, when such an exertion might come more natural than on one of those intoxicating, delicious nights; but just then the doctor came in to congratulate him, and inform him that the baby was a splendid fellow; and after that, when it was too late to think of going out, the young man returned disconsolately to his writing-table. The wind had got up a little, and came in, in

gusts, blowing about the thin flames of the lamp, and giving—or at least seeming to give, as the light swayed and blew about—a wild sort of movement to the decayed frescoes on the wall. All by himself in this vast, dim, desert room, the discomfort struck Roger, as it had often struck Agnes with greater reason. For the moment, the advantages of living in a semi-savage state in an Italian palace grew much less apparent than he had imagined them, and it was under the influence of a momentary inclination towards home that he dipped his reluctant pen into the ink, and at last began. Of the two letters he had to write, that to the blacksmith, though enough to drive a man to despair, was on the whole the easiest; and accordingly it was thus that Roger began:—

“MY DEAR STANFIELD,—I write to tell you that the baby has come, and all is going on well. Agnes is in a state of absurd happiness, which it makes a fellow furious (in a way) to see. Little she knows about it, or any woman. It is we that have got all the responsibility, you know. At the same time, they all say it’s a fine little thing, and has Agnes’s eyes; and, indeed, I don’t see that it can do better in most things—with a little training, of course—than to take after its mother——”

Here Roger got up and shut the persianis again with a little violence. There were some stars outside, projecting themselves out of the blue in a sort of knowing, conscious way, that irritated him. If Agnes had ever had any sisters who died, Roger, who was a little excited, as was natural under all the circumstances, would have fancied it was them who were thus spying upon him and finding out what he said. And then he continued his letter :—

“ Now, my dear Stanfield, I don't mind saying that I know I'm in the wrong a little, and I only hope you won't think it was intentional. I wanted Agnes to see the Bay of Naples, which is, after all, though a man does not like to give in to say the regular thing that everybody says, the most beautiful landscape, I believe, that ever was invented. I wanted her to see it just now, you know, as long as we are both young, and she had nothing to encumber her ; and besides, it's cheap* here ; and not knowing much about these things, I thought she would be strong enough to come home before this happened. I am very sorry to disappoint you, and I should be still more sorry

* Mr. Trevelyan wrote in the days when expenses were reckoned in carlins—in those days when the kingdom of the Two Sicilies was very miserable, but very cheap.

if I thought you would think I did not intend to keep my word. This is exactly how it happened, and so far there seems no reason to regret being here; and, so long as Agnes is all right, I hope you won't mind. As for moving now, I don't quite see how we're to do it. Travelling is horribly expensive; and, to commence with, I had set my heart on Agnes having everything she could possibly have had, had I been in my proper position, and provided for as I ought to be. Perhaps it was imprudent; but I daresay you, at least, will understand my motive;—and the fact is, we got through a great deal of money at Florence. I have been thinking, therefore, of remaining here, which will be good for Agnes and the baby, as we are in a good situation, and I don't think it will be too hot. And then there is this advantage in staying in Italy, that one can do without a great many things here that would be indispensable for Mrs. Trevelyan at home."

When Roger had reached this point he got up again and returned to the persianis, which seemed to furnish an accompaniment to his letter. He felt as if there was not air enough to breathe, and as if, after all, the sea was company, and kept him in countenance; but he opened them only partially, and left one side half closed between him

and that inquisitive spectator star. It was, perhaps, a little bold to speak to Stanfield, who had always overawed him, of Mrs. Trevelyan, but still he was rather pleased with his own "pluck" when he came back to the table, and saw the name actually written down. Then he resumed as before:—

"This is my chief reason for staying here:— A long journey would not be good for her just now; and there is always the chance that Sir Roger may change his mind when he hears there is an heir (I believe I forgot to mention that it was a boy). In those circumstances, considering the urgent need there is for economy, and that really there is no very special call for us to go home, I am sure you will see with me, that it's best, on the whole, to stay on at Sorrento. No doubt it's a sacrifice for me, as there's no society, especially in the summer; but then it's good for Agnes, which is always something, and we can, perhaps, save a little to make up for what's past. Believe me, my dear Stanfield, with love from Agnes—I'm safe to send that, but I don't want to disturb her just now, or, of course, she would send lots of messages—

"Yours very faithfully,

"ROGER TREVELYAN."

“By Jove! if it isn't that ridiculous star,” said Roger, as he looked up. The fact was, that the half-closed persiani was precisely in the position to encounter the light of this mysterious luminary, which shot in direct like a silver arrow through the dark bars, and threw a faint white line, fainter and narrower than moonlight, upon the marble floor. He was not imaginative enough to be superstitious, but still the solitude, and the great desert of a room, and the frescoes glimmering through the flaring smoky light, which made only the feeblest twilight in the vastness of the place, had disturbed Roger a little. The idea of being spied upon was disagreeable to him, even though it was by a star; and this time he closed the persianis definitively, and with a little impatience. “There might have been a curtain to draw, if we had been anywhere but here,” he said to himself, forgetting all the benefits of the place, upon which he had just been dwelling. And then he read over his letter, which struck him, on the whole, as being a highly satisfactory performance—very conciliatory and all that, and yet showing a sufficient resolution to have his way. When he had sealed it up, he had another conflict with himself, whether he had not done his duty sufficiently for one day, and might let himself off for the rest. However,

whether it was an impulse of superhuman courage which moved him, or only that desire to get it over, which sometimes urges onward the most sluggish of men, Roger had perseverance enough to place another sheet of paper before him, and again to dip into the ink his unready pen.

But this was a more serious business than the other. After all that had passed, he had not an idea how to address Sir Roger Trevelyan, with whom, even in his uncritical boyhood, he had never held any correspondence. And then Beatrice was not like the elder sister, who sometimes stands in place of a mother to a boy. It was to her, however, that Roger finally resolved to address himself. He loved his wife dearly, it is true, but still it is only a man of a very high order indeed who is above permitting himself to be flattered by the idea that the best of wives is still scarcely worthy of the elevation of being his. As a general rule, ordinary people, both men and women, regard that suggestion with lenient eyes; and Roger was no exception to the rule. And then he had read over Beatrice's letter two or three times in the course of the year, and had acknowledged to himself that there was a wonderful deal of truth in it; so that, on the whole, he was not disinclined to propitiate his sister by a little confession to begin with, that, notwith-

standing all Agnes's good qualities, there was a *little* reality in what Beatrice had said. To be sure, there was some treachery in this to the unconscious wife; but then she did not know Beatrice, and never could be the wiser, and surely if a man has anything to complain of, he may say it to his sister without giving offence to any one. With this conclusion, Roger began to write the following letter:—

“DEAR BEE,—I have long wished for an occasion to write to you, and one has come now, which I don't know whether you'll be glad or sorry to hear of, but which, at all events, is important enough to give me a reason for breaking my resolution not to write to any of you again after you were so shabby as to desert me. The news is, that I have got a son, a strapping fellow, who is, of course, the heir of the Trevelyans, and, so far as appearances go at present, seems likely to make noise enough in the world. Of course you'll see it in the *Times*, in all its glory; but at such a time a fellow likes to feel that he has got some people belonging to him, and that is why I have made up my mind to write to you.

“Now, Beatrice, I dare say you will think that my last letter to you was not over-civil—and, if we come to that, no more was yours to me; but

that's a long time since, and I suppose there's always some bother when a man gets married. I've read your letter over two or three times since then. To tell the truth, I didn't think you were half so clever as that letter is, and I don't mind telling you in confidence that part of it has, perhaps, come true. I am not going to describe what my wife is, for I think there's nobody like her; and perhaps you would not believe me—though you're safe to believe a man, it appears to me, after he's been married a year; she is a little angel, that's what she is; but all the same, I don't mind telling you in strict confidence, that I did not take everything into consideration, as I might have done, and that it's hard work in society, as you said it would be. Not that there's anything but what is charming in Agnes; but, of course, there are quantities of things that she can't be expected to know. If you were to take her up—I mean honestly and frankly, and not in a condescending sort of way—we might do wonders, you and I together; but she wants stimulating a little, there can't be any doubt of that. In the meantime, I think I'll keep abroad, which is always safe in the circumstances, especially as I am dreadfully hard up. I can't write to Sir Roger—he disgusted me too much for that; but you might, perhaps, say something, and get him

to rescind his orders about my allowance. I've got an heir for him, you know, which should count for something; though I don't suppose he minds much. Do what you can for me, there's a good soul; you mayn't approve, but the more you don't approve the more you ought to be sorry for me; and for one thing you know, when my time comes I will stand by you, and do a brother's duty, and you shall always find a home at Trevelyan, whatever happens. As for Agnes, you may be sure she would always be kind, and, indeed, delicate in her way; and you could do her a great deal of good, if you consented to take her in hand. Her mind wants forming, that is the fact; but, to tell the truth, I have been a good deal occupied, and have not made her go on with her education, as I ought to have done. There are such quantities of people about that one knows, and I think more than ever here. You know, of course, the Charltons are here, and I should not wonder if Lottie had written you a nice account of Mrs. Trevelyan. I never liked Lottie Charlton; she's playing a nice game with a young fellow here, a little spoon, who believes all the fine things possible of her; and I know she takes it upon her to talk of Agnes. But mind you, she is not fit to hold a candle to Agnes; and Jack Charlton would say that as readily as I.

“ I hope you won't bear malice, my dear Bee, but do anything you can to help me, like a good soul. The little 'un, you know, is your own flesh and blood, and I shall be in a nice fix presently, if Sir Roger does not help me. To be sure, I could have money from Stanfield for the asking, but you can understand how much my feelings go against *that*. I mean to call the young chap Walter, after lucky Sir Walter, you know, that used to be your favourite among all the pictures. He had need to be lucky, poor little animal, for I am sure it is more than his father has been. I wish I had known you a little sooner, and sought your advice more; but that is all over, you know, and the next thing to do is to make the best of what we have. I feel sure you could do a great deal for me, as also for Agnes, if you were to make up your mind to try; and for the future, I can answer for it, you should always find a home with us, and nothing but kindness. My wife, to be sure, has no style, but she has the dearest little heart in the world; and I am sure there is nothing would make her happier than to have it in her power to be kind to you.

“ Always your affectionate Brother,

“ ROGER TREVELYAN.”

When Roger had finished and read over this letter, it cannot be denied that he was rather pleased with himself. Though it was the most difficult letter of the two, he had written it right off, without making pauses, or taking fantastic ideas into his head about stars, as he had done while writing his letter to Stanfield; from which fact Roger sagaciously drew the conclusion, that, after all, your own people are always your own people, and it is easier explaining things to them than to anybody else. He thought, indeed, that he had just completed a very successful and even clever performance, and naturally regarded it with complacent eyes. There was the due amount of acknowledgment of Beatrice's superior wisdom, and of the shortcomings of Agnes, without, after all, any real treason against his wife; and it appeared to Roger that what he had said about being a good brother to Beatrice, when his time should come, and Agnes's satisfaction in being able to be kind to her, would reassure Miss Trevelyan, and set her mind easy about the time when the young people should have entered into their kingdom. When he had added the date, he put his letter up with a sigh of satisfaction. "Now, that's well done," he said to himself, and opened the persianis again and went out on the balcony to smoke his cigar.

It was dark—darker than usual, because the moon meant to rise shortly, and the lighted windows of the hotels which faced the sea threw a trembling line of reflection on the water, and the wind came in brisk gusts from the south, blowing the white sails, that looked almost like sea-birds in the darkness, to Naples, scudding on hasty wings; and Vesuvius showed now and then a glimmering tinge of redness in the breath that rose white out of his breast; and the lights crept round all the lip of the bay from Pozzuoli to Posilipo, marking the outline with a pale interrupted golden line. All this Roger enjoyed in his fashion, as he smoked his cigar; but he did not enjoy it half so much as he enjoyed the consciousness that he had got well through with his two letters, and that for the present, Agnes being safe, and his correspondence put straight, he might henceforward be at liberty to amuse himself a little, according as the means for that happy end might reveal themselves to his eyes.



CHAPTER VII.

Living on Nothing.

“ND you think, Roger, that we should stay here?” said Agnes, after she had read her father’s letter in answer to that of her husband. It was a cautious letter, with a careful avoidance of anything like interfering, which Roger, for his part, was quite satisfied with, but which struck the finer senses of [h]is wife in a different way. If Stanfield had been pleased, or even satisfied, his daughter knew that he would have expressed himself otherwise. In this letter had been enclosed a little billet for herself, bidding God bless her and her baby, and enclosing an order for fifty pounds. “There is always a good bit of money wanted at such times,” the blacksmith wrote, “and this is for you, little one, to make the baby fine, as you would like it to be.” Agnes took out the order and showed it to Roger. She would have been glad, no

doubt, to make the baby fine ; but it was a thing difficult to do in Sorrento, and then the sight of the money woke up a little gleam in Roger's eyes.

"How rich you are!" he said. "Your father, after all, has a very good notion of how to put things. I daresay he thought we had expenses enough without an affair like this."

"But you don't call baby an affair, I hope," said Agnes, with her soft laugh ; "and I do not want so much money, nor half of it. Give me five pounds, Roger, and I will give you this."

"Very well," said Roger, with composure ; "you shall have your five pounds. Only, please to recollect that a little thing like that wants next to no clothes at all for the summer here. It's beginning now, by Jove, and all the English are beginning to take flight. We'll have it all to ourselves by-and-by, and then we can live upon nothing, I suppose."

"Roger, I wish you would tell me what we have to live on," said Agnes. "You speak about coming here for cheapness, but I don't see that we ever have anything particularly cheap. I should feel so much more comfortable if you would let me know really and truly how we ought to live."

"My darling," said the young husband, laugh-

ing, "I should make you the very reverse of comfortable if I were to tell you what you want to know. The fact is, we've got nothing to live on. Don't get into 'a way.' There are ever so many people in the world who live upon nothing, and do it very comfortably too. We shall get used to all that in time."

"I suppose you are laughing at me," said Agnes, smiling, but growing a little pale.

"Not the least in the world, my love," said Roger; "there is no laughing about it; till Sir Roger comes to his senses, I have nothing to live upon except about ninety pounds a year; and, of course, as that is barely enough to keep us in gloves, it don't count. Don't look so amazed, Agnes. You knew I had nothing when we were married—I am sure I told you often enough——"

"Yes," said Agnes. It was only a year since, but what a difference there was between that time and this! Then, when Roger told her he had nothing, it sounded like a delicious jest between the two, who were so rich in love that poverty meant only the Arcadian Utopian state, which is always lessened and made vulgar by wealth. Now, when he repeated the same words, it looked to Agnes like misery in its most miserable form—misery which involved the ac-

ceptance of gifts from everybody who would give, and a beggarly contentment in that state of indebtedness. She did not know what to say, but her heart contracted with a sudden pain. To begin upon nothing seemed reasonable enough to the blacksmith's daughter; that was no way out of nature—for was it not fit and just that a man should work for his own?—but to continue on nothing, doing nothing, looking to others, was a kind of voluntary humiliation which she could not understand. She looked up at him, trying to understand him with her eyes. He was her husband, and no other man in the world had ever so much as attracted her fancy—all her heart and all her thoughts were his so far as he could enter into them. And Agnes looked up into his eyes with a curiosity and eagerness beyond words, to know what he could mean.

“Well?” said Roger. “You have stopped short all of a sudden in your questions. Are you disappointed to find out that I really spoke the truth when I said I had nothing? You see I have some reason for concluding that it is best to stay quietly here, where we can live cheaply without the world being any the wiser. To be sure it is horribly slow; but it's always better than shutting one's self up in a cottage in South

Wales, where it rains for ever and ever, which is the only alternative I can see.”

It came to Agnes's lips to say, “This is what it has cost you to marry me,” but she was wise enough not to say it; for, to be sure, that chapter was closed now, and to reopen it would be worse than foolish. But what she did say was, perhaps, on the whole, still more ill-advised.

“Roger,” she said, with a little suppressed excitement, which took away her breath, “would it not be better, perhaps, if we went home, and you—could get something to do?”

At which address Roger rose up abruptly from the balustrade of the terrace on which he had been sitting, and pitched the burning end of his cigar into the orange garden which lay immediately below.

“That is what your father said,” he answered, sharply; “and, to be sure, it would, if I had been a blacksmith; but the thing to which you must accustom your thoughts, under present circumstances, is, that your husband is not a blacksmith, Agnes. Very easy, indeed, to talk of something to do—what could I get to do?—unless your father, perhaps, would take me into his forge as an unskilled labourer; I might have a chance for that; and then we could all live together, perhaps, with Mrs. Stanfield for our pre-

siding genius. But I don't relish that description of domestic happiness, so far as I am concerned," cried Roger; and he took to pacing with impatience about the balcony, where Agnes, in all her pretty invalid pomp, was seated with the baby asleep on her knee.

And then her heart, too, began to beat high in her breast with that excitement of personal conflict, which, unfortunately, cannot be quite put down either by reason or by love.

"Roger, you know very well I did not mean that," she cried, with a sudden burning flush, which did not pass away as it came, but remained, being the colour of excitement and pain.

"Then what did you mean?" said the excited young man. "It is always very easy to say that one does *not* mean so and so. What do you suppose I could do? When your ideas are clear enough to make such a suggestion, you should know also how to follow it up——"

And then there was a pause, which, however, was not a pause of peace.

"Nobody has ever heard a word of complaint from me," said Roger, "though I may be supposed to have paid dearly enough for what I have got. Up to this time the sacrifices, such as they are, have fallen upon me. I have given up

my own people, and a great many things I have been accustomed to. Don't mistake me, Agnes. I don't say I was not very glad to do it for your sake; but I must say, it does not seem to me that you, for whom I have done all this, should be the one to blame me. I have never bemoaned myself in the least, and I surely have a right to expect as much from you."

The red colour did not go out of Agnes's face, notwithstanding that this blow went to her heart. She kept her baby's little sleeping hand clasped upon one of her fingers, and did not look up to meet the unexpected attack.

"I did not mean to blame you, Roger," she said, yielding to the temptation. "I am very sorry you should have suffered so much for me."

"Oh yes, I knew that would come," said Roger; "very sorry you married me when this was to be the end of it? That is always what women say—but, unfortunately, it's a little too late for that. What we have to do now is to make the best of it, and get along as well as we can. And you should have good reason for what you say before you make ridiculous objections to what I have decided upon—a girl, without any knowledge of the world, like you. I should like to know, for the curiosity of the thing, what, if

I were to take your advice and go back to England, it is your opinion I could do?"

"Roger, I did not give any advice," said Agnes, making an effort—"I asked you only if you did not think——. I know I have not been brought up as you have been. To work at something seems always what is most natural to me."

"That is all very well," said Roger; "but what I want to know is, what you think I could do?"

"You should ask me rather what I think you could not do," cried Agnes, with a little outburst of that womanish enthusiasm which unfortunately was more a relic of the past than a reality of the present. "It is not of me that you should ask such a question. I should not have been here, I should not have been your wife, if I had not esteemed you above all the world, Roger. You may choose to do or not, but it is not to me that anyone should say that you *could* not do almost anything you like—you with your mind, and your education, and——. Roger, I am not very strong yet—I did not mean to cry."

But by this time the young husband was so mollified by that unintentional flattery, that he did not object to the crying.

"You are a dear little fool," he said, and

leaned over her and soothed her. "So that is what you have been thinking? I wish all the world thought as well of me as you do; but that is out of the question," said the young man; and he laughed as the tide turned, and the sense of his wife's admiration refreshed his mind; for, indeed, the world was not at all of Agnes's opinion, if even she could be held to have expressed honestly her present sentiments. "A pretty thing it is that you and I should quarrel," said Roger. "Dry your eyes, my darling, and when I am cross and behave like a brute, don't pay any attention to me. It's too hot now for you to be out of doors. Hand the boy here and come in, and I'll have the persianis shut. The great thing, you know, in this climate, is to keep out the sunshine and the hot air."

And again Roger busied himself in making his wife comfortable, and when he went out bought her a pretty little cabinet of the Sorrento wood-work, with groups of peasants eating maccaroni and dancing the Tarantella, which, to be sure, was of as little use to her as it is possible to conceive. As for Agnes, she was left to repose herself in the twilight of the quiet, silent room, with the persianis closed, all but the lower division, which were about on a level with her head as she lay on her sofa, and permitted her a glimpse of the

warm sunshine without—a brightness so intense that it confused and took the colour out of the sea. The baby was in his rude little cradle near her, and a robust peasant woman, made for harder labours, was taking care of them both. This nurse, who, of all the names in the world, was called Serafina, did not talk much to disturb the young mother, who understood her but imperfectly, and Agnes was left at full leisure to inquire into her own feelings, and to become aware that the knife had been put into her, though withdrawn next moment and the wound bound up so immediately that it was hard, at first, to tell where or how she was wounded. Certainly it had been snatched out almost as soon as it entered into the shrinking flesh, and it was not the wound itself she felt so much as the sensation of burning and tearing which had accompanied it, and which was not over yet. With an effort Agnes, always possessing that foundation of natural wisdom to rest upon which had descended to her by hereditary right, succeeded in turning her mind from that eternal re-rehearsal of the words and looks of the last interview, which so often aggravates a passing contest into serious strife, to take herself to task, or rather to examine herself touching what she had said. It would have been very true a year ago, but was it true now?

Did she indeed think that Roger was able for anything, and that only the envy or malice of the world could keep him back? To tell the truth, that certainty was far from her thoughts. She began, without knowing how, to be aware that he was not a man very ready for an emergency, or upon whom anybody could confide absolutely, whatever might come in his way. She began to see faintly the indolence, the inclination to shirk responsibility, the willingness to loiter on and trust himself to be extricated by other people, which grew more apparent almost every day. These ideas came to her without any thinking on her part, as if somebody had held open the pages of a book before her, or as if some fiendish unseen imp had thrown them into her mind against her will. She did not say even in her heart a word of blame against Roger; but a vague idea did come into her mind how much better it would have been had she been Roger and he the woman—she who felt strong and willing to do everything, and totally sheltered by her love and her happiness from the least movement of shame. But then she had not been brought up as he had been—which was always a consolation to think of. Work came natural to her ideas of human life. The peculiarity of her pain, however, at this moment was, that she was wounded not by any-

thing he had done or said, so much as by the intolerable conviction that his present mode of acting and speaking was the one most natural to him. She felt a little ashamed of the enthusiasm she had shown and of the words she had spoken when she thought of it, and almost succeeded in representing to herself that when Roger returned it was her duty to go to him and say, "It is not true that I think you so clever and so gifted—I thought so a year since, but I have been forced to change my opinion; only I love you all the same."

Happily, at this terrible crisis the baby woke up, and thus Agnes was saved from the suggestions of her wounded honesty. He was very wakeful all the rest of the day, and in the engrossing occupation of finding out the colour of his eyes and putting her finger into his tiny hand as a temptation for the little fingers to clasp it tight, Mrs. Trevelyan fortunately forgot all about her thoughts. The baby was the saving of his mother at that moment, like many a baby whom Providence inspires with a screaming fit, or agonizes by premature teeth at a dangerous crisis. Therefore this interview passed over without any evil effects.



CHAPTER VIII.

What they thought in England.

IT would be difficult to describe in so many words the effect produced in England—that is to say, at Windholm, in the blacksmith's parlour, and at London, in the poky little house which Miss Trevelyan inhabited with her father—by Roger's letters. Stanfield received his after several days of anxiety, when he had begun to imagine all sorts of misfortunes that might have happened to Agnes, and to blame himself bitterly for having trusted her to a man who had broken his word on the earliest opportunity, and who had thus thrown her among strangers at the most critical moment of her life. The blacksmith had been so disturbed and anxious, probably moved by that mysterious sympathy which so often conveys an incomprehensible sense of uneasiness and distress to the mind at the moment when some one dear is in trouble or danger, that he had taken to reading Agnes's

letters over again from the beginning ; and it had occurred to him, he could scarcely tell how, that the tone of the later letters had changed a little. Not that there was any evidence of lessened happiness, or even of impaired trust in her husband ; only that there was a change, which the delicate perception of love could discover without, however, in the entire lack of any evidence, being able to define it. When Roger's letter came, it threw a wonderful light upon that past year, which the blacksmith had been tracing dimly through his daughter's description. When he had finished reading it, it became clear to him, in spite of himself, that the subject of this little narrative was Mrs. Trevelyan, a young woman in whom he had at best but a secondary interest ; and not only so, but that the husband who wrote was conscious of something either in his behaviour or intentions which made him slightly apologetic—an amiability which most probably arose from the equally apparent fact that he had still expectations from his wife's father, and had no desire to break with a man from whom orders for fifty pounds might be had on occasion. All this Stanfield perceived, notwithstanding that slowness of apprehension in respect to all kinds of meanness and unworthy wiles by which he was generally characterized. In this case, the matter was too

important to leave him in full possession of that tender and tolerant charity in which he was so strong. His heart went down in his honest breast after he had read the letter, without his reason being quite able to say why. Though he had an inveterate habit of believing what people said to him, still it was impossible to stretch credulity so far as to believe, after these excuses, that Roger ever really meant to return; and the pain which the blacksmith felt in this discovery was made all the greater from the fact that he himself had an affection for Roger—a little on account of his own pleasant qualities, and a great deal on account of his love for Agnes. The young man was a goose, Stanfield had said; but he was not himself in the least an intellectualist, and he could not help thinking, at the bottom of his heart, that the man who loved Agnes, and whom Agnes loved, must have had in himself some hidden qualities worthy of that happiness.

This idea had rather increased in the year of absence, during which Stanfield had seen Roger only in Agnes's letters and through Agnes's eyes. Now, when he came abruptly on the scene again, in his own person, the enchantment disappeared. Here he stood in all his youthful importance—husband of a wife, father of a child—supreme arbiter, in his way, of three lives; but, after all,

a trifling enough personage, only half true and half honourable, and even half loving, like most other men. Stanfield did not say a word about the letter to anybody, except to announce the baby's birth ; but he took a walk in the evening, when his work was over, in the direction where his walks always tended now—towards a new house, the erection of which it had been his delight to watch through all this past year. It was not very far from the village green, and through the trees a glimpse was to be had from the windows of that pretty tranquil centre of the life of Windholm ; but at the same time the house was fitly withdrawn from any closer contact with the humbler world, within soft lawns and a screen of fine old elm-trees and magnificent limes, which had been growing there nobody could tell how long, and which Stanfield had nursed and preserved like favourite children. The house itself was, to be sure, in the style patronized by the builders of new houses in the neighbourhood of London—something between a cottage and a mansion, with Gothic gables and Tudor windows ; but then a certain natural moderation and “feeling” (as the architect called it) which did duty for taste in the mind of the blacksmith, had made him lop off many eccentricities which his liberal commission, regardless of expense, would have given rise

to ; and, indeed, the result would have done no discredit to a much more accomplished connoisseur.

This house, which Stanfield had built and altered in his imagination hundreds of times, while the walls rose firm and fast and white behind the trees, was meant, it is unnecessary to say, for Agnes, and her father had spared no research in order to know exactly what would be suitable for Mrs. Trevelyan. It was built for Mrs. Trevelyan, and not for Agnes Stanfield, in utter disinterestedness and self-abnegation ; and he meant it to be furnished conformably, when it should be finished. At the present moment, the lawns were being rolled, and the paths gravelled, and all signs of construction taken away. It was all but ready to receive the silken hangings and soft carpets which Stanfield, after much doubt of himself, had at last ventured to choose, finding his own taste, on the whole, a much better guide than the advice of other people. He had made his plans in his own mind, as to how it was to be made possible for the young people to live here ; they could not live on him and his bounty, for not only were the blacksmith's modest riches unequal to this, but he would have made very little account indeed of the man who could have accepted such a provision. He had planned in his mind that Roger could come and go every day

to town by the railway, as so many men did ; and it scarcely occurred to the blacksmith to doubt that his son-in-law could and would find something to do. For his own part, it appeared a truism to him that a man able and willing to work should be sure to find occupation ; but then he did not perhaps sufficiently take into account the fastidiousness, in respect to the nature of his occupations, of Sir Roger Trevelyan's son. And then, that being settled, very much, to be sure, as a thing of course, it was so easy to fill up the picture with those sweet details which concerned Agnes. He could see her in the pretty rooms which he had furnished in his imagination, not with mere vulgar chairs and tables, but with every careful graceful accessory which should seem to his tender fancy in harmony with his child. He had gone about the rooms in every stage of their progress, from the moment when the first plank was laid on which he could find dangerous footing, with this picture in his mind ; and the pleasant fancy had borne him company almost in Agnes's place.

When Stanfield went down to his new house the evening of the day on which he had received Roger's letter, the sun was beginning to sink over the tall chimneys at the Cedars, and the sunshine fell in long slanting lines between the lime-trees. There was a well-authenticated nightingale in one

of these limes, and it had begun to sing before he left the house. It seemed to sympathize with him in the destruction and disappointment of his hopes. The blacksmith was altogether untravelled, and had not an idea what like the bay of Naples might be, and all that matchless scene upon which Agnes just then was looking from her balcony ; but it seemed to him that the heart must be hard to please indeed that could demand anything better than that pleasant glimpse of the village green, the sunset glow behind the Cedars, the sweet glimmer of the moon upon the light leaves of the limes, and the hidden nightingale that poured forth his song so near the household door that was to be hers. He was terribly disappointed, though he did not say a word to any one. When he went home, that fairy companion, which all the year long had kept presenting him with pictures of Agnes in her pretty house, deserted him, and left him to walk alone. Even for a minute, it seemed to Stanfield as if he too, wise and moderate as he was, must turn perforce to heaven and demand " why ? " Of what avail was his life to him, thus unshared and unshared ? This was but a passing thought, but it was a thought more bitter than any that for years had entered his mind ; for to think of his fair Agnes alone

among strangers, dragged hither and thither by a young man's flighty fancy, deprived of the settled home, the shelter, and privacy, and comfort, which were essentials of life in the ideas of the sober-minded Englishman, was something almost too hard to bear.

It was thus that Stanfield divined suddenly and clearly the tactics of his son-in-law, which indeed had never been yet so systematized in Roger's mind as they were in that of the grieved spectator who had found him out. Stanfield saw that his daughter's husband had no intention of breaking with him, and still less any intention of keeping faith with him; that he meant to adopt the *rôle* of a man doing everything for the best—going here and staying there for plausible reasons, to which, without a direct quarrel, he could not give their right names. If the young man had defied him at once, and said boldly, "I will take my wife where I please," the chances are that he would have borne it better. As it was, Stanfield saw himself, and what was a great deal worse, his child, involved in a paltry net of subterfuge and evasion; and he saw Agnes condemned to all the shifts of shabby gentility, and all the sordid circumstances of a life in which the first grand particular, always apparent, should be want of money. She for whom he had prepared this

nest—she for whom he had hoped a lot apart—a fortune beyond the common fate—these were the thoughts with which Stanfield locked the door of the new house which was to be of no good to anybody, and went home in the twilight to his dull parlour, to the wife who knew nothing about it, and who, even had she known, would not have had the least idea what he meant.

The effect was naturally different upon Miss Trevelyan, who received her brother's letter when she was at breakfast in her own room, after having been out late the previous night. She was sitting in her white dressing-gown, with her light hair all loosed out and hanging about her neck, when the letter came. Things had not improved much with Miss Trevelyan in the interim. She was as she had been a year ago, only she was a year older, and had remarked a great many more times to herself in the glass, that her beauty and her hopes were going fast, and that she began to grow old. Society had not many charms for her, although she went into it continually. The greater part of her own contemporaries were married, and disposed, when they had a chance, to patronize Beatrice; and to place herself among the younger generation, and conduct herself as if she were unconscious of her different level, was a grievous wound to her pride, as well as to her sense of

what was fit and seemly. She knew, too, that she did herself injustice, in the eyes of everybody who was qualified to judge, by such a proceeding ; but then, what could Beatrice do? She was unmarried, and, according to every rule of civilized society, a young lady, if she chose to consider herself so ; and she knew very well that her only chance of final extrication from all that was false and painful in her life, was marriage. Society, accordingly, which was pleasure to the young people as long as they remained young, was the hardest work to Beatrice to which a poor woman could be put. And in the morning she was very tired of her exertions, and herself, and the world in general. At the present moment she was taking a little comfort, poor soul, in the peace of the morning—though, indeed, for the rest of the world, that had advanced almost to noon—and in her cup of tea, and her slippers, and her loosened hair, which was a pretty sight to see as it hung large, and bushy, and light, and moved about by every breath, about her shoulders. And then the sun was shining, and a stray ray reflected upon Beatrice, gave to her eyes that golden gleam which they had had in their best days ; and indeed, but for the pinches of care in her forehead, she would at that moment have looked as beautiful as ever she did—a fact of which

Beatrice was aware, and which rather vexed than comforted her ; for what was the good of looking well *en peignoir*, and over her morning cup of tea ?

At such a moment, a letter from a young brother, whom she loved in a kind of way, and took an interest in, should have been a comfort to the jaded woman of the world. Her heart, indeed, gave one beat the more when she saw Roger's writing, with a sort of forlorn expectation of something kind and comforting ; and it is just possible if young Trevelyan, in his wisdom, had left out those assurances of his future protection, and Agnes's kindness, which in his heart he believed would be very consolatory to Beatrice, she might have opened her heart even at this late period, and become the friend of the two young people, and avoided what was afterwards the bitterest pang of her life. But as Miss Trevelyan read her brother's letter, a scarlet flush mounted into her cheeks. His confession in regard to Agnes, and even his applause of her own prescience, had no power to mollify her in face of that impertinent promise of his protection, and of a home at Trevelyan when his time had come, which Roger had intended to convey nothing but comfort. She got up with her eyes blazing like two orbs of light, all golden and glorious, and rung her bell impatiently, and proceeded with her dressing

without a single softening thought of the intelligence which the letter was intended to convey. When she looked at herself in the glass, it was not the ordinary reflection that recurred to her mind, but an idea altogether different—a wondering question whether it could be to her, magnificent as she felt herself to be looking in that moment of excitement, that Roger and his villager offered their patronage, and meant to be kind? She, who, notwithstanding all her mortifications, wanted but the one fundamental necessity of a prosperous marriage, to take her place as a leader of society, and reach the very topmost pinnacle of the great world; for Beatrice was aware of her own gifts—those gifts which, by reason of that one thing wanting, had to be kept in the shade, but which could never certainly come to such utter humiliation as to seek refuge under the wing of her young brother's ignorant wife.

Such was the ferment awakened in the mind of Miss Trevelyan by the letter over which Roger had been so complacent. When she had turned its intended sweet into bitter for half the day, with a sense of injury, and mortification, and rage impossible to describe, it began to come to her recollection that there was a question of something else than merely a gratuitous insult to herself. There was a baby, as was to have been

expected. This girl, for whose convenience heaven and earth were to be moved, was naturally just the sort of person to grasp at another supreme happiness for herself, without the least consideration for anyone else. Of course there was a baby; for it was of no importance to Mrs. Roger Trevelyan that her husband was a great deal too young to be saddled with such incumbrances, and that the Trevelyans in general were not rich enough to indulge in large families. Beatrice was so angry that she did not see, as she would have seen in the case of any other person, the absurd side of her own thoughts; and, in spite of herself, it was with a kind of silent rage that she regarded Agnes—a rage which took force from the inferior position in which Roger took pains to place herself, as she thought. Who was this girl that Providence itself—Beatrice did not say God, because when there is anything to find fault with in the arrangements of the world, the other is the more convenient word, and sounds less profane—should disturb the ordinary arrangements of nature to make her happy? What right had she to be happy any more than others—any more than her superiors? And why in the name of justice should Beatrice, for whose happiness no one either in earth or heaven put himself out of the way, be called upon to help

to move the most ordinary obstruction from this fortunate woman's path? Let her be poor! It was easy to be poor, when a woman had everything else she desired in this world—youth, and love, and happiness, and an unblemished name, and no antecedents that could be brought up against her. Indeed, Beatrice even grudged to her brother's wife the poverty which, at such a distance, looked sweet. Miss Trevelyan had rung all the changes of indignation and offence before she met her father, which was in the evening, just before dinner, when they encountered each other as they came in. They were going out again to dinner, and Beatrice did not choose to lose any time before she went upstairs to dress. In her exasperated condition of mind, Roger's baby counted for so little, that to sacrifice her chance of looking well for the evening on account of it, by lingering to tell Sir Roger, was a thing which did not enter into her mind; and she had just time for half an hour's repose upon the sofa before she began to dress. She told him when they were driving to their destination, and when the time was no longer of any importance, and then it was quite soon enough for Sir Roger's interest in the fact.

“Papa, I have had a letter from Roger,” Miss Trevelyan said. “He wants me to tell you that

they have got a baby, a boy—the son and heir, you know. They mean to call him Walter, and mother and child are doing well, which I am sure will be a great comfort to you,” said Beatrice. Sir Roger was so taken by surprise, that was some moments before he could ease his mind, even by an intelligible oath.

“A baby!” stammered the amazed father. “The wilful fool was married only the other day. What the deuce does it mean, Beatrice? By Jove, I’ll have that looked into. I’ll have it sifted, by ——. A baby! A year! You may as well say it’s fifty years since the deuced ass made a fool of himself. I know better. By Jove, I’m not the man to give in to that.”

“It was a year on the 13th,” said Beatrice, in her cold way. “They would like some money, papa.”

“By ——, I believe you there,” cried the baronet. “I wish they may get it, too. Money, by Jove! Let them go and get money from that confounded blacksmith. I suppose you’re not such a d—d fool as to take their part? By ——, you ought to know better than to take up that deuced dodge with me.”

“Make yourself quite easy on that point,” said Miss Trevelyan; “though, to be sure, it is a little ungrateful on my part, for Roger says they both intend to be very kind to me.”

And after this little conversation, the subject was dismissed, for the carriage drew up just then at the hospitable door; and Miss Trevelyan looked extremely well, with a little more colour than usual—quite as well, somebody said, as when she was in the first height of her beauty, though that was unfortunately a good many seasons back. It was on the same evening that Stanfield locked the door of his new house, and left his hopes in it in the darkness, for, to be sure, *his* letter had come by the same post; but the chances are, that of the two sufferers it was Beatrice—though she was more brilliant than usual, and quite the most charming woman present—who had the most painful share to bear.



CHAPTER IX.

Disenchantment.

IT would be difficult, after this point, to give any very distinct account of the life of Roger and Agnes Trevelyan for several years. They lived the life inevitable to a young couple without any very distinct resources, dependent upon what they may be able to borrow, or upon what charitable friends may send them, or, perhaps, upon the success of a bet or a lucky hour at play ; for Roger was by no means a gambler. He made as much money as he could out of his expectations, though everybody knew the embarrassed state of the Trevelyan property, and that Sir Roger had laid as many burdens upon it as he dared, or almost as it was able to bear ; and then Stanfield was always good for as much in a year as would keep Agnes from actual suffering ; and Roger himself had a godfather who had, from the earliest, taken a liberal view of his spiritual duties, and considered them

best carried out by affording, from time to time, a supply of pocket money to the audacious boy who had gone and saddled himself with a family. Agnes made in this way a wonderful acquaintance with the Continent, and with all the shifts of cheap living in most of the centres of pleasure in the civilized world. She became a linguist, accomplished in her way—perhaps not very qualified for metaphysical conversation, but quite able to manage all her domestic concerns.

It was the strangest kind of life for a nature so shy and so refined, and all these shabby particulars made a ruthless and total end, or at least she thought so, of every ideal she had ever formed. The life of which she used to dream in the Windholm parlour—a life utterly vague and undefined, except in so far as it was loftier and purer than anything she had ever seen or known—had disappeared utterly from her horizon. The life she had to live was one without beauty, without privacy, without calm—a vagabond career full of change and bustle, full of amusement if she had been capable of taking it, but full also of sordid cares; and Agnes, though capable of happiness to the bottom of her heart, was perhaps not so capable of being amused as if her mind had been of a lighter character. The gay promenade and the sound of music, which would have been very

pleasant had they occurred in an interlude of more serious life, wearied the thoughtful young woman to death when they became the constant accompaniments of her existence; and in winter, after that year in which Lady Grandmaison, poor old Lady Betty's daughter, the kind Lizzie to whom that grateful old woman had recommended young Trevelyan's wife, "took up" Agnes, and insisted on taking her about everywhere and making a pet of her, the social entertainments of the evening in Rome, and Naples, and Florence, and Dresden, and Vienna, and all the places where visitors abound, were an almost equal weariness to the soul of Mrs. Trevelyan, who, to be sure, had not been brought up to that sort of thing, and who, though she learned to know the people whom everybody knew, and to respond with a good grace when she was asked, "Was not Lady Etheldred charming?" was as far as ever from seeing any good in it, and had in her heart an unspeakable impatience at this loss of her life.

Agnes had other pangs, besides, to make her sad. She had those sorrows of a young mother, to whom God gives only to take away again, which count for little in the estimation of the world, but are enough to cloud over an existence with unspeakable heaviness and discouragement. To be sure, little Walter remained to give her a little conso-

lation ; but then, as Walter grew, the yoke became so much harder, as she began to consider what effect this wandering, lawless life might have upon the child, who could prattle three or four languages, but who had not a chance of acquiring any other knowledge except such as she herself could give him ; and what she could give him was mostly scraps of her own thoughts, which were not very bright, and reflections from her own anxieties, which she did all she could to hide from the affectionate and curious little creature, without any great success.

All this time Roger was by no means a bad husband, though some people might be disposed to blame him. He was still fond of his wife, and very proud of his pretty boy, and had come to take it for granted that they were doing the very best that was possible under the circumstances, knocking about a little, abroad, as long as they were young and poor, with always the prospect before them of Trevelyan and its honours, such as they were, and abundant opportunity for Agnes to set up as Lady Bountiful, and be the providence of the parish, as he believed she longed to be in her heart. This expectation kept Roger easy enough as to what his wife considered the loss of his life. He was not losing his life in the least, according to his own ideas ; granting that a man

has to choose between a cottage in North Wales, with a trout-stream, and perhaps—but only perhaps—a conversible vicar as its sole attractions, and all the round of amusing experience which lies between Naples and Vienna, between Turin and Baden-Baden, no rational creature could hesitate which of the two to decide upon. As for Stanfield's idea of something to do in London, and the pretty house at Windholm for Agnes and the babies, and two daily journeys up and down by the railway—or, perhaps, even by the omnibus on an emergency—like a stockbroker or a bank clerk, Roger laughed loudly, but with an angry amusement, at an idea so preposterous. “You forget, you and your father, that, with the greatest regard for Stanfield, I am not myself a blacksmith's son,” said Roger; “but I believe in my heart you would like to give tea-parties to the village, notwithstanding all you've seen; which would be very funny, if it was not a little aggravating,” Mr. Trevelyan would say. Agnes had very little answer to make to all this. Even in her own mind, she had a conviction that it would not do; even in her own heart, yearning as she was after home and repose, and something that would look like a real and serious life, she felt a wonderful reluctance to bring her father and her husband into close contact, and to see Stanfield's lu-

minous, observant eye throwing a light too clear upon Roger. Agnes knew that her father would not understand him, that he would be utterly puzzled by a character founded upon conceptions of life so entirely different from his own; but it was for herself that she was instinctively reluctant to see her husband in too strong a light.

For it is true that a wonderful disenchantment had already come to Agnes—such a disenchantment as any sentimental young woman, brought up upon novels and fine feelings, would regard either as the occasion of utter despair, and the most summary death by heart-break which was possible, or else as a release from all obligations towards the man who had disappointed her so sorely. She was no longer able to admire Roger, however much she tried, nor to look up to him, nor even to trust him much. She was aware that his ideas of right and wrong were confused, and his impulses very often anything but just ones; and when any emergency occurred, Agnes was very far from being confident that her husband would not utterly break down in it; and yet, withal, she had not ceased to love him, and stand by him with all her might, which wonderful problem of humanity is one very little discussed in works of imagination. Though she had never said it to herself, she knew very well in her heart that she

had lost the perfect life for which everybody hopes, and that never on earth, if even in heaven, there could be between herself and her husband that marriage of true minds, which is the highest ideal of human existence. But this knowledge did not make Agnes fall off from him, or even grow indifferent. Such as it was, for ever and ever her lot was cast; and her love had all the steady strength, all the force, without any self-deception, of a disenchanted love. Such a thing exists, as many a man and woman know.

“Mamma,” said little Walter, when they were sitting together one morning in the great bare, half-furnished *salon*, which this time was at Baden-Baden—Agnes was very well used to these rooms, and they all had a certain generic resemblance—“mamma, is not England home?”

“Yes,” said Agnes, with a little sigh—she had been teaching him his lesson, for he was now seven years old, so long a time had elapsed in this weary wandering—and waiting for the moment when the flaxen-haired German nurse should be ready to take the children out. Baby was lying at Mrs. Trevelyan’s feet, on a rug which had been spread there for her special advantage, and the group was as pretty a one as could have been desired. Agnes was too busy working to do more than watch with an occa-

sional glance the rosy and fair infant which lay at her feet, placidly contemplating with outbreaks of sudden laughter, the wonderful little hands which it flickered in the air—"Yes, England is home, Watty; and yet you are a Sorrentino, and baby is German—and how do you think that can be?"

Walter, for his part, declined to take the question into consideration, his mind being otherwise engaged.

"If England is home, why don't we go home? Haven't we got some friends there?" said the little boy. "When we always go everywhere, why don't we go there?"

"It is because it does not suit papa," said Agnes; though that, unfortunately, was a very unsatisfactory answer to herself.

"Hermann says we have a *château* in England," said little Walter; "a *château* would be a great deal nicer than being here. If we're to be anywhere, I like Sorrento best—but why don't we go to our *château*, mamma? At Hermann's *château* there are ponies and all sorts of things, and his papa has woods to shoot in. I should like to learn to shoot, and to have a pony of my own. I would lend him to you to ride upon sometimes, and I'd be your little guide, and take you up the mountains to all the places people go to see.

Are there many places that people go to see in England, mamma?"

"Yes," said Agnes, whose knowledge on that point was not much more extended than that of the child; "but you know in England it is different, Walter; people are not always trying to find out what there is to see. There is no promenade nor band like what we have here. When people want to have music they have it by themselves at home, and then they stay still in one place all the year round, and never dream of going away."

"I should like that, if we were at our château," said Walter; "if there was a white pony and some hounds, like Hermann's papa's hounds, and, perhaps, rabbits—I should never wish to go away. But if people do not care for seeing things in England, tell me, mamma, what do they do?"

"Generally, they work," said Agnes, who was not without a little fear of saying too much, in case the boy might be seized with the idea of recounting the conversation to his father, and Roger, for his part, take it as an indirect lecture or reproach; "that is," she added with a little constraint, "when they have got anything to do."

Walter was leaning reflectively, in a thoughtful attitude, against his mother's knee. "What

does it mean, to work?" he said, with that quaint soupçon of an accent which sometimes appeared in his otherwise good English, to remind Agnes that her little boy was a Neapolitan born. "Does papa work? I did not know gentlemen had ever anything to do."

This, which was said in the purest childish good faith, sounded like an unconscious touch of irony to Agnes. "In England, most people have something to do," she said. "When you are big, I hope you will work too. Your grand-papa, whom you want so much to see, has a great deal to do."

"I don't think I should like to have a great deal to do," said the little philosopher. "I should like always to have time for a good game with Hermann, and to hear the music in the afternoon, like papa. I don't think it can be much fun to be a lady," said Master Walter. "Is it because you like it that you are always making frocks and things? but, mamma, when we go to our château, I will lend you my pony and take you up all the mountains. I think I should like that better than being here. Perhaps the mountains in England are higher than Sant' Angelo; but you know I have been up to the very top of that."

“ Yes,” said Agnes ; “ but here comes Madelon, ready to go out.”

And that was the end of the talk for the moment ; but it may be supposed what were Mrs. Trevelyan’s thoughts when her boy left her, with this grand question of her life all opened up and lying naked before her. She had acquired a great deal of experience of various kinds, as was natural, and perhaps in that hard school had really learned more than it would have been possible for her to have learned in the tender enclosure of that home in England for which she had so much longed ; but all her experience could not overcome her natural English prejudice in favour of a settled habitation, an honourable means of living, a fair future for her children, unsullied by shabby recollections, or by those burdens of debt and evasion which children are so quick to divine. As for her own life, it was a very good proof that, as Walter had said, it was not much fun to be a lady. After Roger had found out, which was not for some time, that Agnes was perfectly capable of being trusted with the provision of the family, for which he himself was very imperfectly qualified, he had put only too much confidence in her. She had everything to think of, and most things to do, and being of a more scrupulous

conscience than her husband, Mrs. Trevelyan did everything in the world to avoid expending the money which had to be obtained, if not by labour of the hands, by a much more exhaustive process—by what she could not help considering degradation of the mind and character. She sat and wondered in her heart how she could set her boy right about the château which he had begun to dream of; and what, if this life continued, she could do to deliver Walter from its evil influences. For it was out of the question to think of sending him to her father, though such an expedient would have been a happiness to both.

When the children had gone, and Agnes sat by herself in the large empty room, which was almost as big as that in Sorrento, though widely different in appearance, with white panelled walls instead of mouldering fresco, and a bare wood floor perfectly clean, and scanty chairs and sofas in faded green velvet, a new thought came into her mind, such as had never occurred to her before, which made her start, and let the baby's frock, at which she was working, fall out of her hands: all at once it came into her head whether she might not write to Beatrice Trevelyan, who had never taken any notice of her, and ask Roger's sister to receive the boy, who was her nephew, and the heir of

the family name, and all that remained to it. The thought made Agnes tremble, but still it had come into her mind, and it looked as if, everything else failing, there might be some hopes for Walter in such an expedient. He was the greatest consolation Agnes had in the world, and to send him away would be like taking the heart out of her bosom; but that was not what the mother most thought of, nor even of the idea that followed, that her child would be taught to despise and disdain her. The suggestion was so strange and sudden, and so unlike anything that she would have wished for, that Mrs. Trevelyan felt a little alarmed by it, as if it must be, being so painful, a presentiment of coming events, and an indication given by God. This feeling took such obstinate possession of her, that to escape she got up hurriedly and put away her work and went out in some agitation to find Madelon and the children. Was it, perhaps, Beatrice Trevelyan's guardian angel that put that thought into Agnes' mind? But, so far as her own feelings were concerned, for the moment, it seemed more like to her as if it had been a demon and not an angel who spoke.

“Send Walter to my sister!” cried Roger, in amazement, when he heard of the idea; “why, in Heaven's name, isn't he much better here? I

assure you Beatrice would not thank you for giving her the trouble ; besides, the boy is too young for school—and, by Jove ! he's quite a little linguist," said Roger. " People should always learn that sort of thing at his age. You can bring him up to be an ambassador, if you like, on this sort of education—and I hope that would satisfy your ambition. As for Beatrice, she don't understand anything about children, and I don't think she would have him at any price. My love, you are an innocent soul, and think all women like to be bothered with babies ; but that only shows you don't know the world," and Mr. Trevelyan kept on laughing for some time at the idea of saddling Beatrice with a troublesome little boy of an inquiring mind, whose curiosity might penetrate even to the mysteries of the toilet ; for Roger was himself a little sore and bitter in respect to the sister who had done so little to help him. As for Agnes, it was undoubtedly a great relief to her when her proposition was negatived so summarily ; and thus again, for the third time, the indiscretion of a third party prevented the last remaining chance of mutual understanding and sympathy which might still have arisen between Agnes and Beatrice Trevelyan. After this, even the most pitiful angel could find nothing more to say.



CHAPTER X.

The Doctor's Counsel.

IT happened about this time, however, that Mr. Trevelyan fell ill. Some people have such chances accorded to them when it has become expedient to change the tenor of their lives. Roger was very ill, and required a great deal of nursing, and entire tranquillity, and freedom from care, which was a little difficult under the circumstances; and then, after the immediate danger was over, the doctors looked very grave, and gave pitiful glances at the children, whom they sometimes saw coming and going. When he was convalescent, and in the highest spirits, they took the worn-out wife apart to “speak seriously” to her—as doctors sometimes do.

“My dear Mrs. Trevelyan, I don't want to alarm you,” said the English doctor—whom English visitors had brought to the place—“but

I feel it my duty to tell you that the greatest care is necessary. Mr. Trevelyan's constitution, especially after the shock it has received, demands a quiet life. I don't mean to make the least reflection upon his habits, far from it, for they, I am sure, are irreproachable; but life here, you know, is less regular than life at home. He should live very quietly for a long time to come, and avoid cold, and be careful of what he eats and drinks. If I were you, with your young family to consider, I should advise him strenuously to go home."

"Doctor, I am afraid you think he is very ill," said Agnes, almost overwhelmed by this sudden relapse from hope to fear.

"Not in the least," said the doctor; "on the contrary, he will soon be quite well, and I hope he will keep so. All that I want to warn you is, that his constitution has received a shock, and there is great need for care. He ought to keep early hours, and be out of the way of excitement. I think, on the whole, if you were at home among your own friends with your young family—but, at all events, no worry, no bother; that is a thing which *must* be guarded against at all costs."

To this Agnes gave her consent, as was natural, without the remotest idea how the thing

was to be accomplished, and went back to her patient with all the little colour that had been left in her cheeks by long confinement to his sick room, effectually quenched out.

Roger, for his part, feeling a great deal better, and expecting to be perfectly well in a day or two, was in admirable spirits, gay and affectionate, disposed to play with his children, and make himself agreeable to his wife, as became a man to whom, for the moment, only these tranquil pleasures were possible, and who was grateful to his nurse, and to God in some degree, and exhilarated by the prospect of getting speedily back to the world.

“What have those old fogies been saying to you?” he asked, in his gay voice; “trying to get you for a patient, I suppose, now that I have escaped their hands?”

“They were telling me that you must take great care, Roger,” said Agnes, “after such a severe illness;—if you were to go out too soon, or use too much freedom with yourself——”

“Oh, yes, I dare say,” said the patient, laughing; “all that goes without saying; one takes it for what it is worth. By Jove! after six weeks of it, they might leave a man to his discretion. However, never mind the doctors; come along here, and tell me how you have

managed all the time I have been ill. I don't suppose you had a treasure hidden away for such an emergency. Is it that all the tradespeople have been preternaturally good?"

"Oh, yes," said Agnes; "everybody has been very good. I will tell you all about it afterwards. To-morrow you may have a drive, if you like it, the doctor says."

"Oh, hang driving!" said Roger; "I'll walk. I am as strong as you are—a great deal stronger than you are, I believe, to speak the truth. So, everybody has been good? I suppose they thought you had enough on your hands with a sick husband and three little children. By Jove, Agnes, there was one night I took fright myself. I thought how cruel it would be if anything happened, you know. England's impracticable for people in our circumstances; but I was almost tempted to wish we had been there."

"Hush, for Heaven's sake! and don't talk so," said Agnes. "What does it matter about me? It is your health that is the thing to be considered. Do you think England is quite impracticable, Roger? I cannot see it, for my part."

"That is because you don't know, my dear," said the invalid, confidently. "We can live

anyhow here; nobody takes the trouble to inquire how many servants you've got, or how much you spend on your toilette. But at home, you know—why, at home we must either drop out of civilization altogether, or live as other people do; there is no choice."

"That is another thing in which I don't agree with you," said Agnes. "Lady Grandmaison used to say it was a great mistake."

"A great deal Lady Grandmaison knows!" said Roger; but he was secretly mollified by the name of the very fine lady whom he called his wife's authority. "Let us hear what *she* said."

"She said, she went sometimes to people's houses who were not of her own class—for example, artists," said Agnes, in her innocence; "and that they always tried to entertain her in imitation of Grandmaison. And then she said, if they only had been content to entertain her in *their* way, and not to copy hers, it would have been so much kinder to her, and so very much pleasanter, than to have always the same thing over——"

But here Agnes could not but perceive, by the clouding over of Roger's countenance, that she had said something much amiss.

"Agnes, you are enough to drive a saint out

of patience," said Roger; "what the deuce do you mean? I hope you don't mean to put *us* on the level of artists and such people. You ought to understand by this time that *all* these professional people are out of society. One notices them, of course, because it is the right thing to notice them—in a way: but Lady Grandmaison would never have taken the liberty of making such a remark in respect to people in our condition. The thing is preposterous, as you ought to know——"

"But why?" said Agnes. "I am sure many artists are a great deal richer than we are; and they could not be good artists if they were not educated people. I don't see why it is absurd."

"That is simply because you don't know," said Roger, with impatience. "There are some things that never can be taught. It is all very well to be kind to an artist—who, of course, is an outsider; but I should hope that Lady Grandmaison knew better than to be kind to *me*!"

"I am afraid, as you say, there are some things I shall never learn," said Agnes. "Lady Grandmaison was very kind to *me*. Of course, if that is your feeling, I don't suppose she would do anything to wound you. But don't you think, Roger, if England was best for you, we could do without society for a little?" she

said, returning to her object. "I am sure I should not mind, for my part."

"What stupid idea have you got into your head of England being best for me?" said Roger. "Nonsense! England is the land of taxes and appearances, and never can be best for anybody. Let well alone, I tell you. If I want a place which will be the best for me, I can go back to Sorrento. But the fact is, I am all right again, and mean to go to the place that's most amusing. There, I wish you'd count up what your bills are. I'm going to write to my respected godfather. I mean to tell him how nearly he has lost me," said Roger; "and therefore, you had better make up your bills, for his heart is sure to be moved by such an appeal as that."

"I have not any bills," said Agnes; "even, I have a little money. Dear Roger, you know my father is always kind. If you only would go home a little, and recruit your strength; we might come abroad again, if you wished it; and perhaps," said the anxious wife, faltering a little, "he and you might think of something better——"

"By Jove! it is difficult to stand all this," said Roger, getting up from his chair. "My dear Agnes, I never say anything against your father; it is one of my principles. But just be

reasonable a moment, and tell me how can he possibly know what is suitable for me? Besides, I don't know what you mean with all this nonsense about recruiting my health. To-morrow I shall be all right. Is it the doctors that have been telling you this?"

"They say you ought to take care," said Agnes, faltering a little, "and that you must not be worried. I suppose they say as much always after a severe illness like yours."

"By Jove! to send me to England is an odd way of taking care," said Roger; "and as for the means;—I don't mean to say we're lying on a bed of roses; still, the money generally turns up somehow, you must acknowledge that. Don't talk any more rubbish, there's a good girl; you ought to know by this time that I don't mean to go to England. I tell you, I know a great deal better than you do, and that we are best here!"

And with this decisive utterance Agnes had to stop short and be content. But her anxieties were awakened, and a new turn was given to her thoughts. Though the illness of Roger had been of a very serious kind, it had never occurred to his wife, after the actual crisis was over, that anything further was to be apprehended; and the novelty of the idea, and the necessity for hiding it in her own mind, became dreadful to

Agnes, when, her patient being better—or indeed, as he himself said, “quite well,” and returned to his usual amusements and occupations—she was left once more to complete the baby’s frocks in the silence. Up to this time, though she had had many things to suffer, Agnes, who was not given to brooding over those disappointments of life which, after all, never reveal themselves at a stroke, but grow slowly upon the firmament till the eye gets used to them, had been in the habit of rousing herself now and then, when she got sad and discouraged, and doing her best to dissipate her troubles by contemplation of the parts of her existence which were, on the whole, sufficiently happy. Roger might not be precisely what she had once supposed him to be, but he was almost always kind, in his way; and Walter was the dearest and most engaging of children; and baby was well, and promised well;—and at the worst they had a prospect before them, if Roger ever came to Trevelyan, of paying what they owed—or at least Agnes devoutly believed so. When she took all these things into consideration the heaviness would melt away from her heart, and she would say to herself that the mists dispersed always when she had courage to face them, and that fancy was more cruel than fact.

But this day a spectre took its place on her

path, which was not a fancy, and would not disappear. When she felt the pain more than usual, and essayed her general mode of exorcising it, Agnes for the first time felt herself repulsed and driven back, sadder than ever. This was no burden of the thoughts or the imagination, which could be put to flight. In place of lightening it became heavier than before, and fixed, as if with actual talons, upon her heart. She did not think as yet of what the consequences might be to herself, for she had not followed out the idea so far as to anticipate the possibility of widowhood. What she thought of was Roger weak, and ill, and suffering—unable to take any of the pleasures which occupied him now—without anything to employ his time or give him an interest in life; and so far as she herself was at all the object of her thoughts, it was that she imagined herself engrossed with him, and the children running about wild, neglected, and yet subdued and reprov'd indoors, that they might not make a noise to disturb papa. And then, in such a case, the question arose more than ever how the forlorn household was to be provided for; whether Roger would consent, whether Agnes herself could bear to apply to her father for everything, even though that everything was but a pittance, enough to

keep them alive. Such thoughts were not very cheerful accompaniments to the making of baby's frocks ; and, for the first time, Agnes found them too strong for her—thoughts that would not be repelled even by her most strenuous efforts ; for, to be sure, by this time, something had come into them which could not be reasoned away.

And it was very hard to say how far matters would be mended if they went home. Agnes's mind revolted—more, it is to be feared, than Roger's would have done—from the idea of living upon her father's bounty ; and now it was too late to hope that Roger could “do something” to provide for his family. At last she had agreed sadly that he was right, and that it was best to stay where they were. When her thoughts reached this stage, she began to think of Sorrento, which had grown, as was natural, fairer and dearer to her since she left it, and which was still associated with the time when she had been able to dream. She sat at her work and planned how they could return there (for Agnes never doubted that, if Roger was to be “delicate,” Italy was the place for him), and find for the winter, rooms that faced to the *mezzogiorno*, and a balcony that looked on the sea ; and how, with the ninety pounds of honest money which remained to them, and which Roger had

so often laughed at, she could make a last forlorn attempt to live without asking for any more alms. These were the most cheerful of all the many new calculations which occupied her in her solitude.

Yet it must be remembered that even in these circumstances there was nothing of absolute misery in her life or in her thoughts. It was not life in its tragical aspect, extraordinary and unusual—but life, with some private aggravations, of the common complexion, which she had to confront and conquer, as far as that was possible. Agnes had even breadth enough of mind to see that her husband, save in the stronger faculty for being amused, was very little better off than she was. Roger's dissipations, which were not of a heinous character, and his amusements, stood to him in the same place which her baby's frocks, and little Walter's lessons, and her exertions in domestic economy did to Agnes. Instead of feeling virtuous over the different character of her occupations, she was wise enough, being Stanfield's daughter, to recognise that, as she owed this shifty, unsettled, unlovely life to him, so he too owed its more disagreeable features to her. If he had not married, he might have stood in exactly the same position as most of the men in

whose company he spent his life; and nobody could have had a right to blame him, whatever the opinion of a high moralist might have been as to the waste of his best years implied in such an existence. Or he might have married in his own sphere, and in such a way as to have secured at least an income and the means of following out his own conceptions of what was best and most agreeable. Instead of that, he had cast himself helpless, not being a man in the least capable of conquering fate, upon the world by marrying Agnes; and he too, like her, had to fight his battle under circumstances hard enough. All this went through her mind when she was alone. But then there were other moments, when the sunshine and the air outside drove such ideas altogether out of the heart of Agnes, and when she only recollected that they were both young, and that they loved each other, and that nothing had happened as yet which could not be mended; and even the doctor's warning did not altogether overwhelm her spirit at these happier moments. Doctors were wrong so often; and then Roger himself was utterly sceptical, and looked as well as ever; and the world was still before them, with all its hopes and chances of new and better life.

Fortunately, the season was about over when

Roger had his next attack ; which, to be sure, was brought on by the most imprudent exposure and the excitement of a steeple-chase, upon which he had betted heavily. His horse won at last, fortunately for the Trevelyans, but Roger next morning was reduced to almost a worse strait than in his previous illness. This time the doctor "spoke seriously" to himself, when the patient was sufficiently recovered to listen.

"I warned Mrs. Trevelyan that the greatest care was necessary," he said, reproachfully, "and that excitement was above all things to be avoided. I must repeat what I said then with still more emphasis. With quiet, and a tranquil mind, and a regular life——"

"Good heavens, doctor ! don't be so barbarous," said the unfortunate patient ; "I am the steadiest fellow going. What you can possibly mean by that frightful sentence, except gruel and slippers, I cannot imagine ; and surely I have not come to that."

"No ; not if you take care of yourself," said the doctor, "but this is not a case to trifle with. Excitement and exposure are as bad for you—I mean, of course, in a physical point of view—as the wildest dissipation might be to another man. I don't want to drive you to slippers and gruel, but I must tell you that this won't do ; your

constitution is not equal to it. Go home and nurse yourself for a year or two. I assure you, a little care will be well repaid."

"Go *home!*" said Roger; "I suppose you mean that for a joke, doctor. An English winter is a fine thing for a man who has to take care of himself. We were talking of going back to Italy, which, of course, is what you meant to say."

"My dear sir," said the doctor, "I meant what I said; there is nothing the matter with your lungs, and I don't believe in Italy. Go home. Go to a quiet place, where there are no amusements. Ride if you like, but don't hunt. Leave sport alone for a little, you'll come back to it with all the greater zest. A little steady occupation and domestic life for a year or two might set you all right."

Here Roger threw an indignant glance at Agnes, who was so much amazed by having her own early visions repeated with all the force of professional advice, that she raised her eyes in astonishment to the adviser's face, and missed Roger's look of accusation. He, however, could not divest himself of the idea that Agnes was a traitor, and that this was the means she had taken to secure her own way.

"Precisely," he said; "you are in charming

accord with Mrs. Trevelyan, doctor. This is the career she has chalked out for me for I don't know how many years."

"I know nothing about that," said the doctor, with a little impatience. "If Mrs. Trevelyan had formed that idea on the same grounds that I have done, she would have showed her acquaintance with the grand principles of medical science; but that does not interfere with my advice."

Roger naturally found it necessary to pause after this. He began to demand explanations, that he might know at least why such a step was incumbent on him. If it was not his lungs, which is always the idea that comes easiest in such a case, what was it? And then the conversation grew purely medical. The end of all, however, was that Roger was convinced, however much against his will. Agnes hovered about the room in silence and terror while all this was going on; she saw that her husband attributed to her, that suggestion which resembled so much her own desires; and she saw, besides, what Roger did not observe, being occupied with other matters, that even with all the advantages of quietness and tranquillity of mind, no certain cure was promised to her husband. The doctor spoke to him as doctors speak to a man who has to be

soothed and humoured in order to prolong his life as long as possible. She did not venture to follow the doctor to ask any interpretation of his dubious expressions, when he went away. She had to wait and receive, in her own person, the inevitable shock.

“So,” said Roger, “you have managed to get your own will at last. A nice sentence this, isn’t it, for a man of my age? A tranquil mind, and a quiet life; something to do, and the domestic circle! You have got your own way at last.”

“Not by my own will, Roger,” said Agnes. “You know it is long since I have either spoken or thought of going home.”

“Oh, I don’t accuse you,” said her husband; “perhaps, for the first moment, I thought you had been mean and spoken to him; but you are not mean, whatever you may be. Oh no, I don’t accuse you. This is what it has come to of itself, and altogether independent of you. A nice life for a man of my habits! We’ll go to Windholm, of course.”

“Not of course, if you don’t like it, Roger,” said the anxious wife.

“Oh, like it, hang it! I like it as well as any other place;—a place where there are no

amusements, that is the chief thing desirable. Windholm is just as good as any other, and we'll always have your father handy to keep us from starving. By Jove, it *is* a little hard upon a man at my age!"

"Yes, Roger, it is very hard," said Agnes, kneeling down by his side, and feeling for the moment remorseful even of her own health and life, which were all for his service. If it had but been she who was ill—she who could have been sent home to be taken care of, and there would have been an end of it. This seemed to Agnes, as it has seemed to so many women, so much more natural, so much more satisfactory; but this is not how things are arranged in this perplexing life.

Roger was, however, a little touched by his wife's sympathy. He was pleased that at least she could see some reason for his disinclination to return to England; and when all that could be said on that subject had been said, the invalid, with natural inconsistency, changed his mind all at once, and began to think with pleasure of the change. He discovered that when he was no longer free and able to move about, the sound of the band in the afternoon was something insufferable; and that the idiots who played, and the *canaille* who enjoyed themselves,

were a detestable foreign mob, unworthy of an Englishman's regard. "You had better let your friend, Lady Grandmaison, know where we are going; *they* have a place in Middlesex," Roger said. And these were the circumstances, altogether amazing and unexpected, in which, after nearly eight years' absence, the Trevelyans made their preparations to return.



CHAPTER XI.

Once more in England.

THE Trevelyans were going home. So they all said—from Roger, who knew that the only house he had ever called home in England, was closed against him, down to little Walter, whose sole idea of home was the place where his mother happened to be. The words are suggestive words in all circumstances, and come to bear meanings very different from their first cheerful primitive meaning. As for Agnes, she regarded this return, though she had longed for it for years, with painful doubt and timidity. She was too wise to expect her husband to content himself with the manner of life which would content her; and what was he to do at Windholm, where he would be able but too completely to carry out the doctor's orders? And then she thought, not as Stanfield believed she was thinking—of her father's pleasure in the news, in the hope of again seeing her, of keeping her and

her children near him—but of how Roger would bear the proximity, of how the two would “get on.” It seemed as if, as happens so often, her wishes were granted her just at the moment when she had ceased to wish. The summer was almost over when they began their journey, and Agnes’s anxiety was great on the road; for there was her helpless little baby, still so young, and Walter, who began to be uncontrollable as he developed into boyhood, and Roger himself, who had to be cared for most carefully of all. After all her fatigues, this journey stretched her strength to its utmost point, and it was with a weary, wan face that she landed again in England, after the eight years’ absence which had been so eventful to her. Stanfield had come up to London to meet his child, but the two said very little to each other when they met. When she had gone away, it was she who was the person to be cared for, she whom everybody was thinking about, whom Roger meant to guard from every wind that blew, and whom the father, as he gave her up, regarded wistfully, as feeling that no new protection could adequately replace his own unflinching care. But by this time, all that was changed.

It did not occur to Roger now, even to say or to think that Agnes had to be taken care

of. The idea would have moved him not to eager protestations of his own attention, but to a little amusement, if not impatience. "Oh, Agnes is used to it, she is a very good traveller," he said lightly, when the blacksmith said something about her fatigue; and after the first moment, when Stanfield had kissed his daughter, she had too much to do to talk to him. Instead of remaining with her father, to make acquaintance with him anew, and tell him, not only in words, but by her eyes and her looks, that all was well with her, Agnes, after the first hurried greeting, had to leave him with Roger, while she attended to her necessary duties. Stanfield had engaged rooms for the party at the hotel, but it was Agnes's business to arrange which was to be Roger's room, and to give all the orders for his comfort and for that of the children, which, to be sure, was only her natural duty, too much an every-day matter to take any importance at all in her mind. But it was different with the father, who had seen her go away a bride, and whose eyes had not been familiarized gradually with the inevitable change from the position of one whom everybody served, to that of one who served everybody. Stanfield was too wise a man to come to an immediate decision in his own mind on the first aspect of

affairs ; but, nevertheless, his heart sank when he saw the change in his daughter. No doubt, it was inevitable that she should be changed ; and it might have been, had he seen the change day by day, that the new things might have grown, to him also, as dear as the old. But at this moment the shock was too great and sudden. He stood by the side of the fire, near the chair into which Roger had thrown himself, contemplating, with a little sympathy and a little irritation, the changed looks of his son-in-law. The difference in Roger's appearance was sadder and more striking than that which these eight years had wrought in Agnes ; but then it was not Roger who was William Stanfield's only child.

“Always the same,” said Trevelyan ; “this horrible old England never has anything but fogs and rain to greet a fellow with. Would you mind shutting the door, Stanfield ? An arrival is always a wretched affair ; and as for me, this cold goes to my bones, though, to be sure, there's always a little comfort in a coal fire.”

“Did you have a rough passage ?” said Stanfield, by way of having something to say.

“Oh, nothing particular, for the Channel,” said Roger. “What's Agnes about, I wonder ?

And, by Jove, how slow those fellows are! *She's* looking after the babies, I suppose. That German maid, of course, is not the least use. If we had been a little richer, I should have brought Giovanni, who was worth a dozen maids; but that money is the deuce; it comes in the way of everything; and here we are, in this blessed old country, where one has always to pay double. Good heavens, how cold it is!"

"We have had a deal of rain," said Stanfield; "that is why it is so cold. I am sorry to see you feel it so much."

"Yes," cried Roger; "that is what I said to Farington; but these doctors will always have their own way. As for coming home to be quiet, I have no confidence in it, for my part. I believe a man is always better where he can amuse himself a little. By Jove, what can Agnes be doing? She ought to be a little more civil to you, at least."

A sudden light woke up under Stanfield's eyelids. "She has no occasion to be civil to me," he said, with a momentary smile, which was gone in an instant. But Roger had a great deal too much to occupy him in his own person to concern himself about Stanfield's looks.

"That is very kind of you, but she ought to know better," said Trevelyan; "it's that baby, of

course. Watty's a little brick, and never gives any trouble. I believe it's all vanity; she does not want you to form your opinion of them tonight, when they're tired and cross, but she ought to consider that I'm famishing. However, here's something to eat at last. Look here," said Roger, addressing himself to the waiter, "go to Mrs. Trevelyan, will you, and tell her we're waiting. Stanfield, I beg your pardon. Sit down, won't you? She'll be here this minute, I've no doubt."

Stanfield took the chair his son-in-law offered to him without any remark. He saw well enough that the tired traveller would have been much better pleased to have been left alone this first evening of his return; but the blacksmith's heart for once was too strong for his civility; he could not conquer his yearning to look into his child's eyes again, and learn to know this new Agnes, who was his and yet who was not his. He sat down, restraining with difficulty the heavy sigh that moved his breast. If Roger had been in vigorous health, the heart of Agnes's father would have risen against him; but the young man was himself worn and aged before his time, and the just soul was silenced, and would not reproach the weakness of his neighbour. Thus they sat together, Roger gradually

working himself into impatience till Agnes re-entered the room. She had taken off her bonnet and cloak, and at last her father could see the fair and serious woman who had come back, in the place of his ideal child. She seemed to him even a little taller in the wonderful change that had come upon her, but even now she was not tall; and her slender, girlish figure had expanded a little. She had never had much colour, and what with weariness and excitement, she was very pale at this moment; but it was when she looked at him that her father saw the fulness of the revolution. The sweet, pensive, furtive eyes, once half abashed at their own meaning, were steady and serious now like two stars. They met his eyes with a full, open look, which went to Stanfield's heart. It seemed to say, "We are equals now; my experience is more than yours, my burdens are heavier, and yet I am your child, oh, my father!" And it was in him to understand the look. There was nothing said between them as they sat down together at the table; but somehow, it seemed to Stanfield as if his life had passed in review before him, and he had seen at a glance how peaceful it had been—how sheltered from the storms and perplexities of that existence which was at present spreading over Agnes a firmament heavy with clouds. He had

this thought in his mind, while he sat for the first time at the table which was Mr. Trevelyan's table, though the bill might possibly come to the blacksmith's hand, sooner or later. Roger brightened up when he was comforted with food and wine, and had recovered his chill and fatigue a little. He even mellowed into the tone that befitted a reunion in which joy and pain were so naturally yet so strongly mixed. He talked of his wife, and praised and laughed at her with that freedom which is only born of love—a freedom which, indeed, Stanfield comprehended but partially—and he told the grandfather, who did not as yet recognise himself in that capacity, stories of Walter, with a pride in his boy which it was sweet to Agnes to see; and after this he took up his candle and shook hands with his father-in-law, and kissed his wife.

“I daresay you two would like to look at each other by yourselves,” he said; “so I'll go to bed; but don't keep her late, Stanfield, for she's very tired, though she never says so.”

They had been all standing together round the fire, and when he was gone the two that were left, turned to each other as if it had been to carry out literally Roger's suggestion. It was Stanfield who was the most moved of the two. He put his hand

softly on his daughter's head, and smoothed the heavy braids of hair under which her small head seemed to droop, as it had done all her life. A strange confusion of feeling was in his mind. He had been disposed to think her wronged, but yet it was difficult now to see how she was wronged, for her husband loved her. He had been indignant, and full of a great remorseful pity; but this pity was defeated and turned back by Roger's evident tenderness, and by the clear light in Agnes's eyes. For it was apparent to him that his daughter was not unhappy and oppressed, though at the same time she might have failed of the perfect life. He did not know what to say, scarcely what to think, as he smoothed down with a tender caressing hand her beautiful hair.

"So this is you, little one, at last!" said Stanfield. It was all he could find breath to say.

"Yes, father," said Agnes, "but not a little one any longer—the mother of little ones whom you have not had time to see."

"Ay, child, so I suppose," said the blacksmith, with a sigh. "It's time I should make up my mind to that. You're changed enough to teach me the lesson; but still, my darling, you will always have a child's face to me."

“Am I much changed?” said Agnes. “I ought to be, for in some things we have had a hard life—and, father, what do you think of Roger?”

She fixed her eyes upon him as she asked this question, to read his opinion in his looks; and it did not occur to her that this instant introduction of another, even though it was her husband, into their first interview, moved Stanfield with a sense of irritation strange to his nature. He withdrew his hand from her head before he replied.

“He’s thin and worn, but he’ll come all right again at Windholm,” said the blacksmith, who, indeed, believed what he said, not being gifted with the clear-sightedness of love so far as Roger was concerned. “It’s strange to think it’s eight long years since you and me was parted, Agnes; and you’ve been happy, little one, happy, though you’ve been so far away?”

Agnes paused a little, and smiled such a smile as went to Stanfield’s heart; but her eyes met his frankly, though they were full of a world of thoughts and recollections of which he felt he knew nothing.

“Happy, and very sorrowful,” she said, “and glad, and sometimes like to die. You know, father. We have had the sweet and the bitter,

and sometimes the bitter more than the sweet."

This was all she said in answer to his anxious question; and Stanfield, in his delicacy and tenderness, could not find it in his heart to ask more. He suffered her to speak of the children, which was not for the moment a subject to which he turned of his own will; for, good as he was, he was only a man, and it was his own child—his only one, whom he was thinking of, and not the vague descendants whom he had kissed, but scarcely noticed, before the poor little creatures, pale and weary with their long journey, were taken to bed. And then again they stood and looked at each other in a silence that was more expressive than words.

"I will not go with you to-morrow," said Stanfield. "I'll have to start the first thing in the morning to set everything going, and I'll see you at home when you're settled there. No, Agnes, I'll not be at the house when you arrive; I'll come in the evening and see how you are all settled, and if you like it. Now, little one, go, you've cared for everybody; go yourself and get a little rest."

"Yes," said Agnes; but she paused and hesitated, and did not go away. Her heart was like his, a little disappointed to find that without any

fault on either side there was something between them that there had not used to be. She did not think that it was those eight long years, during which almost all her own individual life had been lived, and all the changes they had made. She thought her father was, possibly, displeased, discontented, dissatisfied with something—perhaps her own preoccupation, or Roger's lightness of speech. "Yes," she said, with a lingering doubt in her voice; "but, father, you have not said that you are glad to see us home."

"Have not I?" said the blacksmith, and his heart leaped into his mouth and kept him from speaking. "My little one, I've pined and longed for you every day for eight years. I never was given to much speaking, and I'm confused with the sight of so much change. I'll tell you better to-morrow, when I see you in your own house, all I have to say. Good night now, my darling, and go and sleep, and take comfort and get yourself refreshed. It makes me feel dizzy and queer to see you like this, but to-morrow it will be all clear."

And with that salutation he kissed her and went his way. It would be hard to say what thoughts were in his mind—wonder, perhaps, in the first place, that his child, whom he had

nursed so fondly and watched so carefully, had been so taken out of his hands, and placed, in spite of all his precaution, in the very heat and front of the conflict. It seemed to him impossible, sometimes, that the woman from whom he had just parted, so full of duties, and appealed to on every side, was indeed the same as his child Agnes—the child of his imagination and of his heart, from whom in her youth he had warded off all trouble. He was thirty years older than she was, but his peaceful life had not known all this time so many experiences as those which were crowded into eight years for her. Life was to her more heavy, more stormy, a more dangerous and difficult path to tread, than at any time it had been to him, strong man as he was. Was it, perhaps, also more sweet?—for after the melting of Roger's heart, Stanfield, always just, could not blame his daughter's husband, nor feel indignant, as he had at one moment done, at the burden she had to bear, and the many calls upon her. If she had been unhappy—if there had been any complaint in her heart, she would never have answered his questions so openly, nor confessed to having had sometimes more bitter than sweet; and yet Stanfield could see, notwithstanding, that the perfect union, that accord of mind and heart, which makes by times upon earth the

music of the spheres, had not fallen to her share. He knew it by instinct, he could not have told why—and yet she was not unhappy, nor was there anything to blame her husband with. As he mounted upstairs to the humble room he had engaged for himself, he turned these matters over in his mind, and, indeed, they kept him from sleeping far into the night, long after all the Trevelyans were resting from their fatigues.

The truth was, that the lot which had fallen to Agnes was the common lot, neither blessed nor miserable, with love enough and happiness enough to keep her going, and support her under the fatigues of the way, but nothing in the world to make paradise, or the ideal fate for which dreamers hope. Either it was that Agnes was not a common woman, or that at least, which was excusable enough, her father thought she was not, and that accordingly this common lot seemed to him a strange lot, less suited to her than either blessedness or misery. Stanfield kept thinking of it in his little dark room, till his mind was too much bewildered to think any more; and then he said his prayers over again, simple man as he was, with an additional supplication, which was not so much a prayer as a question and appeal; for indeed he was used to do all his thinking in the sight of God—and to put that

question which he could not solve, into the hands of Him who knows all things, seemed, after all, the only way to dispose of it. This was how the father and daughter had their first meeting after so many years.



CHAPTER XII.

The House on the Green.

NEXT day the Trevelyans prepared with some excitement to continue their journey to Windholm. As for Agnes, she was the most silent of the party, feeling, as she did by instinct, that her father, like herself, had made, even in the joy of the meeting, a painful discovery; and that their reunion had revealed to them a fact, which might have been ignored so long as they remained apart, that they never would be fully united in heart and thoughts again. Though Agnes knew that this was inevitable, she was too true and single-minded not to recognise it with a pang, and it was accordingly with more sadness than joy that she set out upon the short journey, which for the first time was to conduct the family *home!* Roger, on the contrary, was as pleased as a boy going home for the holidays, with this new change. He had no *arrière pensée* to subdue his spirits,

and for a moment the novelty occupied him. Jack Charlton had already been to see them at their hotel, and Pendarves, who had assisted at their marriage, had also paid his respects to Mr. and Mrs. Trevelyan; and the impression made upon that solemn personage by the aspect of Agnes had amused and elated her husband. And Roger was convalescent, and the sun was shining, and England, after all, bore a familiar face. "This little shaver must learn better English," he said, as he played with his boy. "By Jove! the fellow has an accent; and it's time to remember you have a stake in the country, Wat." As for Walter himself, he was in a state of intense curiosity, mingled with dissatisfaction. The grandfather whom he had seen last night through his sleepy eyelashes, somehow lacked the air which the experienced youth believed necessary to that class of the human family. Stanfield was not a grand seigneur, and the boy recognised the fact by instinct. Accordingly, he opened his eyes very wide and looked out for the *château* of his dreams with a jealous eagerness, in which already a presentiment mingled; and to be sure Agnes, who was *clairvoyante*, divined, and was disturbed by the childish anxiety of her child. Baby had the best of it, who fell asleep placidly, and left the circumstances to arrange themselves.

As they drew near Windholm, a shade too came over Roger's face. "They might have let us have the Hall," he said, "that would have been a small boon in comparison with all your father is doing—though, after all, it's a disgusting old place, and you would have been buried alive." But after this remark, it was in silence that they arrived at the little station, and got out, themselves and their baggage, to the amazement and curiosity of the officials. "Halloo! what's the name of the place?" said Roger. "Mr. Stanfield's house on the Green, I suppose?" "Stanfield's, the blacksmith's, sir?" said the cabman promptly, and Agnes saw her husband's face redden and cloud over, and Walter's eyes open wide. She said, "No, the new house—the house Mr. Stanfield has built," as she seated herself in the cab; and the man answered, "All right, mum," with a glance of evident recognition which disconcerted the whole party. Agnes took her baby in her arms, and leaned over it as they drove down the village street and past the house in which she had spent her youth. It was afternoon by this time, and the sun was beginning to decline behind the Cedars, throwing his full radiance, as of old, into the wide opening of the archway, and upon the parlour windows, where the blinds were down; but something which she could not

define to herself—something which was not pride—a painful hesitation which made her heart sink and falter, restrained Agnes from saying to her eager boy, “That is my father’s house.” Heaven knows it was not the meanness of being ashamed of that homely house. She bent down her head to her little daughter’s sleeping face with a pang which it would be hard to describe. She said to herself—“*She* will understand,” with that long, long and doubtful postponement of her hopes of sympathy, which so many mothers know; while Roger, beside her, looked out with somewhat sullen recognition, evidently relieved to see that there was nobody either at the door or window; and Walter, much bewildered, regarded everything about him with a jealous, half-frightened curiosity. In this way they drove down the street, which Agnes had left with all the sweet, absurd expectations of impossible nobleness and blessedness that come natural to a bride.

Things were better, however, when at last they arrived at the house which Stanfield had built for his only child. In the interval between the first disappointment of his hopes and Agnes’s actual return, the blacksmith, who was no sentimentalist, had let the house, and all the obtrusive signs of novelty had disappeared. But his tenants had been sent away in time to

permit him to carry out all his original ideas about the furniture and accessories. When the cab wheeled in at the open gates, and drew up before the door, Roger's countenance cleared a little. It was not a *château*, but at least outside it bore the aspect of a house that a gentleman might live in, Mr. Trevelyan said to himself; and even Walter, though his eyes opened wider than ever, and though he gazed with consternation at the walls and railings which enclosed it all, jumped out with eagerness, and called to his mother to look at the bright flowers on the lawn. The lime-trees were beginning to lose their leaves, and the elms were brown and rusty, but still the sunshine slanted between them with a friendly consolatory glow; and the flower-beds were gay with geraniums, and a few solitary white stars still lingered among the dark foliage of the jessamine, which concealed the wall at the point where it divided their possessions from somebody else's garden. Then there was a cheerful maid, holding wide open the door, and a pleasant gleam of firelight visible at the windows. When they went into the pretty drawing-room, Roger gave vent to his feelings in an exclamation—

“By Jove! Agnes, the old boy's a brick,” said Stanfield's respectful son-in-law; and he

threw himself into an easy chair, and poked the bright fire, and made himself comfortable. But after a moment, the circumstances moved Roger a little, careless though he was, and awoke his better nature. He got up again and went to his wife, who had seated herself also, silent, and not in case for conversation, with her baby in her arms, to keep her heart from running over. Roger came up to her and bent over her, and kissed her white cheek.

“You know I cannot talk sentiment,” he said; “but, my darling, don’t you think I don’t feel his delicacy, and all that. Another man would have been here to say, ‘Look, what a present I give you!’”—and then Roger faltered a little, and held his wife tight, with the baby in her arms. “It is you who have brought me home, and not I you,” he said, hurriedly, with a pang of humiliation and gratitude.

Agnes knew what his tone meant better than he himself did, and rose to meet it, rendered strong by this new call upon her powers.

“Roger, dear,” she said, “I have brought you a great deal of trouble; that is the thing of which I am most conscious now.”

But when he heard these words, Mr. Trevelyan, restored to himself, laughed and hugged his wife.

“I am very well content with all you have brought me,” he said; “and as for Stanfield, he’s the most generous fellow going. Put down that baby, and let us have a look over the house. Halloo, Watty! don’t you think it’s worth a man’s while to have a grandfather? By Jove! who would have thought he could have had such good taste?”

“I will come back directly,” said Agnes, whose composure was forsaking her. She was only a woman like the rest, and had to cry or die, as is the manner of women. She laid the baby down in a little bed, which was there ready for the little stranger, and fell down beside it on her knees. No words could have described the agony of pain and happiness, of love, and grief, and gratitude, and disappointment, that found their natural vent in those tears. She had come home, and she was glad; and yet it was not to the comforts and tranquilities of home that she had come, and her heart was wrung with the anguish foreseen. She owed all to her father, and she loved him, and had a daughter’s pride in his tender goodness. But, alas! it was not to her husband she owed it; and the pride of the wife, humiliated and mortified, ached in her breast. But it was not many minutes that she could spare to this little crisis

of excited feeling ; and Agnes's eyes were deep, and did not always betray when they had shed tears.

Thus the return was accomplished, and few people were the wiser. The cabman announced to his public that he had driven the swell as married Stanfield's daughter to the new 'ouse on the Green ; but then his public was limited, and not composed of people who knew Mrs. Trevelyan. And Mrs. Freke, returning from her afternoon walk, saw the firelight shining at the windows, and a child's face looking out, and hesitated whether she should not go and inquire whether Agnes had arrived, feeling surely enough that her visit at any hour could not be otherwise than an honour to the blacksmith's daughter ; and it was only a chance meeting with little Miss Fox, from the Cedars, the only one of the three who remained unmarried, which hindered her from carrying out this kind intention. The news got abroad in the evening, and created a sensation at Windholm. Polly Thompson, who had been bridesmaid to Agnes, and who, like Miss Fox, was still unmarried, thrilled all over when she heard it, foreseeing social elevation to herself, to which it would be difficult to put any limit. And Agnes's old schoolfellows, most of whom had also husbands and babies of their own, betrayed all

the liveliest curiosity, not unmixed with irritation, and an anxious desire to hear everything that could be told. Perhaps the most excited of all was Mrs. Stanfield, who could not, as she herself said, settle to anything, and whose determination not to have nothing to do with her stepdaughter, as had cost the master both time and money, not to speak of feelin's, had already been expressed loudly. As for the blacksmith himself, he had sedulously kept at his work all the day long, not even going to the forge door, as was his custom, to breathe the air, in case it might have happened to be that moment at which the carriage went past. He had given all his orders in the morning when he arrived at Windholm, and made a last tender inspection to see that everything was in order; and then he left his daughter, whom he loved too much to let his love come in her way, to arrive in peace, with no reminder before her that she owed her home to him. He was thinking about her all day long, though nobody knew his thoughts, and entering into her secrets by mere force of sympathy and love. He could have told, without knowing how, all about that mingled emotion in her heart that had to find utterance in tears, and knew by instinct that her pleasure in his gift must be marred by the thought that it was not her husband who had

provided her a home. All this Stanfield felt with his daughter—felt it much more strongly than Roger did; to whom, by this time, it appeared the most natural thing in the world that the blacksmith, who was rich in his way, should build a handsome house for his only child. When the work-day was over Stanfield changed his dress and took his tea as usual; that is to say, the meal was as usual, but not the Sunday suit, which he only wore on special occasions.

Mrs. Stanfield watched him go away with a heated and cloudy countenance.

“If it had been ere another she’d a-been civil, and asked *me*. Them as lives upon other folks has no call to be so high,” she said; but the last words were under her breath.

As for the blacksmith, it was not with a very triumphant countenance that he was going to pay his visit.

“Not to-night, Sally, not to-night,” he said. “I’d not go myself, but the child might think it unkind—not to-night.”

“Nor no night, I promise you, master, for them as don’t think me good enough to ask,” said his wife; but he was gone without hearing her. He went on his way slowly, with a more than usually meditative look in his eyes. His step was so leisurely, that instead of expressing

any anxiety to be there, it seemed to imply an unexpressed, inexpressible reluctance. He could not remain away; and yet he had a strange consciousness that the picture he could form in his imagination would always henceforward be more satisfactory, less disturbing than that which he saw with his eyes. Nevertheless, the new house on the Green had never looked so cheerful. The young moon was up in the east, looking with a little wistful curiosity over the tree-tops into the windows; and as the curtains were not drawn upstairs, that celestial spectator might have seen if she cared a pretty effect of light upon the flaxen hair of Madelon, who was singing the baby to sleep by the fire. Down below it was only a ruddy reflection that filled the curtained windows; but when Stanfield entered, the first thing he heard was the voice of his little grandson, filling the house with that cheerful din which only children can make. Within, Roger and Agnes were sitting in the pretty drawing-room, which was all glowing and shining with light and comfort. Agnes had learned many things in those long years. She could scarcely have believed now in the stiff and "tidy" room in which she had received Lady Charlton when she began her career. This room, which she had entered only a few hours before, looked to Stanfield as

though she had been living in it all her life. It seemed already to have taken her impression by some mysterious means which he could not comprehend. He could see at a glance that there was a chair at the window, half visible between the curtains, at which she must have been sitting at work, and there was another chair near the table, which was as distinctly the throne of the mistress of the house as if she had inhabited the place for years. As for Roger, he was dozing in his easy-chair, in that moment of comfort and quiet after dinner which moves most men to that indulgence. Stanfield, who could not quite divest his mind of the idea that his daughter was still a bride, with all the sensitive feelings and instinctive claims of that crisis of life, could scarcely restrain himself from an impulse of impatience and disdain towards the man who, with such a wife opposite to him, could find no better way of enjoying her society. But as for Agnes, she was quite unmoved by Roger's slumber. Perhaps, indeed, she was glad of it for the moment, in so far as she took any notice whatever of so usual a circumstance. She rose up to meet her father, and took his two hands in hers and led him to his seat.

“At last it begins to look as if it was real,” said Agnes. “Father, you have been a great

deal too good to us; nobody but you would have thought of everything—would have thought so much of me.”

“ You are pleased,” said Stanfield, with a wonderful sense of gratification—and he spoke under his breath without knowing it, and held his child’s hands fast in his own.

“ Pleased !” said Agnes, and made a little pause after the words; “ I do not deserve that you should be half so good to me. It is like Paradise to us, who have been vagabonds and never have had a home before.”

“ My little one, I have nobody in the world but you,” said the blacksmith. He seemed to take pleasure in giving her the name which she had said was applicable to her no longer. But this time the sound of the new voice roused Roger. Agnes might have gone on talking long enough without producing that effect, but the murmur of deeper sound disturbed Mr. Trevelyan, unused to any such interruption.

“ Eh !—halloo !—why, what is it, Agnes ?” he said, opening his eyes; and then awoke. “ Is it you, Stanfield, come to bid us welcome ?” said Roger; and he gradually lifted himself up and went forward with outstretched hands—for he was in his most genial humour—“ and, upon my life, I don’t know anything half good enough to say to you.

I hope Agnes has told you what we both think. By Jove! you are as magnificent as a prince. You can't think how pleasant it feels, after marching about so long, to find one's self in such snug quarters. Agnes, you know how stupid I am—I hope you've said all that you ought to say."

It was on Stanfield's lips to say that between his daughter and himself there was no necessity for anything to be said—for, to be sure, Roger, as was natural, had broken the spell—but Agnes's look restrained the words.

"My father understands me, at least," she said; "when two people know each other, it does not matter so much about words."

"She takes it all in her own hand," said Roger. "Look here, Stanfield. Should you think she had ever lived anywhere else in her life? Most people, you know, look out of sorts a little the first night; but that is Mrs. Trevelyan's way. Where's that young shaver, Agnes?—why don't you have them both in, as you are longing to do, and make your little exhibition? Halloo, Wat!—don't make such a row, you little polyglot wretch, but come here——"

"Come and see grandpapa," said Agnes, softly; and then she led the new little wonderful living creature to Stanfield's knee, and put the boy's hands into his. The fact was that the black-

smith had scarcely yet taken this new relationship into consideration. To be sure, Walter was seven years old, and Stanfield had known of his existence all along; but the idea had never taken form or shape in his mind. He could believe in the speechless, sleeping baby which, so far as he had seen it, was only a piece of still life; but it was hard to add on to Agnes another independent being with a will, and a mind, and a voice, and to realize that it belonged to her, and to him through her. He lifted his broad brown luminous eyes upon the boy, and held Walter fast in that look. The child's eyes were not unlike his own, and they owned the fascination; but still Walter was a little discontented and disappointed in the depths of his heart. This new grandfather lacked something the child could not tell what. He was not like Hermann's grandfather—the stately old baron with his white moustache; and it was with a momentary cloud on his little eager animated face that he stood meeting the stronger and fuller gaze with his fearless eyes.

“I don't know who he is like,” said Stanfield, with his face gradually softening and lighting up.

At this moment Roger winced a little, and muttered “By Jove!” under his breath, and turned away rather hastily, while Agnes, on her

part, gave a little start of surprise. It was on her lips to say "He is like you," but her husband's unconscious gesture restrained her. He had observed it, too; and though he was in his best humour and grateful to Stanfield, it was not altogether a pleasant discovery. As for Walter, he regarded steadily, with brown eyes equally luminous and deep, his grandfather's face.

"You are like mamma," said Walter; "you are like her, and yet you are not like her—I don't know how it is. Grandpapa, I suppose it is you who live at the château? When am I going to see you there?"

"The château?" said Stanfield, turning to ask Agnes what the question meant.

"Walter does not know yet that there are no châteaux here," said Agnes; but she could not conceal a little confusion. "We are coming to see you to-morrow, father. This is all so new that I cannot make sure I am back at Windholm till I see you at home."

"That is true," said Stanfield; "it will be best to get it over," and he paused and sighed. After all, this happiness of meeting again was a joy largely tintured with bitterness, like most human joys.



CHAPTER XIII.

A Beginning.

“**W**ALTER,” said Agnes, next morning, “you and I are going to see grandpapa, and I want to talk to you before I go.”

The child did not make any answer, but he came to the table where she was sitting. Roger had not yet come downstairs. He had felt it advisable to resume his invalid habits; and accordingly Agnes and her little boy had breakfasted alone, as was almost habitual to them. Walter came and stood at the table where his mother's work was lying. He was busy himself making a whip with a branch of a shrub he had cut in the garden and a piece of string which he had possessed himself of in the carnival of unpacking which was going on upstairs. Without knowing it, the child was a little suspicious of this grandfather, whose face attracted him, and yet who had not the air of Hermann's grand-

father. Accordingly, he did not make any eager response, but came and placed himself, with his eyes intent upon the manufacture he was carrying on, by his mother's side.

“What you said about the châteaux last night was silly, you know,” said Agnes. “We have no châteaux here. Your other grandfather, Sir Roger, lives, I suppose, in a house a little like one, but he has not asked us to go to see him; and your kind grandpapa here, who has given us this pretty house, has not kept anything nearly so nice to himself. Do you remember what I used to tell you a true gentleman was?”

“Oh, yes!” said Walter; “the Red Cross Knight; I wonder what colour his charger was. Una had a milk-white palfrey—I remember all that. Is there a white pony, do you think, at grandpapa's? Look, mamma, what a famous whip I've made! Madelon has such lots of string upstairs.”

“Well, but that is not what I meant,” said the anxious mother, beginning to perceive that her teaching had been a little fanciful. “I want you to forget all about chargers and milk-white ponies for a little. I have always told you it was not the fine things a man had that made him a gentleman, but——”

“Yes,” said Walter; “I remember—it was

always to take off his hat, and to open the door when anybody went out, and to pick up things for ladies—at least, that is what Giovanni used to say. But look here, mamma: here's somebody in the garden. She is looking in at the window! Why does she come and look in at the window before she knocks at the door?"

"Who is it?" said Agnes. "Is it a lady?"—for, to tell the truth, she was a little afraid of Mrs. Stanfield, who certainly had a right to visit at her stepdaughter's house.

"I—don't know," said Walter. The boy was confused in his ideas, what with the doubtful appearance of his grandfather, and the new visitor's investigation of the window, which went against the young gentleman's code of manners; and Agnes turned a rather alarmed look to the door, expecting that nobody but her stepmother would have come so early, and utterly at a loss how to explain such an apparition to her clear-sighted boy. But, however, it was Mrs. Freke who came in, with a little eagerness and the most benevolent looks and intentions. The vicar's wife was very plainly dressed, as vicars' wives have a right to be (if they like) in their parish; and as the one in question had not much dignity in her looks, a little intellect of seven years old, much sharpened by travel, might be pardoned for

judging her summarily according to her outward appearance. Accordingly, Walter stood by with the most vivid astonishment when he saw this plain woman take his pretty mamma in her arms with protecting kindness.

“My dear, I’m so glad to see you back again,” said Mrs. Freke, “all well and safe, and so much improved. I had almost come in last night, when I saw the light in the windows; and I declare this must be your little boy. How do you do, my little man? Why, Agnes, let me look at you again—I scarcely think I should have known you. After all, it is a great thing to be out in the world, as you have been—you are so much improved!”

“Thank you; I am very glad you think so,” said Agnes, whose mind was much relieved by finding that it was not Mrs. Stanfield. Though she smiled a little at this novel mode of accost, she still had too much loyalty to the past not to receive it with perfect good grace. But at present Mrs. Freke had so much to say that she left Mrs. Trevelyan very little time to speak.

“I am sure you must be pleased with this pretty house,” said the vicar’s wife; “I have taken almost as much interest in it as your father has. He asked my advice about the carpets long ago, when we thought you were

coming home directly ; but I remember he and I were not quite agreed. Upon my word, I think he has done famously, considering that he could not possibly know how such things ought to be. I suppose he consulted the upholsterers, though that is always the most expensive way. We had a long talk about you at the Cedars last night ; I am sure Mrs. Fox will call when she knows you have got settled. They are all married but Milly, who used always to be called the little one, you know ; but I suppose you have heard all the Windholm news ? Upon my word, Agnes, I scarcely should have known you. It is such a pleasure to see you so much improved. I daresay you may feel a little awkward at first, on account of the difference ; but I am quite sure all the best people in Windholm will call, if you only have a little patience to wait."

" Oh, yes ! I have a great deal of patience," said Agnes, smiling a little in spite of herself ; but she was rather glad, on the whole, that Roger was not downstairs to hear the amiabilities of the vicar's wife. Perhaps, however, there was something in her tone that showed her amusement, for Mrs. Freke continued, with an air of dignity—

" Oh ! I daresay you have met much finer people than we are, abroad ; but I always say

there is nothing that a true Englishwoman prizes like recognition in her own parish. Mr. Freke, you know, has always been a great friend of yours. He says it is a shame of Sir Roger not to give you the Hall; though, for my part, I think it's a dreadful old place, and you are a great deal better off here;—and I hope you won't neglect your poor father, Agnes, now you have come home. I am sure he has been lost without you—after that strange marriage of his, too;—and what a good man he is! The vicar says he believes there never was a better man. He says he would rather talk to the blacksmith than to half the gentlemen of the county; but then, you know, Mr. Freke was always a little peculiar," said the vicar's wife.

At this point, again, Walter stole close to his mother's knee. He pulled at her dress a little with his unoccupied hand, though with the other he was cracking his whip much too near Mrs. Freke's face to be pleasant.

"Mamma, who is the blacksmith?" said little Walter; and, as one of his lessons in politeness had been not to whisper, he uttered the question audibly enough. The child was amazed, as was natural, not having met with anybody before in the course of his juvenile experience who had adopted this tone towards his mother; and, un-

fortunately, the demand thus made came to the visitor's ear.

"Dear me! is it possible the child does not know?" said the vicar's wife. "I must say, Agnes, I think you are very much in the wrong there. The blacksmith, my dear, is your grandfather, and a very worthy man. It does not matter what a man's station is in the world," Mrs. Freke added, delivering a lesson in passing; "there are a great many gentlemen, I assure you, my dear little boy, who are not nearly so nice or so good as William Stanfield; and I hope you will always be as respectful to him as if he were a duke. He is your mamma's father, and a very good man. Agnes, I cannot think how you could have kept your little boy in such ignorance; it is very hard upon your father to be despised by his own child!"

"It would be indeed, if such a thing were possible," said Agnes, whose patience was giving way; "but I have never yet seen anybody who found it practicable to do that. If my father's occupation had been a thing that was in my mind at all, no doubt my little boy would have heard of it. Pardon me, but I am sure it was not of our domestic concerns that you meant to speak when you were so kind as to come to see me. I am not likely

to forget how kind you were to me before I went away.”

At this point of the conversation it happened suddenly to Mrs. Freke to wake up out of sundry delusions with which she had entered Mrs. Trevelyan's drawing-room. She was a woman of sense, though she had her defects like other people; and at this moment it occurred to her all at once that it *was* Mrs. Trevelyan, and not Agnes Stanfield, to whom she was speaking;—perhaps the immediate cause of this discovery was that behind Agnes, and immediately in front of Mrs. Freke, there was a mirror, which reflected with perfect distinctness the long flowing skirt of Mrs. Trevelyan's dress, and its perfect fit, and air of simple elegance. It was a purely feminine argument, but it was entirely conclusive in its way. The moment that it flashed upon Mrs. Freke's mind that she was talking to a woman clothed by a Parisian milliner, the scales fell from her eyes. That she was mistaken in her idea, and that Agnes's gown had been made in Baden, under her own supervision, did not alter in the least the facts of the case. When the details of that simple toilette struck the vicar's wife, she remained speechless for the first moment; and then, all at once, it occurred to her that the kindness which Agnes thus acknow-

ledged consisted in that serious remonstrance against the marriage which Mrs. Freke had thought it her duty to deliver. This recollection embarrassed the good woman dreadfully, and added to the force of the sudden revelation. She faltered a little in spite of herself, and could not take her eyes off the mirror in which Mrs. Trevelyan's figure, a little expanded out of its girlish delicacy, was so distinctly visible; and somehow the blacksmith's daughter, always so simple and docile, seemed to vanish out of existence as she gazed.

“ I am sure I had not any intention of saying anything that was disagreeable, or taking any liberty,” said Mrs. Freke. “ People who don't move about forget what changes are going on ;” and after this semi-apology the vicar's wife changed her tone hurriedly. “ I suppose you must have met quantities of people abroad ; everybody goes abroad now, I think, except the vicar and myself. Ellen Fox, who married Mr. Spencer, went to Italy for her wedding-tour ; but I should have heard of it if *they* had seen you : I daresay you must have met the Hornbys, who have such a pretty house on the Walton side ; they go to Germany or somewhere every year ; and then there are the Perrins, who have been so much abroad ; of course you remember the Perrins—

they live on the other side of the Common, you know, at Elmwood. I am sure you must have some acquaintances here."

"No," said Agnes, amused to see the same impulse which had vexed her youth, in the case of Lady Charlton, re-appearing in the vicar's homely and kindly wife. "I don't know anybody near Windholm but my own people, and yourself, and Polly Thompson, if you will pardon me for the conjunction—that is to say, I know everybody; but that does not count, you know. You and Lady Grandmaison," said Agnes with a smile which she could not restrain, "you are my only friends, apart from my own people, here."

"Lady Grandmaison!" said Mrs. Freke, aghast.

"Yes; I saw a great deal of her one year. She is very kind, and was excessively good to me," said Agnes, and then she was drawn by the comic character of the situation to add another word *malice prepense*.

"You and she are the only friends I have in the great world. I must trust my cause to you," Mrs. Trevelyan said with a soft momentary laugh. Perhaps the conjunction was a little piece of feminine wickedness and impertinence; but Agnes, like most other people, had

learned by this time the wonderful advantage that lay in that power of being occasionally impertinent, which only great ladies possess in the highest degree.

“You know very well that it is absurd to speak of Lady Grandmaison and me together,” said Mrs. Freke, getting up with a little flush on her cheeks, “unless you wish to affront me. But at the same time, I am an old friend, and old friends are not to be picked up everywhere. I hope Mr. Trevelyan is better. Give him my regards, please, and tell him Mr. Freke is going to call upon him. I am afraid I have come in upon you too early, but you know we keep such early hours in Windholm. I must go up and tell your good father how well you are looking, and how very much you are improved; I am sure he will be very glad to hear that,” said Mrs. Freke; and then she shook hands with little Walter, who opened the door for her like a little gentleman, according to the principles of Giovanni of Sorrento. However, when he had closed it, and she was gone, the hardest part of the business remained; for the little questioner returned to the charge, excited by all he had heard.

“Mamma, why does she say you are improved?” said Walter, taking up his station

at his mother's side with an evident determination to be at the bottom of it, and hear all that there was to hear.

"I suppose, because she thinks so," said Agnes, to whom, however, the question was not very agreeable; for, to tell the truth, that which seemed improvement to other people—a change which involved the loss of all her higher hopes and beautiful aspirations—seemed a falling off rather to the mind of the woman who, seeing nothing better was to be made of it, was conscious of having schooled herself into an endurance of her life. "She thinks me looking better, I suppose."

"Were you beautiful when you were young, mamma?" the sturdy little inquisitor went on.

"No, Walter," said Agnes, laughing; "not in the least, except perhaps to grandpapa, who did not know any better." She was more nearly beautiful at that moment than she had ever been in her tranquil youth, but this neither she nor the child were aware of. To be sure it is usual to say that all women are conscious of their advantages in this respect, but then Agnes had been brought up alone, and had never heard the question discussed, which, perhaps, may account for her absolute want of information on the subject. Walter, however, was in an inquisitive mood.

“Why did not grandpapa know any better?” he said with an air of gravity almost approaching pain; for it grieved the boy to be obliged to set down as an inferior person this grandfather, who, after all, had something fascinating in his face.

“Don’t you know,” said the mother, whose teaching was always visionary, “when you are very fond of any one, you like her looks whether she is pretty or not? My father loved me better than any one else in the world,—and he might even think me beautiful, for anything I know—but that was because he did not know any better. Perhaps you are too little to understand that now.”

“And papa?” said Walter, without taking any notice of this insult, “did he know better? isn’t he very fond of you too?”

“Papa is different,” said Mrs. Trevelyan. “There was once a time when papa did not know me, and did not care anything about my looks; but now go and get your hat, Watty, and come with me; we are going to see grandpapa—and if you see a great many things that surprise you, I hope my boy is a gentleman and will not say anything disagreeable about what he sees. You will understand it better when you have talked it over with me.”

“Ye—es,” said Walter; “but, mamma, I may ask what things mean, when I don’t know?”

“Oh yes, as much as you please,” said Agnes; and she got up and put her work away, while Walter still lingered in the excitement of his discovery, forgetting even his newly-manufactured whip.

“And is it true?” he asked, “really true? grandpapa is a ——. But then I don’t know exactly what that is. I suppose that there are no white ponies where he lives,” the boy added, after a pause; and Walter sighed. It was the first time his ideal had been so rudely disturbed. After that he went and got his hat, and submitted to have his hair brushed with that subdued acquiescence in circumstances which is a necessary condition of existence in this unsatisfactory world. To tell the truth, it was a little hard upon Walter. If this total want of connexion between grandfathers and white ponies was true, as the evidence seemed to indicate, he did not, on the whole, see the advantage of having come home.

The child, however, had enough to distract his thoughts from this painful subject on the way to the forge—for in all his travels he had never seen anything like the English village green, with its white palings, and all the pretty embowered houses, with their tranquil looks—and

then the idea of everybody speaking English, even the babies at the cottage doors and the people in the shops, was droll to the little traveller. "It is so funny to hear them," he said; "it sounds as if they were all ladies and gentlemen," which was a view of the subject which had not occurred to Mrs. Trevelyan. As for Agnes, she seemed to be making acquaintance not with Windholm, but with a new self, whom she had never paused to look at before, as she went along the familiar street. When she caught sight of her own figure reflected in the windows of the little shops, she began to consider for the first time the change which had come upon her—even the different way in which she walked occurred to her with a strange sensation. Agnes Stanfield would have tripped along humbly, moving aside by instinct to let everybody pass who would; but Mrs. Trevelyan, though her courtesy was far more perfect and sweet than that of Agnes Stanfield, felt it to be natural that the world in general should, to some extent, make way for her, and leave her "the crown of the causeway." In this there was not the least intention or desire to be different from what she ever was: it was merely the natural action of life and circumstances which she recognised in herself with a smile.

When she saw Mr. Freke pass at a little distance, and pause with some embarrassment, not knowing whether to return to greet her or not, Agnes could not but be amused at herself, at the quiet bow with which, without thinking, she dismissed and released the vicar. In old days, his nod and smile had been an honour to the blacksmith's daughter. She felt at that moment the ease and simplicity of her own manner, as at other times she had felt its awkwardness and *gaucherie*, but with a little surprise and amusement instead of pain and confusion. Perhaps it was because, for some time past, Agnes had been so much occupied with other matters more important as to forget all about her manners. These thoughts went through her mind involuntarily as she went on to the humble house which still in her heart she called home. It was a painful thing to do in its way, if she had been a woman used to reckoning up her trials—for to Agnes, who knew so well her father's superiority, there was something at once humbling and irritating in the roused curiosity and dissatisfaction of her child. She was half angry, and yet at the same time anxious, longing to have it over, and that this little scion of the Trevelyan race should recognise and understand the character of his rela-

tionships. She took him in at once to the forge, where everything was in full movement; and Stanfield himself, in his habitual working dress and looks, was occupied, as usual, directing his workmen. The glare of the smithy fire behind threw out the grimy figures in strong relief, and showed all the details with unsparing distinctness, and even the hand with which the blacksmith took Walter's little white hand was marked with the signs of work. It was a moment of some excitement both for Agnes and her father, though neither betrayed what they were thinking; but the fact was they had both been speculating with a great deal too much gravity on the ideas of seven years old. All Walter's uncertainty disappeared from his mind at the sight of this tempting interior. He gave a little cry of delight, and swung himself off his feet, holding by Stanfield's hand.

“ Oh, grandpapa, let me come in and see what they are doing,” said the heir of the Trevelyans. He condoned and accepted everything with the frank and reckless generosity of a man who sees unlimited amusement and novelty before him. Mrs. Trevelyan retired with a soft laugh, which was as near crying as it could be under the circumstances.

“ If Mrs. Stanfield is in, I will go upstairs

and see her," said Agnes; and so this dreaded introduction to the house, which was not a château, and where there were no white ponies, was got over and concluded to the wonderful relief and satisfaction of all concerned.

Agnes, for her part, had a still more painful duty to perform in her visit to her step-mother, who sat upstairs awaiting her in great state and grandeur. Mrs. Stanfield was full eight years older, and had progressed out of the remnants of youthfulness which still remained to her overblown bloom when Agnes last saw her into a rudeness—a flush which knew no softening, and from which her fiery hazel eyes shot glances more restless and impatient than ever. It was even whispered in Windholm that the blacksmith's wife indemnified herself for the lack of occasion to exercise her temper, and keep up a current of excitement in that wholesome and natural method, by the use of other stimulants less innocent, perhaps, than the quarrels, which were the only things in which Stanfield absolutely refused to indulge his wife. She got up when Agnes came in, and made her an abrupt and sudden curtsy, and then, without any preface, burst out into a sudden denunciation of "them as had no manners, and never could have no manners—they as

took all they could get, and never said thank you. It aint as *I* ever expected any civility," Mrs. Stanfield cried, without leaving Agnes time to utter a syllable—"though it's my money as he's a-spending when all's done; for what is his is mine, and if he goes a-throwing it away on them as never shows no gratitude, I'd like to know what's to become of his unfortunate widder when he's dead and gone. I never expected no civility, knowing them as I have ado with; but I did say, and I've said since ever I knew you was a-coming, as you should have a piece of my mind."

Agnes had learned a great deal since she left this room, in which it seemed so strange to find herself once more seated; but she had not learned how to reply to an excited and violent woman. She said to herself what a comfort it was that she was alone, and composed herself to support the storm to the best of her ability; and the half-hour's trial she had to go through was not a slight one. Mrs. Stanfield, when she saw that the victim did not mean to fly or call to the rescue, but disposed herself simply to endure, put forth her whole powers. She upbraided her step-daughter for being proud and for being poor-spirited—for staying away and for coming home; she reproached her for being ashamed of

her origin, and then she reproached her for disgracing the Trevelyans by coming to live at Windholm, and proving to everybody that Sir Roger's son had married the blacksmith's daughter. "I'd have done a deal more for young Roger than you'd ever have done," cried the furious woman. "I told him so, for all so good as you think yourself. I give him my advice afore you was married, and he'd have took it if he hadn't a-been led away by them as was always designing. As for Sir Roger, I can tell you as he knows everything, and there aint nothing to be expected there. The master may be a fool with his money, but you won't do nothing with Sir Roger; but you're a deal too clever to let your poor, simple, deceived husband get sight of me, as could tell him things—you'll take good care that you don't let him come nigh *me.*"

"Then you know Sir Roger?" said Agnes, with an air of carrying on the conversation which drove Mrs. Stanfield mad.

"I know him—ay, a deal better than anybody knows him," cried the passionate creature; and then she stopped short in her flood of words. Was it because the blacksmith's heavy foot was audible coming slowly up the outer stair? Anyhow, she stopped all at once in her passion,

with that power of self-control which people generally have who give themselves up to the indulgence of their temper. She paused as a wild beast might have paused at the sight of its enemy, seeing that flight was the only policy, and gave a rapid look at Agnes, as if doubtful whether to dash herself at her and make an end of her, or to trust to her discretion. But there was no time to do either before the blacksmith opened the door. He came in slowly, still with his grandson's hand in his, and by this time the child was hanging about him, swinging on his hand, describing little circles round him, making little runs at him in the height of his satisfaction. Stanfield might not be like Herman's grandfather, a baron with châteaux, and hounds, and horses, but what was next best, he was a man with a workshop full of astonishing tools, red-hot iron with which a clever boy might have hopes of burning his fingers off, and all sorts of cunning inventions, which had to be fathomed; and, perhaps, even had he been a baron, and possessed the *air noble* to perfection, he would scarcely have had so ready an entrance to Walter's heart. The blacksmith lifted his great brown eyes when he went into the room. Walter was still swinging by his hand, and talking at the top of his voice without making the least account

of the difficulties of locomotion, and it was on Agnes that her father turned that look, which warmed and gladdened to her heart like a broad unexpected gleam of sunshine.

“This is little Walter Trevelyan, Sally,” Stanfield said, in words; but with his eyes he assured Agnes that her boy had won his heart, and that already the inevitable wounds which their meeting had caused had been softened and healed by the touch of the child’s hand. He seemed to take it as natural that his wife should subside into the chair, where she sat fanning herself, and take no further part in the conversation. As for the blacksmith, his heart was full, and he could not but speak it out.

“He’s well pleased on the whole,” said Stanfield; “he had a moment’s doubt, but it is past. The only thing he is disappointed about is the white pony, and, perhaps, for that——”

“Not just disappointed,” said Walter, “for you know I said I would lend him to mamma to go up the mountains, and there are no mountains here; and grandpapa says, I may come to the forge every day if I like, and you will let me, mamma; so that I don’t see, after all, that there would be any time left for the white pony—unless, to be sure, grandpapa would let them show me how they shoe them, and then I can see that

on other people's horses. But, mamma, grandpapa says——”

Here the smile that had been growing under Stanfield's eyelashes flooded over, filling all the lines of his face with sunshine.

“My boy,” said the blacksmith, “you don't know what I said. I said I had a little box somewhere with a walnut in it, and a little nut in that, and something inside. What if it should be a white pony with a saddle and a bridle, and all ready? When I've left off work to-night I'll hunt up the little box and see.”

“Ah, but that would only be a toy,” said Walter; “and then besides, such boxes are only in fairy tales. It could not be a real nut or a real pony, you know. I once had a little horse of wood that was wound up with a key, and could run about on the floor. When did you say, grandpapa, you would look for the box? Haven't you time to do it just now while I am here?”

“No, not just now,” said the blacksmith; “I must do my work first, and then when six o'clock has struck, and the men have left off, and I've had my tea——”

“Yes,” cried Walter, with eagerness; “may I come and have tea with you, grandpapa; and then, you know, I could help you to look,

and you would not forget?" said the politic youth.

This was how the visit terminated, of which Agnes had stood in so much fear. She had sustained a rough enough encounter in her own person, to be sure, but that, as she said to herself, "did not count." And as they went home again, her speculations as to what Mrs. Stanfield could mean, and the little stings that remained after that assault, were accompanied by such a running chorus of narrative from Walter that the wounds were more than half healed, and the wonder dissipated. It was impossible to believe that Mrs. Stanfield could have any influence, one way or other, upon Mrs. Trevelyan's fate or that of her children; and when she reached her pretty house again, Agnes recognised better than in the excitement of arrival that she had attained the security of a home at last.



CHAPTER XIV.

The Middle Age.

HERE is this curious difference between life itself and the story of a life, however close and faithful, that the narrative must necessarily be a narrative of certain hours and moments which do not altogether determine the complexion of that long waste of living which has to be gone through, though it is not in the least interesting to describe. To go over all the little vicissitudes of those days, in which everybody got up at the usual hour in the pretty house on Windholm-green, and went on with their usual occupations—working, walking, talking, dining, reading, receiving calls now and then, sometimes making them, occupied with expectations of the advent of Lady Grandmaison, feeling a little excitement when she came, and a little blank after that event was accomplished and over—would be as unnecessary to a clear conception of the life of Agnes

Trevelyan as it would be tiresome to the hearers. Most people cry out against the tedium of such a routine, though most people, perhaps, in their hearts, if they took the trouble to think, would recognise the fact that, short of actual happiness, which comes to so few people in this world, this routine is the great support of courage and patience, and makes life practicable. It would be quite false to say that Agnes was not happy during this winter, but it would be also very false to imagine that there was anything perfect in the character of her happiness, or that she could in any sense feel herself to have entered the haven, or commenced a higher life.

Roger, as was natural, was bored to death with those quiet days. He had nothing to do, nor had he the habit of doing anything; and he did not possess the placid mind which could occupy itself with gardening, or take to a greenhouse, or find domestic happiness sufficient for its requirements. Even reading is but an unsatisfactory substitute for living under the best circumstances, and when the subject has a mind disposed for literature—which was not Trevelyan's case. To be sure, he might have had a day's shooting now and then, if he had cared for that; but his illness, and the habits it had led to, and the doctor's warnings against exposure and

fatigue, made that impracticable; and then the visit which they paid to Lady Grandmason, at Christmas, however pleasant in itself, made matters rather worse when it was necessary to go back. By degrees Roger got disgusted with everything around and about him.

“By Jove! I think I’d better go out for a walk with Madelon, as the children do,” he said, with a laugh, which was not pleasant to hear, when his wife disturbed him sometimes from his idle and angry musings.

When they were invited to the little dinners at the Vicarage and elsewhere—which were the most dignified entertainments practicable at Windholm—it was with savage sarcasm that Roger prepared himself for those mild pleasures; and the unrestrained yawns in which he indulged even in Mrs. Freke’s drawing-room, made him an undesirable guest. And then, in mere lack of anything else to amuse him, Roger’s eye was caught by the pensive air of little Milly Fox, who was the only one unmarried, and who, in early days, had entertained a romantic preference for the young squire. She was of opinion at present that Mr. Trevelyan would have been very different if he had married a woman who could understand him, and had a certain inflection of sympathy in her voice when she spoke to him,

which infinitely tickled Roger, who was moved thereby to commence a decided flirtation. He was not sufficiently interested, it is true, to put himself to much trouble to keep it up, but when the opportunity came in his way, he devoted himself to her service with enough emphasis to scandalize the good people of Windholm, and wake a good deal of excitement in the gentle bosom of little Miss Milly, who, being the only unmarried daughter of the family, naturally felt a little aggrieved and injured, and was, besides, at the age when friendship becomes sweet, and a woman feels herself safe in assuming the office of guardian angel to a man who is not appreciated by his wife. The worst of it was, that Agnes was almost the only person who remained totally unmoved by her husband's devoted friendship; but still it was an amusement in its way.

What was worse than this, so far as Agnes was concerned, was, that Roger was seized with a certain irritation and jealousy in respect to Stanfield, which added a new bitterness, not the less bitter that it was not entirely unexpected, to Mrs. Trevelyan's life. When the blacksmith came, after his work was over, in his Sunday suit, to sit for an hour by his daughter's hearth, in the house which he had built and equipped, and, at the present moment, all but supported, the

pleasure Agnes felt in her father's society was turned into sharp pain and anxiety by the doubtful words and irritable temper of her husband. The blacksmith could scarcely utter a word to which Roger did not find some exception ; and the younger man disagreed, as if by instinct, with all Stanfield's opinions almost before they were expressed. Then Roger took pains to utter loudly all the scraps of club philosophy which he had picked up in his experience, touching the general meanness of human nature, and the absolute unimportance of moral distinctions ; which was not because such were his own opinions, or because he himself was in the habit of reflecting at all on serious subjects, but because it was the only means in his power of thoroughly exhausting Stanfield's patience, and perhaps provoking a quarrel.

All this occurred in presence of Agnes, who had to keep her place between the two with a composed countenance, and to laugh at Roger's extravagance, as if it was meant for a joke ; while she knew very well in her heart it was a covert insult, intended to irritate and provoke her father. As for Stanfield, he swallowed down his natural indignation as well as he could, with the magnanimity which was natural to him ; he suffered himself to be contradicted ; he supported

with a smile the insolent assumption of superior knowledge with which his son-in-law waved his experience aside, and consented, though not without an effort, to be addressed as an ignorant and illiterate person ; which was no inconsiderable exercise of patience for a man whose wisdom and goodness were universally acknowledged, and who had been used to have no equal in his homely sphere. But when Roger propounded his supposed " views," such as they were, Stanfield had a greater difficulty in restraining himself, especially when Walter happened to be present. The blacksmith had made a friend of the boy, as a man of a spirit so highly toned, and yet so simple, was capable of making of an open-hearted and well-conditioned child ; and naturally the grandfather took for comprehension a great deal that was only sympathy, and imagined that Walter's ethics were in danger when Roger gave vent to his opinions. Thus there arose between them a strife all the more deadly that it was always covert and veiled, and that, so far as appearances went, the victory was always with the weaker side. And so it came about that Agnes sometimes almost wished that her father would give up his visits ; while Stanfield, for his part, made up his mind to endure and continue them, in case of wounding her.

“She’d be grieved if I stayed away,” he would say to himself, as he went slowly with that reluctant step which he had been conscious of the first evening, when he paid his first visit to his daughter’s house; while, in the meantime, Agnes sat within, listening, with all her senses quickened by anxiety, for his step outside, and saying in her heart, with something like a prayer, “Perhaps to-night he will not come.”

When the gate was heard to open, and Stanfield’s steady, somewhat heavy foot sounded outside on the gravel, Roger would make a movement of impatience, and thrust his chair away from the table. “It is very odd that we never, by any chance, have an evening to ourselves,” he would say with angry vehemence; and thus Stanfield’s visits, which were far from occurring every evening, were the most painful moments of Agnes’s life.

All this time, however, it was the blacksmith who principally supported the family. As for Roger, he got money somehow for his own concerns, but it did not occur to him to ask Agnes about the bills, which, no doubt, were paid somehow; and she had abandoned the idea of suggesting “something to do,” as a mere aggravation, from which no good could result;

but it was very hard upon her to be compelled to speak to her father about money, and she did not know what to say, nor how to express her own shame and humiliation and sense of wrong, without compromising her husband. She said, with a transparent assumption of calmness, which could deceive nobody, much less the eyes full of insight that watched her so closely—

“Father, this must all be made up when Roger comes to his kingdom, as he says. It is hard to have always such an expectation before his eyes; it keeps him from trying for himself. Don’t think any worse of us than you can help,” said Agnes; and she glanced at him piteously, and withdrew her eyes, afraid to trust herself to an encounter with his.

As for the blacksmith, he took her hands into his, and held them fast, with a look almost more piteous than her own; for he could not bear to see her suffer.

“I have nobody but you in the world,” he cried. “What I have is all yours, Agnes; and I’m hale and strong and fit for work as ever I was. Don’t you vex yourself about that. You and me,” Stanfield said, with a meaning more perfect than his grammar, “have been brought up different. It’s a thing your husband does not think of; and it’s hard to learn, when a man

has been brought up to do nothing. Don't think any more about that."

"That is just what it is," said Agnes, eagerly; "he never was brought up to it. It does not come into his head. I feel as if I could die, sometimes, rather than ask more money from you; but you see, father, it is not Roger's fault."

The blacksmith made no distinct reply, but he put a little bundle of notes into Agnes's hand. "Next quarter day will be the 10th of May," he said, with a smile; and kissed her forehead, and went away. And Roger, who, to be sure, knew no particulars of this conversation, took pains to be specially rude to Stanfield the next evening he came to the house.

Yet, even with these two resources, of flirting with Milly Fox and insulting Stanfield, the time hung heavy on Roger's hands. He took to conversation with the vicar, when nothing better was to be done, and then Agnes found herself assailed on another side. Mr. Freke was one of the men of the present generation who do not pretend to a very clear faith; and at the same time, he was not clear-sighted enough to see that Roger's speculations were the mere fruit of idleness and discontent, and had no origin whatever in real reflection. Thus Agnes, who had supported herself through all her troubles

by the unquestioning certainty of her youth, that all was and must be well, however painful it might be, became suddenly aware of the objections entertained by speculative minds against the popular theory of Providence, and found the ways of God not justified but questioned by the priest, who ought to have strengthened her faith and her courage. Perhaps she was scarcely old enough to have entered for herself into that "selva oscura" out of which the soul can only find egress by the painful and roundabout road which leads through the Inferno and the Purgatory to Heaven itself, where there is rest. But it startled and discouraged the young woman, who was so solitary among her troubles, and who was labouring along in the mid-career of her life, under harder burdens than the vicar had ever known or perhaps imagined, to learn all the difficulties that existed in the way of that simple trust, which she had managed to maintain hitherto, without ever losing hold upon the certainty of her youth. Roger, to be sure, was not moved, one way or the other, by Mr. Freke's candid statements; but that was because Roger was not really thinking, but only talked in the vain idea of amusing himself, and with a charitable intention of "drawing the parson out."

"It's very easy to talk of everything being

for the best," Roger would say. "I wonder how it can possibly be for the best, for example, that a man should be stranded here as I am? I don't mean to complain of want of money, you know—for that is what a great many fellows have to complain of; but it does seem an aggravation when a man's health is attacked in addition. I know hundreds of fellows who have taken every sort of liberty with their constitutions, and yet are as strong as horses; while I, that have never lived a reckless life, and that have nothing but my health to keep me afloat—if that's justice, it's a very queer kind of justice. Men are bad enough, but they don't hit a man when he's down like that. I can't say I understand what you parsons mean about Providence; especially in face of all that one sees happening in the world."

"My dear Trevelyan," said the vicar, "for a man who has thought on these subjects, it is the most terrible of all mysteries. I don't pretend to fathom it, for my part. It used to be the fashion to admire the beautiful construction of everything, and how the human frame was made to secure strength, and grace, and ease, and so forth; but it's dreadful to turn to the other side of the picture, and see how the nerves and the rest of it are framed so as to make pain into torture;

and it is just the same often with the mind and circumstances. Grant that there is a misfortune that a man could have reasonably borne, there's sure to be something added on to drive him frantic;—instead of the compensations which it used to be the mode to talk of. I don't pretend to understand Providence any more than you do. It is one of the greatest difficulties for a thoughtful mind. As for the vulgar idea, all that can be said for it, is, that it *is* the vulgar idea; and I suppose it gives a kind of comfort, in its way, to people who are unaccustomed to think."

"I don't see any good in thinking, for my part," said Roger; "the more a man calculates the more he is out, in a general way. It's all vanity—I suppose that's the end of it; and I don't imagine there's half-a-dozen men in the country, from the Archbishop of Canterbury downwards, that really know what they would be at."

"Oh no, that's a mistake," said Mr. Freke; "that is one thing Low churchmen and dissenters of the evangelical school have an advantage in. They know what they mean in a kind of way; but, unfortunately, the higher you ascend in the scale of intelligence, the less one knows what one means. You may smile, Mrs. Trevelyan, but I assure you it is true. You may fancy now and then, I allow, that you have a vague

conception of what you would yourself be at—but as for what God means in this world, or what a single life means, or what significance there is in the sequence of events, it is enough to drive a man crazy to attempt to understand it. Everything that is most unlikely comes to pass. When a man is struggling to make head against the world, something happens to him to take the courage out of him just at that identical moment; and another man, who is only looking on, has the happiness thrown at him when he did not want it, that would have been a cordial to the other, and set him up for his work. That is how I continually find it, when I open my study window, you know, and take a look out upon the world.”

“Yes,” said Agnes, who knew more about it than he did, and had that problem of life to consider, through no such tranquil medium as the study window—“I know it is true; but then what conclusion would you draw from that?”

“Heaven knows!” said the vicar, getting up from his seat—“the common conclusion is that everything is for the best. I don’t draw any conclusion, for my part. I only recognise the mysterious state of affairs, and hope that perhaps we may have more light some time or other. There’s the difference, you see, between a discussion which touches upon religion, and philo-

sophy proper. Mrs. Trevelyan, who naturally takes the ethical side, desires a conclusion ; but I can't stop now to enter upon that. My wife told me you were going to dine with us to-morrow—don't forget."

And the vicar shook hands, and took his leave somewhat abruptly, as was his custom. To tell the truth, he had excited himself a little by his own description of human affairs, and something in Agnes's face had moved him still more deeply. Not a word or look of complaint ever came from Mrs. Trevelyan, and yet the vicar, who had a high opinion of her, could not but bethink himself, that her life must have burdens sufficient to make his picture a little too vivid to her mind. The world generally, and especially the little world of a village, knows much more about people's affairs than they think ; and Mr. Freke had a tolerably clear idea of Agnes's circumstances. He said to himself, " Good Lord ! what does it mean ? " as he went out. " There is a creature now," Mr. Freke reflected, " that looked as if she was made for something worth while ; but, as it turns out, all that she is made for, is to take care of a discontented young fellow, that never was good for much, and that is going to fall ill, and maybe to die, for anything one knows. It would be like him to die—but yet I don't know that it would, either, for

then, at least, he would be out of the way; and here are all her delicate senses wounded, and her nerves driven crazy, and her fine character wasted. Good Lord! good Lord! I would like to know what everybody means by it," said the vicar to himself. Perhaps he would have been disconcerted if he had been requested to explain what he meant by everybody—for to be sure he was a little profane in his way of thinking, as clergymen often think themselves at liberty to be.

As for Agnes, however, the effect upon her was a great deal more painful than upon Mr. Freke. It opened her eyes to that truth which most people find out sooner or later, that distress and trouble are, after all, very seldom elevating agents, and that those who are happy, are in most cases those who have the best chance of being good; and this discovery took a great part of her courage away from her, for, indeed, her soul had consoled itself often with the reflection that the sufferings she had to bear were signs of God's love, as some simple people think. But how could they be signs of God's love, when their influence was towards deterioration, and not towards improvement? If that refuge failed her, Agnes did not know where to flee; and this was what the vicar's frankness seemed to lead to. For a woman without any support in her indivi-

dual difficulties and distresses, it was, perhaps, safer to recognise the misfortunes of life as blessings in disguise, meant to purify and to elevate, rather than as evils pure and simple, which were day by day undermining the health and courage of her soul. Mr. Freke gave her a great blow in her primitive belief, for thoughtful as she was, and inclined to judge for herself, yet it seemed to Agnes, if there had any longer been any certainty in the world, that the vicar would not have proclaimed his difficulties so openly; for to be sure she was only a woman, and could not have taken into account, even had she known it, the spirit of the age.

Thus it occurred that Mrs. Trevelyan, as happens so often to a soul which leaves youth behind, and begins to enter—prematurely as it happened to be—upon the painful level of the middle age, was left by herself to undergo her trial. Her father was withdrawn from her side, because, in loyalty to her husband, she could not confide in him, and a wall of separation was thus built between them, even in their tenderest moments. Her husband was withdrawn from her, because he did not comprehend, or if he comprehended, eluded and escaped from, the evils that overwhelmed her; and even God himself—the God of her youth, the Supreme Father—seemed

to be failing the solitary woman whom He had exposed without any protection to all the horrors of the way. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why Mrs. Trevelyan was so utterly unaffected by the flirtation of her husband with little Milly Fox. Life was pressing very hard upon her at the moment, and things a great deal more serious were revolving in her awakened mind.



CHAPTER XV.

Brother and Sister.

WHEN the winter had passed after this fashion, perhaps it was not very extraordinary that Roger Trevelyan, though without any means, should avail himself of the vicinity of Windholm to London, and make a rush up to town in May. Jack Charlton, for example, who was still much the same Jack Charlton as he had been at the commencement—not changed, to speak of, in position or in occupations, though he went on circuit—was quite content to give his old friend a share of his chambers as often and as long as he pleased; and if Trevelyan had lost some of the friends of his youth, he had something to counterbalance that loss in the multitude of people who had met him abroad, and who were glad to greet a man whose recollection was associated with ideas of enjoyment and freedom. Then he felt quite easy in his mind about Agnes, who was

all right with her children, and never had shown, as he assured himself, much taste for society. It was doing her no harm to take a little amusement for himself—amusement of which he had such need as perhaps Agnes, on her side, could not understand; and so affairs went on amicably and comfortably. It was at this time that he encountered Miss Trevelyan, who certainly was eight years older, but who had not yet changed her *rôle* in society. On the whole, this long interval had not made the difference in Beatrice which she had expected. Youth and bloom, to be sure, were gone for ever; but after the first change, to which she had already accustomed herself before Roger's marriage, the years were merciful to Miss Trevelyan. She seemed to have reached the table-land upon which a woman who takes proper care of herself may rest a long time; and though she had given up dancing she had not retired into the background of society, as might have happened to a person of less spirit. When she met her brother, Miss Trevelyan was very well dressed, with that amount of care which is suitable to her years;—the wonderful *chevelure*, which had been one of her great beauties, was as light, and feathery, and airy as ever; not so abundant, no doubt, but then the quality of those light locks, which had

no weight, but moved with every breath, made them capable of every kind of ingenious torture. It was natural to them to be frizzed, and puffed out, and elaborated, and made-up, like any detached and independent head-dress, which was an advantage that Beatrice did not despise. And then, as she got used to it, she had ceased to turn that anxious look into her mirror, and the pucker had softened a little out of the forehead. Her eyes were subdued out of their golden glow, it is true, and generally looked like mere hazel eyes—yellow-grey. She preferred to call them hazel, because, like most people who have a remarkable feature, she had a vehement dislike of the next grade to that, and despised the blue-grey with vehemence. She had lost her early bloom altogether, to be sure; but then, when a woman has features, she can afford to dispense with that fleeting livery of youth. When Roger came up to her she was seated by a table, very well dressed, as we have said, and leaning her beautiful arm, which had never been more beautiful, upon it. She was talking to some one who interested her, and for whom she was putting forth all her powers—and Beatrice was a very good talker. She was in the middle of a sentence when she perceived Roger, and all her composure and self-command could not keep down a start of surprise;

but she finished what she was saying, notwithstanding, before she held out her hand to him.

“Roger!—is it possible?” she said; but though she did not shrink from the evident duty and necessity of speaking to him, and even though an impulse of nature prompted her towards her brother, it was not without a pang of regret on the other hand, that Miss Trevelyan postponed the business in which she was occupied to the claim of family affections; for she was talking to a man in every way suitable and eligible, and they were just beginning to get interested in each other. Nobody could tell what might not have come of it but for the apparition of the brother, at sight of whom the stranger naturally retired; and no doubt Miss Trevelyan felt it a little hard to purchase her re-introduction to Roger at the price of such a sacrifice. Her regretful eyes followed for a moment the departing figure of her late companion, even while she held up her cheek for Roger to kiss. And whatever may be thought of Beatrice, and of her anxiety to preserve her good looks and make the best of them, it may be added that her cheek was quite safe to be kissed; for she had too much good taste and knowledge of the world to carry art too far.

“Is it really you, Roger?” she said; “have

you dropped from the skies? I never was more surprised. To see you at all is strange; but, of all places in the world, to see you *here!*”

“It’s a very natural place to see me,” said Roger. “Stanley and I spent a whole winter together. But then, I forget, you are not *au-fait* of my history of late. How is Sir Roger? I began to think you had both retired to Trevelyan for good, as I have never met you anywhere; but I suppose things have not come to that.”

Roger spoke as if they had taken leave of each other a few weeks before—a tone which was not without its effect upon Beatrice.

“No, not quite,” she said. “Sir Roger is very well, and I am sure would be grateful to you for your filial attentions. On the contrary, we have both been out a great deal this year.”

And here there was a pause; and Miss Trevelyan’s eye strayed, in spite of herself, to the person who had left her, and who at this moment was standing in the very same attitude, leaning over the chair of another lady who had pretensions to the character of a brilliant as well as a fine woman, and was a kind of rival power. They were enjoying their conversation, to all appearance; and Beatrice could not but regret more and more that she had lost her opportunity for the sake of this encounter, which was so un-

promising. She gave a sigh, and then she looked up at her brother, and recommenced with a little irritation, as it was natural to expect.

“I don’t suppose you came up to me now to have the opportunity of making such ordinary remarks. Why didn’t you come and see me when you came home? Papa may be displeased, but it’s an old matter now, and I don’t think he would have stood out. I suppose you are not alone?” said Beatrice, looking round her. Her eyes fixed, unconsciously to herself, upon a plump young woman in white, with plenty of roses about her, from her cheeks downwards to the skirts of her dress. She was standing a little apart by herself, and contemplating the world before her with an evident mixture of excitement and uneasiness; and naturally Beatrice fixed upon this figure as that of her brother’s wife.

Roger’s eyes followed hers, and he laughed aloud. He was not the best husband in the world, to be sure, and was very unlikely to go into raptures about his wife; but it was pleasant to think how Beatrice was deceived, and how different was the appearance of Agnes.

“No,” he said, laughing, “that is not Mrs. Trevelyan—neither she nor any one like her. After all that has happened, the only right thing

for you to do would be to go down to Windholm and be introduced to my wife."

"I wondered very much you should have gone there," said Beatrice, taking no notice of this suggestion, "where everybody must know, and where it must be so awkward; but I suppose you wished the little boy to make acquaintance with his relations," she said, with malice, and laughed a little softly and with the most perfect grace at her own joke.

"They are the only relations he seems to have any chance of making acquaintance with," said Roger, with offence; and then his tone softened a little—"He's a famous little chap, and on the whole I'd like you to see him," he added a minute after, in his natural voice; and either the sentiment, though expressed with perfect moderation, or perhaps some inflection in his voice, touched by chance the heart which always existed under the silk and the lace which covered Beatrice Trevelyan's breast.

"Yes," she said, with lively resentment. "it looks like that, does it not? To be sure, you have written to me once or twice, when you could not help it; but yet you come to England only to go to these people, and do not take the trouble to make the smallest overture to us. I am not in the way of being sentimental or saying

much on such subjects; but I feel it all the same."

"By Jove," said Roger, "you are all alike, you women. You never have taken the trouble to say a kind word. What sort of overtures could I make? You may believe I have not the least inclination to be in feud with my family. As for going there, I had no other place to go to, when that ridiculous blockhead of a doctor sent me home for my health."

"Home for your health!" said Beatrice. The conversation she had been watching ceased just then, and the gentleman withdrew and disappeared into the midst of a host of other men, when he ceased entirely to be interesting. In these circumstances Miss Trevelyan was left with her attention quite free and disengaged.

"Home for your health!" she repeated, lifting her eyes. "By the way, you are looking a good deal worn. I observed it the first moment I saw you, but I thought it might, perhaps, be the anxieties, and so forth. A man with what is called a young family, and not very much to live on——"

"You should say with nothing to live on," said Roger. "It is something astonishing to me how we have kept on and continued to exist from year to year. The fact is, I am very glad

to have a chance of half an hour's talk with you," he continued, drawing a chair close to his sister; "for, to tell the truth, I am tired to death of this sort of life, and something must be done to bring it to an end."

"What sort of life?" said Beatrice; but her question was put coldly and without any great appearance of interest. The fact was, the rooms were getting full, and all the world had arrived, and the idea of half an hour's conversation about family matters just at that particular moment alarmed Miss Trevelyan, who, to be sure, had not made so careful a toilette with the view of sitting apart with her brother in a corner, and advising him about his future life.

"Look here," said Roger; "I am back in England because I could not help it. That fellow Farington at Baden made a fuss about my health, as these doctors do. He said quiet, &c., was necessary; and I was confoundedly ill, there is no doubt about that. We went to that beastly place the beginning of winter, you know. What was a man to do? We've got a house there, and can live quiet; there's the frightful part of it—live quiet! If ever an unfortunate fellow was bored to death it's me, Beatrice, and it's no figure of speech in my case. But at the same time we can live cheap and quiet there. You may grumble

as you like, but you don't know what that sort of thing means. I wish you'd think it over, and see what can be done for us. Let's be friends! Sir Roger is horribly aggravating, but there never was anything unpleasant between you and me."

"No," said Beatrice; "but then papa is poor, if he were ever so friendly; he might set *you* right, you know, but as for your family——"

"Oh, confound my family!" said Roger; he said it without the least meaning, merely to express his impatience; but, notwithstanding, Miss Trevelyan was sensible of a little movement of satisfaction to perceive that, after all, her unknown sister-in-law was not so disproportionately happy as she had once imagined. "My father can do something if he likes to exert himself," Trevelyan continued; "even, if there was nothing better, you know, you and he might try to get me an appointment of some kind. It's rather hard upon a man to see all the world enjoying themselves, and he alone thrust outside."

"All the world does not marry at four-and-twenty," said Beatrice; "one has always to pay for indulging one's self. At the same time, you know I have always been your friend, and I'll do what I can for you, Roger. Where are you living—with Jack Charlton? Oh, yes, I re-

collect, he came home with quantities of stories about—but we'll not enter on that subject," said Miss Trevelyan, with alarm, perceiving that she had almost betrayed herself into a new subject which might have protracted the conversation to any length. "I will do what I can for you, and, if papa is at all practicable, I will write to you to come to us. I must go now. There are hosts of people here I want to see. At the same time, I am very glad to have had the chance of a talk with you, Roger;" and then she hesitated a moment, not sure whether to tell him to wait for her and put her into the carriage, or not. A brother, even when he has made a foolish marriage and ruined himself thereby, is still a sufficiently respectable attendant when nobody better offers; but then if anybody better did offer, it might have been rather in Miss Trevelyan's way had she made a positive engagement with Roger, according to her first idea. Accordingly, she compromised the matter. "If you leave before I do, come and speak to me first," she said, kissing her hand to him as she moved away.

Roger, who did not know the fine people for whom his sister left him, followed her with his eyes as she made her onward progress, and acknowledged to himself, with some pride and humiliation, that Beatrice, though she was

not young, looked one of the most notable people in a company which embraced many notable persons. All that she wanted to have been one of the leaders of society, was to have married some one rich enough to give her the necessary means—a duke, if that had been practicable, but failing that, anybody with a very large fortune. This condition, unfortunately, was wanting; but, at the same time, Roger acknowledged to himself that his sister had, in some sort, a right to patronize him, as she had been doing. No doubt, if she had had a mind, she, too, might have crippled and disabled herself as he had done; and it occurred to him to think with a grudge how different his own position might have been, had he, too, denied himself on that special day, nine years ago, when, had he been guided by Beatrice, he would have left summarily and for ever the dreary old Hall at Windholm. Roger did not pursue that train of thought, for at the bottom of his heart he was loyal, even without intending it, to his natural ties, and, indeed, would have found it very difficult to detach himself even in idea from Agnes, who had been his wife and companion for so many years. Still he thought of it for a moment, as he saw Beatrice, with her lofty looks and her handsome toilette, standing in the midst of a brilliant group, where

she was welcomed with acclamations. It did not occur to Roger, who was not given to much thinking, that Beatrice's own estimate of the position might have been different, could he have got fairly at it. But, to be sure, that was a discovery impossible to him or to any other man in the world. Miss Trevelyan knew her position and all its necessities much too well to indulge in any confidence so indiscreet.



CHAPTER XVI.

A Gloomy Prospect.

MISS TREVELYAN, however, notwithstanding her good intentions, found it apparently less easy to serve her brother than she had supposed. She wrote him a note, addressed to Jack Charlton's chambers, a day or two after their meeting, and this was all she could find to say:—

“I don't know how to tell you that I have failed, my dear Roger. As for papa standing out so long, and making a fuss over your *més-alliance*, now that it is no longer possible to help or even to ignore it, and when I am ready to forgive you and stand your friend, it is ridiculous; but, notwithstanding, that is the *rôle* he has taken up. The fact is, I suppose that he could not receive you without doing something for you, and we are so dreadfully poor; but he has policy enough to play the indignant father, and

to put it all down to the score of your folly. I don't know if you will feel so fully as I do how amusing this is; but I am afraid I cannot do anything more for you. And besides, I think *he* thinks that a son who is a virtuous family man is a reproach upon his own habits. I don't in the least excuse him, you see, but I can't do more. He is going out of town to-morrow, and, if you like to come and see me on Friday, I shall be at home all the morning. He says he will take your boy and bring him up, if you like. That is a great deal cheaper, to be sure, than a family; and of course, let him be as indignant as he pleases, he can't hinder the child from succeeding. I advise you to think over this, for no doubt it would be a great saving to you, as I suppose he is old enough to begin his education. As for your present circumstances, I fear you must just make the best of them. I don't see, for my part, why you should hesitate to let the people *where you are living* do what they can for you. They ought to know by this time how much you have sacrificed—if, indeed, these kind of people ever can understand; and any little thing they can do can never in the least make up for what you have lost through them. I don't say this out of any ill feeling, but only because it is true, and from a sense of justice. As for what

you said about an appointment, you know I should be *very* glad to be of any use; but then I don't know in the least what you could or would do. I hope you will take care of your health, and not mope, which is the worst of all things for the health. As for what the doctors say about quiet, it has always seemed to me the greatest absurdity. If, however, you are at liberty on Friday, come, and we will talk it over, and I shall be glad to see you. It was impossible to talk the other night before all the world.

“ Affectionately,

“ BEATRICE.

“ P.S.—I advise you to consider seriously what Sir Roger said about taking care of the boy.”

“ By Jove,” said Roger, when he read the letter, “ the boy ! as if he was a little dog ; and I should like to know what his mother would say.”

“ What is it ?” said Jack Charlton, who knew all about his friend's prospects and intentions, and that Beatrice had promised “ to stand his friend.”

“ She says Sir Roger will have nothing to say to me, but he will take Walter, if I like. By

Jove!" said Roger; "and talks of him, I tell you, as if he were a little dog."

"I should think she'd talk with a deal more interest if he were a little dog," said Jack. "I don't think Beatrice ever was one for children. Do you mean to accept it, Roger? They'd do his schooling, you know, and all that sort of thing. To be sure, there's Mrs. Trevelyan to be consulted; but I don't know that it would be a bad thing," he added, thinking, as was not unnatural, of the forge, and the grandfather who was a blacksmith. Sir Roger, to be sure, was a man without any reputation; but still his dishonour came more natural, or at least Jack Charlton thought so, than the spotless character, or, as he called it, dead respectability, of the humble ancestor, who might, without meaning it, corrupt little Walter's mind.

"Women are the very deuce," said Roger, "and when there's two of them, what is a fellow to do? I have not a doubt that was Bee's suggestion—not that she wants the boy, but it's the best way she can think of, of getting a good hit at Agnes. By Jove! she's turned out a *grande dame*, though she's not married; but, for my part, I think Mrs. Trevelyan is capable of standing up to her," Roger said, disguising his rage and disappointment under a harsh laugh. "To-

morrow's Friday, ain't it? I'll go and see Beatrice, and hear what she's got to say."

"Oh, she'll have plenty to say," said Jack; "and, upon my honour, I don't think it's a bad idea; but only there's Mrs. Trevelyan to be considered; and, of course, you know better than I do what her opinion is likely to be."

"The truth is," said Roger, "that they don't in the least understand Agnes. For example, I'll tell you what Beatrice said to me the other evening. She said, 'I suppose you're not alone?'" and she cast her eyes upon a country cousin of the Alvanleys, who was within sight—a creature with red cheeks and red arms, like a plump pigeon, whom she took for Mrs. Trevelyan. By Jove, that's what they think. Now, you know, Jack, a man may have his own opinion as to whether he's done a wise thing or not, in the way of marrying when he had nothing to live on; but I'd think myself a very shabby sort of fellow indeed if I didn't stand up for my wife."

"I should think so," said Jack, shortly. He said it, as if that was a thing of course, without appreciating Roger's magnanimity; for, to be sure, Jack Charlton had eyes like other people, and had not known the two for so many years without forming his opinion of both. He thought, indeed, that Windholm was a mistake, and that

the blacksmith grandfather was unlucky for little Walter ; but, at the same time, he could see something in Agnes which her husband could not see, oddly enough, though he had been sufficiently aware of it when he was only her lover ; and Jack was even conscious of a momentary movement of indignation when Roger declared thus apologetically the necessity there was that he should stand by his wife.

“ Yes,” said Trevelyan, “ *cela va sans dire* ; but I’ll go to-morrow all the same, and see what Beatrice has to say.”

That interview took place when Agnes was quite unconscious of anything that could be going on against her peace. Her youngest child had just come into the world, and she was tracing in its little undeveloped countenance lines which reminded her of the others whom she had lost, and was happy in a tranquil way, as a woman is who has got over one of the crises of her existence without any harm. But Roger knew nothing of this, or, to do him justice, he would have had very different ideas in his mind. He had a long conversation with his sister, the only remarkable thing in which was the cleverness with which she evaded naming his wife, though, of course, Mrs. Trevelyan had to be referred to by implication ; and Beatrice was perfectly candid about Walter,

and made no pretence that she herself meant to devote herself to her little nephew. She was not "one for children," as Jack Charlton had said. "I don't mean to say that I want him, as maiden aunts do in novels, to be a comfort to me," she said with a smile; "that is not my *rôle*, you know; but of course he must succeed some day, and he ought to have a proper education. His relations in Windholm cannot be very good for him in that way," Miss Trevelyan said. Of course she meant to include his mother among the relations who would harm little Walter, but she was too *fine* and subtle to say it in words.

"I wish you would recollect that he has *no* relations in Windholm," said Roger with some vehemence; "I have told you so a hundred times; except Stanfield, who can't do much one way or the other. Whatever drawbacks there may be, there are no relations—I have always told you so."

Beatrice smiled and shrugged her shoulders the least in the world. "It is all the same; you shall have the benefit of my influence if you like," she said; and the end was that Roger made up his mind to think it all over, and reflected philosophically that his boy must go to school one day or other, and that Agnes must make up her mind to it. His thinking, however, was brought to a summary

end by the news of the event which had happened in his absence, and he gave up his engagements for the evening with a good grace to visit his wife. When that visit had been made, however, the mere fact of Agnes's delicate health led her husband to return to his friends and his pleasures. She was all right; there was nothing in the least to be apprehended. All that she wanted was to be quiet and take care of herself; and, on the whole, Roger thought it was rather good of him to go and take himself out of the way. He said to himself, with an agreeable sense of the most benevolent intentions, that when he was gone she could see her father at her ease, and comfort herself among her old friends, which could scarcely have been done while he was there to distract the attention of the household and keep the invalid uneasy. Perhaps he was even right, to a certain extent, in his idea; but then it was not to be expected that Roger could know that, present or absent, his shadow stood between Agnes and her father—a more effectual separation still than the long years which had changed Stanfield little, but his daughter much.

Thus Roger returned, feeling free and at his ease, to Jack Charlton's chambers, and enjoyed his holiday as much as he could, and

recovered several old acquaintances, and, on the whole, amused himself; while Agnes, for her part, got better very tranquilly at home, without the least idea of finding fault with Roger, or imagining herself neglected. But otherwise, his absence did not fulfil his charitable intentions; for she was afraid to ask her father to make his visits more frequent than usual, in case the difference should be too marked and evident when Roger returned; and even when they were together, the conversation languished, and the two who had once been everything in the world to each other, sought subjects to talk about like two strangers; for, to be sure, the life of Agnes with her husband, and their hopes and prospects, were all tabooed subjects to her father. Neither of them dared to enter upon that forbidden ground, even had it been possible; for a sudden impulse on either side might have, at an unguarded moment, led to confidences which were, of all things in the world, the most to be avoided. It was not that Agnes had wrongs to talk of, such as drive some women to frenzy, but she foresaw by instinct the danger of permitting herself to discuss her husband; and thus the talk was vague and painful, and carried on with a disagreeable consciousness on both sides. Walter was the safe subject upon which they

could both express themselves freely; but then the sayings and doings of a little boy nearly eight years old, however interesting, cannot afford opportunity for many long and continued conversations. Happily, they neither of them knew that there was risk of even this resource failing them; for Roger was not bold enough to say a word about Miss Trevelyan's proposal to his wife when he found her ill. He waited until the season was over, and he was obliged to return, before making that proposal to Agnes; and that was why she never fully knew what Beatrice and Sir Roger had intended in respect to her boy.

For, unfortunately, Roger's season in town ended as Dr. Farington had predicted, and as Jack Charlton had warned his friend it would. To be sure he was very incautious, and after his horrible winter at Windholm, which was a long series of precautions, he avenged himself by taking no care whatever of his health. And the end was that he returned home very ill, just as Agnes had recovered her strength sufficiently to nurse him, which, to be sure, was a fortunate circumstance in its way. Roger was much too ill to think, much less to talk of his father's proposal to take Walter, when he came home in this forlorn condition. He was so ill, indeed, that at one time he did not seem likely to rally

even temporarily, but lay exhausted, with the pallor of death in his face, unable to make any movement, or to take any nourishment, to the profound alarm of everybody around him. Mrs. Trevelyan had been anxious enough before by times, but had never been called upon to contemplate, thus close at hand, the possibilities of her position, and to realize the fact, that she might be left with her two helpless babies and little Walter, to face the world alone. To tell the truth, this was not the idea which came into her mind even then, for she had no time to think of herself; nor did the position she might occupy, or even the fate of her children, have much share in her thoughts at that moment. She had no acquaintance with death, except as she had seen it fall on the infant children whom God had withdrawn all unconscious from her arms; and though these losses had overcast her life with sad clouds, she had never yet received any blow which struck straight and deep at the roots of her happiness. The cares of life, of which she had known her share, are hard enough in their way, but they do not quench out the gladness of the light, or make life itself distasteful to a spirit still elastic and young. And so it still appeared to Agnes, that dying was the saddest of earthly occurrences, and that to lie expecting

it, looking forward to it, rehearsing it, was of all things in life the most terrible.

Thus it was that she scarcely realized the anguish for herself, or the loss that began to shadow over her. Her whole mind was occupied with wonder, and horror, and dread of this trial for Roger. How was he to bear it? How was he to give up life, and compose himself to meet the terrible approach of the Unknown? She was afraid of it for him, perhaps more than he was for himself—a hundred times more than she would have been for herself—and this took away from her all those thoughts of her own future, which might have been natural to a mind differently organized. It did not seem to matter what happened *after*. All the interest collected round that terrible moment, when the companion of her life, the husband of her youth, must consent and make up his mind to be no longer. And it did not occur to Agnes to consider that Roger's mind was occupied with the details too much to be able to regard the approaching event as she did; that a little relief from suffering, or a little sense of comfort, were enough to divert a sick man from graver thoughts; or that, in fact, he was too much concerned about his little changes of sensation to have time to contemplate and rehearse, as she was

doing for him, the concluding scene of all, with all its mystery and darkness. When Mr. Freke came to see the patient, Agnes was relieved and yet wounded to see how glad her husband was to take refuge in the parish gossip, and hear all the village news; and when the Vicar looked at herself with a sympathetic face, and pressed her hand, and said, "My dear Mrs. Trevelyan, you must keep up and have courage," Agnes could have found it in her heart to strike him with her trembling hand. What did it matter about her? Was not she there in horrible good health, and cruel force, unable to communicate that strength to him, with whom she would have shared everything but pain? This was how her mind was occupied in the crisis of Roger's illness. But, after all, the trial was not so near as everybody thought. The sufferer was respited, and everything went on again to a certain extent as before.

This renewal of hope, however, was not very vivid nor very consolatory. Roger got better in a poor way, as his doctors accounted betterness. He revived so far as to feel his miseries, and to enter a little into the position in which Agnes's anxiety had placed him at the height of his illness. When he began to look forward, it dawned upon Roger that the future was very dark and uncertain, and that nobody cared to discuss with him the time

when he should be well again. And then he got impatient, as was natural, with this amount of recovery, which permitted only a voyage downstairs to the drawing-room, or a little walk in the sunshine. He had been patient and courageous when he was very ill, bearing what he had to bear like a man; but as he became "better" after this sad fashion, poor Roger began to show the smaller side of his character, as was natural. And it was in this state that Miss Trevelyan found him, when she came quite unexpectedly and without any warning, in the middle of October, to spend a few days at the Hall.



CHAPTER XVII.

Miss Trevelyan's Visit.

BEATRICE TREVELYAN had known for a long time that she had only, as her maid might have said, "herself to look to" in this world.

The expression is vulgar, but the sentiment is painful. Nobody belonging to her could do much for her, or took the trouble to think of doing anything; and the world in which alone she saw any true object of ambition, and indeed, in which alone she knew how to live, was a world in which a woman in her circumstances, if she fails to keep herself in mind and to make herself agreeable and amusing, fails altogether, and comes to an end. It was as necessary for her to be seen and heard as it would be for a popular actress or prima-donna, and, indeed, perhaps her art was something of the same description. But, for all that, she was far from being without feeling. Had she married at the natural

time and in the natural way, she had it in her to have been impassioned in her love; but though that had passed over, as was to be expected, she was still capable of loving, and had by no means shut her heart to the natural affections, as so many people do when they have reached the middle of life. When she heard of Roger's illness, she was concerned about him, though he had never done much to recommend himself to her. And then she had a sisterly sentiment, of the same character as that which disposed the little Miss Fox to flirt with poor Mr. Trevelyan. Without permitting herself to inquire what Roger could have been good for, she concluded that things might have been very different with him had he married differently—"if he had had a wife who could understand him," Beatrice said; and when she found that an interval of a few days intervened between two visits which she had to pay, Miss Trevelyan came down to Windholm to the old Hall, where the agent and the housekeeper reigned supreme. She brought her maid, which naturally secured her a certain amount of comfort—a bright fire in her room, for example, lighted at the right minute, and a cup of tea when she liked to have it; and next morning she walked down to the village to see her brother.

Sir Roger, in the meantime, had not given up

the idea of taking Walter, and this was one of the things which Beatrice meant to talk over with her brother. She had made up her mind calmly enough to the undertaking, but notwithstanding, her heart beat a little quicker as she made her way to the house on the Green. This time, it would be impossible not only to avoid naming Agnes, but to do without seeing her, and even being civil to her in some degree; and it occurred to Miss Trevelyan, as she approached the door, that her sister-in-law was not precisely now in the same position as when she was twenty and the blacksmith's daughter. She had been Roger Trevelyan's wife for nine years, and had seen, in a way, something of the world. She had even, as Beatrice had vaguely heard, been considered worthy of the notice of Lady Grand-maison, who was no contemptible chaperon; so that there was at least a possibility that Mrs. Trevelyan knew how to defend herself. Beatrice fortified herself by recalling Lady Charlton's pitying mention of the young woman's ignorance and frightened looks; but, to be sure, it was a long time since then, and a woman, especially when she is married, learns a great deal in nine years.

It was thus, with a little excitement, that Miss Trevelyan entered at the gates, which amused her by their pretension of shutting in the pretty

lawn and pleasant garden. It had the air of a house in the suburbs, but notwithstanding, it was far from being a contemptible house. The visitor was conducted into the drawing-room by a maid, who declared it essential to ask whether master was able to see her before leading her to Roger's sick room, and who was not moved by hearing that she was Miss Trevelyan. "I'll ask, and let you know, ma'am, directly," said the incorruptible attendant; and Beatrice came in with a little sense of astonishment into the pretty room which Stanfield had furnished for his daughter. Already it struck her that there must be somewhere a ruler in the house, when her own air of command had so little effect. The drawing-room had something of the deserted look, which so soon betrays the presence of another domestic centre—the sick room, for which it had been abandoned. The fire was low in the grate, and the flowers on the table were beginning to droop, and the blinds were half drawn over the pleasant window where Agnes had been used to sit at work. At the first glance, Miss Trevelyan had supposed there was nobody there, but after a moment she perceived little Walter, coiled up in an easy chair, with a book in his arms. The child was altogether absorbed in his book, and felt no lack; but yet he looked a little forlorn, all by himself in the room,

like a child whose father was sick, and who was suffering a momentary neglect in consequence. He did not observe the stranger till she had come in and begun to move about the room, and throw curious looks at everything, not perceiving him, for her part—for, to be sure, all the Trevelyans were a little short-sighted; and then, of a sudden, he raised upon her two broad brown luminous eyes—eyes that had no imperfection of vision, that did not belong to the Trevelyans, but were derived directly, without any question, from the blacksmith. The sight of those eyes made upon Beatrice an impression something like that of a curtain drawn aside in the partially lighted room. The silence and dimness suddenly became possessed of a soul, and looked at her and asked what she did there.

When Miss Trevelyan had got over the first effect of this look, she made an effort to recollect the child's name, and happily succeeded. "Are you Walter?" she asked, holding out her hand to him. "Come and speak to me. I am your Aunt Beatrice." Walter uncoiled himself slowly, and came down from his chair, still embracing his book in one arm. He came towards her slowly, making his investigations. Politeness required that he should respond, but the child was surprised and partly suspicious, and did not know what reply to make.

“ I have come to see your papa,” said Beatrice. “ Come and speak to me. Have you never heard of your aunt ?” She spoke a little sharply, as was natural ; for besides that she never had been “ one for children,” it was a little irritating to observe how slowly Walter made his approach.

“ Yes,” said Walter, “ I have heard of you ; but I never knew you were coming here. Is it because papa is so ill ? When I have asked mamma if I should ever see you, she said she did not think so. Shall I run and tell mamma ?”

“ No,” said Miss Trevelyan ; “ come here, and let me look at you. I want to see if you are like any one. The true Trevelyans all resemble each other.”

“ Are there any false Trevelyans ?” said Walter. “ I know who I am like—I am like grandpapa ; at least Madelon says so, and the other servants, and all the men at the forge.”

“ You are not in the least like your grandpapa ; your face is quite strange to me,” said Beatrice, sharply ; and then she stopped short, and grew red. No doubt it was the blacksmith whom he resembled ; and Miss Trevelyan felt herself shudder. The child stood looking at her with those large brown eyes, soft and impenetrable, in which there seemed to lurk a certain humour

and irony, and a hundred things beside, which she could not explain to herself. She did not know whether he was secretly smiling at her, or looking through and through her; and the ox-eyes had an extraordinary effect upon her mind in spite of herself. What if, perhaps, these were the mother's eyes? She pushed him away from her with some energy, and turned her face to the door instead. "Is your father very ill?" she said; "he is not confined to bed, is he? I wonder what preparation can be necessary before he sees his sister. It is very bad taste to keep me here."

"Perhaps papa is having his dinner," said Walter. "He does not have his dinner with us; or perhaps baby is there, and has to be taken away."

These explanations were uttered so quietly that Beatrice could not but look at him again. He was perfectly composed and abstract, regarding the facts of the life with which he was acquainted as the natural order of affairs; and in the meantime he held his book fast in one arm, and gave a furtive look at it by times; though the rules of politeness inculcated by Giovanni of Sorrento, forbade him to read so long as the visitor was there, and made any claims upon his attention. He was not a picturesque child, with floating

curls or careful costume, but there was something in his eyes which took the words out of Beatrice's lips. She felt that he restrained her as he stood opposite looking at her, preventing her from examining the room, and forming her opinion of its mistress by the trifles about. She was even glad when the maid came back again to relieve her from the scrutiny of this open-eyed boy. And Beatrice drew all her forces together as she went upstairs. If the mother was like the child, the chances were that she had here a foe-man worthy of her steel; and it was with this feeling that Miss Trevelyan entered her brother's sick room, where he was awaiting her alone.

It was one of Roger's bad days; for one thing, all was cloudy and dull outside, and the damp weather affected his breathing, and the heavy atmosphere oppressed his mind. Nobody had come near him all the day, not even the doctor, who was not now in daily attendance; and he had got tired of Agnes, who had little that was new to say, and tired of hearing her read, as was natural. He had been amusing himself playing with the two babies, but the result had been an unlucky little tumble on the part of baby the elder, which made her cry, and awoke a sympathetic scream from the other little unconscious creature; and they had both been sent away in

disgrace. Then he had been disappointed with his early invalid dinner; and his annoyance over, that brought back to his mind the still more serious and bitter discontent which was not unnatural to his circumstances—his impatience at finding himself an invalid, shut up and nursed, and obliged to take care of himself, at an age when other men were in the fulness of their strength. Poor Roger! it was hard to blame him for a petulance so natural. And then, when his sister's visit was announced to him, the name of Beatrice brought matters to a climax. What did she want here, coming spying on his privacy after she had refused to do anything for him—or, at least, had failed to do anything for him, which came to the same thing? No doubt she had come to inspect and make a study of his weak condition, and all the disadvantages of his lot. He glanced round upon the room in which he was sitting, which, in its way, was a very pretty room, but very different, as was to be expected, from the stately chambers at Trevelyan—which, indeed, was a house far too magnificent for the fallen fortunes of the family; and gave orders to admit Miss Trevelyan, with a peevish impatience.

“You need not take the trouble to go upstairs to your mistress,” he said to the maid;

“she is coming down directly. Ask Miss Trevelyan to come up here.”

And thus it was without Agnes's knowledge that Beatrice entered the sick room.

Miss Trevelyan was deeply touched when she saw her brother, pale and feeble, in his dressing-gown, sitting by the fire. He had the shrunken look of a man with whom affairs were very serious, and from whose wan face and weary limbs suffering had taken all the roundness of life.

“My dear Roger, I am very sorry to see you looking so poorly,” she said, as she sat down by his side; and, indeed, the shock was so great that Beatrice grew a shade paler than usual, which was saying something, as she never had any complexion to speak of—and with difficulty kept from falling the tears that rose to her eyes.

“No, I am no great things,” said Roger. “I suppose you've come to see the rights of it? If I stood in anybody's way, you might carry good news to them; but then the misfortune is, that I don't stand in anybody's way——”

“Don't speak like that,” said Miss Trevelyan. “I know you have had a very serious illness, but now that you are able to be up, you'll make progress. Are you sure you have good advice?”

I would not trust to a village doctor in such a case. Wouldn't it be best for you to go to Nice, or somewhere, and shun the winter? I should think that would be the thing to do."

"On the contrary, that fellow Farington sent me home," said Roger. "I don't know what he meant by it. If there had been anyone waiting for my shoes, I might have thought it was done with a bad meaning. No, they don't say anything to me about the winter—all they recommend is quiet; and you may imagine," he added, bitterly, "I have that here."

"Yes, indeed!" said Miss Trevelyan. "I am sure I only wish I knew anything to suggest. Couldn't you be moved to town, for instance? You know we have no house now, but only hire one for the season, and, in consequence, I cannot offer——"

"No," said Roger, with a laugh; "if you could have offered, you would have taken good care not to make the suggestion. It's very mild at Trevelyan, but it does not occur to you to ask me there."

"Roger, dear, you know as well as I do," said Miss Trevelyan, with real distress, "I never go to Trevelyan myself when I can help it. You know what sort of people Sir Roger collects there."

“ I don't see that matters much to me,” said the invalid ; “ there's plenty of room. As for the society of a lot of sporting men, I don't see that it could harm me much, and it has always a chance to be amusing. But when a thing turns up that you really could do, then you begin to see the objections. That is like all my friends—they'd be glad to do for me everything I don't want ; but they take precious good care not to say a word about anything that would really be of service. By-the-way, I oughtn't to say all,” said Roger, with sudden compunction ; “ there's that good fellow, Stanfield, though I've behaved like a beast to him ; and then there's Agnes's friend, Lady Grandmaison, who has done what you are sorry you can't do—offered us a house in town to be near the doctor ; but then,” said Roger, willingly sacrificing his own pride for the moment for the sake of aggravating his sister, “ that is not for me, but for my wife's sake.”

“ Lady Grandmaison has offered you *her* house !” cried Beatrice, with unfeigned astonishment ; and there gleamed across her mind a splendid vision of Belgrave-square which took away her breath.

“ Well, it is not precisely her house,” said Roger, “ it is her sister's house, who died, you know ; but, all the same, it's a charming little

place. Only, unfortunately, it's my wife's friends and not my own who are willing to do something for me; and that's a thing, you know, that rather goes against a fellow's pride."

It went so much against Miss Trevelyan's pride that her pale face flushed, and the puckers grew in her forehead. "If I had anything of my own, or could do anything!" she said. "But, at least, there are some people in the world who will do something for me. If you should like to go to town, I will find means to get you a house."

Roger laughed. "Thank you," he said; "I'll go to Lady Grandmison's if I go anywhere. You don't say, come to Trevelyan where it is mild, you know. That is precisely what I say—anything I don't want, or that is impracticable—but for something that I should like, and which is in your power——"

In spite of herself Beatrice grew agitated, and lost her usual composure. "Roger," she said, "to show you how much I am willing to do, I will give up all my engagements for the winter, and go down with you to Trevelyan and be your nurse, if you like. I have a great many engagements, and some of them might be of great consequence to me," she continued, unable to contemplate such a sacrifice even in this moment of

excitement without a movement of regret; "but I will give them up if you say the word, and go down with you to Trevelyan, and do all in my power to make you comfortable."

"My dear Beatrice," said Roger, who was amused, though not in a very amiable way, by her excitement, "where did you learn to take care of a sick man? I don't doubt your power, you know, to do anything you take in hand to do; but that's unnecessary. Agnes can make me comfortable. It's her business, and I don't think she'd like to give it up, even to you."

Again Miss Trevelyan grew crimson to the roots of her hair. "You know Trevelyan is not fit to receive a—a family," she said. "You know it would be impossible to take down a whole household, nurses and everything. You know papa could not be expected. But for you, Roger, if you like, and even for the little boy——"

Roger laughed, but the sound of his laugh was displeasing to his sister's ears. "I am no great things," he said; "I cannot be sure, when I think it over, that I've done my duty by Agnes, or fulfilled her expectations; but, by Jove, I'm not such a shabby beast as you would make me out. Go off to Trevelyan with you and accept a half reconciliation, and leave my wife behind me as if

she was not good enough to go there! By Jove, there's nobody like a woman for meanness; I and—the little boy; poor little Watty. If I die, I hope that youngster will have a soul above deserting his mother. Leave Agnes behind, who is worth the whole set of us twice over! It's like a spiteful woman's idea—but, by Jove, Beatrice, I thought better of you."

Miss Trevelyan had never before heard herself called a spiteful woman, and, indeed, had not investigated her own ideas, nor considered what sort of proposal she was making; and even at that moment, amid the shame and confusion with which she felt herself covered, a certain satisfaction in her brother, who, after all, was better than herself, mixed in her humiliation. Though he was cruel in his indignation, she thought better of him as she made a struggle to reply.

"All that is very fine, Roger. I am not saying a word against Mrs. Trevelyan; but, of course, if Sir Roger made up his mind to receive her at all, it would be my duty to see that she was properly received; and if she came down with you, an invalid, and requiring all her care, how would it be possible to introduce her, and have people to see her, as would be necessary? It is all very well to think of—of your wife; but, at the same time, you ought to remember," said

Beatrice, suddenly breaking down and begging the question, "that there is also—some—respect—owing to me——"

It was this moment of all others that Agnes chose for coming into the room—Agnes, pale and quiet, out of the nursery, where she had been soothing her little children, and with that look of preoccupation in her eyes which made her appear impervious to lesser troubles. She came in thus upon Miss Trevelyan, who was flushed and vexed, and almost ready to cry, convicted of meanness, and humbled from the heights of her superiority. Beatrice got up instinctively as her unknown sister-in-law came softly into the room. At the first glance, the new-comer showed no signs of beauty, and it was impossible to imagine anything more simple than her dress, which was grey, of Roger's favourite tint. She had had no warning of the visitor, and came in without any thought of finding a stranger there. Miss Trevelyan drew her short-sighted eyes together as she gazed at this woman, whose happier fate she had been indignant at, and against whom, in her soul, she felt such a stir of dislike and opposition. The idea she had formed of Agnes in her own mind was so different that she gave a little start of consternation when she saw the soft negligent grace of the advancing figure, the small graceful

head stooping under its weight of hair, the look altogether unconscious of, and indifferent to, criticism.

“This is not Mrs. Trevelyan?” she said unawares, under her breath, with an inquiring glance at her brother; and Roger could not deny himself the natural triumph.

“Yes, this is Mrs. Trevelyan,” he said, with a laugh, rousing Agnes out of her abstraction. “Come here and make acquaintance with my sister, Agnes. It is rather late in the day, but still it is better now than never. This is my sister Beatrice—my only sister, whom you have heard of; she has come to see what she can do for me now I’m ill. It is a pity she had not thought of it a little sooner; and to make acquaintance,” said Roger, with a savage significance incomprehensible to his wife, “with your little boy——”

Agnes was surprised, but she had the composure of a woman who is in her own house, and is too much absorbed in her own anxieties to be disturbed by the entrance of any stranger. A slight colour came to her cheek, but it was nothing to the fiery flush which burned on that of Miss Trevelyan. There was still in her eyes the shy, sweet appeal of her youth to the kindness of her new acquaintance, but that did not in

the least resemble the angry embarrassment which made Beatrice awkward for perhaps the first time in her life. It was Agnes who held out her hand and gave the graceful gracious greeting which at once placed the two in their fit position—though not by any means in the position which Beatrice considered natural.

“I am very glad to see you,” Mrs. Trevelyan said; “you are very welcome. I am sure it will do Roger good. It was very kind of you to come.”

That was all,—but it was enough to make Beatrice feel that never more could she hold her head high in imaginary superiority over the blacksmith's daughter. She took her seat again, no way converted or humbled, in the amiable sense of the word; but mortified and humiliated, which is a condition of mind not favourable to moral improvement; and Roger laughed harshly as he sank back into his easy chair. The only one who was unmoved was Agnes, whose sole perplexity was as to whether or not she should order a room to be prepared for Miss Trevelyan;—and in the meantime the October afternoon began to darken, and it was time for Beatrice to return to the Hall.

“Roger is obliged to dine early since he has been an invalid,” said Agnes, absorbed in the

cares natural to the mistress of the house ; “ but, if you will pardon me for leaving you, I will see about getting your room ready, and about dinner. We all keep early hours since Roger has been ill—but after to-day——”

“ Oh, pardon me ; I am staying at the Hall,” said Miss Trevelyan ; “ indeed, I must go now to get there before dark. I will come back again to-morrow, Roger, and by that time I hope you will have thought over what I have said.”

“ If that is all, you may save yourself the trouble,” said Roger, somewhat rudely ; “ after what you have seen, I should have thought it unnecessary for me to say any more.”

“ Perhaps you may change your mind,” said Miss Trevelyan ; “ anyhow, I will come again to-morrow. Good-bye for to-day.”

“ I am sorry you will not stay,” said Agnes, who paid no attention to this. “ Could not we send for your things to the Hall? It must be solitary there all by yourself; and I am sure it would do Roger good to have you with him. Don't you think you could make up your mind to stay?”

“ Thank you, no,” said Beatrice ; “ I am very much obliged to you, I am sure. Don't take the trouble to come downstairs. Pray don't take the trouble ; I can find my way out quite

well by myself." This was said while going downstairs, for Agnes persisted in following her visitor, to Miss Trevelyan's amazement and contempt. She began to think, after all, that her first idea was correct, and that Agnes's appearance was a delusion. "I suppose it is considered civil in her condition of life," she said to herself with a sense of recovery. That was all she was thinking of on leaving her brother's sick room; but sadder thoughts were in the heart of his wife.

"Miss Trevelyan," said Agnes, when they had nearly reached the door; "stop a moment, I want to speak to you. Tell me how you think he is looking. You saw him in town before he had this attack; and I get so anxious that I don't know what to think. Tell me, do you think he is very much changed?"

And then they stood facing each other—the one anxious, the other disconcerted—while Agnes, who was utterly incapable of concerning herself at that moment about any one's opinion of her, stood trying eagerly to read Miss Trevelyan's judgment on Roger in her eyes. Even then it was not Roger that occupied Beatrice, but the eyes which were thus anxiously fixed upon her; they were not like Walter's. That was at least one comfort. If the boy ever came to be Sir Walter Trevelyan, nobody could say it was

from his mother that he had taken his remarkable eyes.

“ Indeed I can’t say,” she answered, coldly ;
“ I suppose you have a good doctor ; his opinion must be of a great deal more importance than mine. Thank you, good-bye ! I am sorry to have given you the trouble of opening the door.”



CHAPTER XVIII.

The Valley of the Shadow.

ROGER had another attack that night; of course it was not his sister's visit that caused it; and he was indignant, even in the midst of his sufferings, when the doctor asked if he had been agitated or disturbed during the day. "Stuff!" the patient said from his bed, seeing that Agnes hesitated. "I have seen my sister; but there was nothing to agitate any one in that; not even a poor wretch with a heart like mine." But whatever it was that had caused it, the enemy was there once more assaulting the feeble frame which had not been permitted time enough to gain any strength. The house on the Green was kept in a state of terrible anxiety all night. Downstairs Stanfield sat sad and silent, overawed by the shadow of Death that hovered over the house, waiting, if perhaps he could be of any use; and in the nursery Walter woke up in the middle of

the night to see the lights still burning, and Madelon crying by the fire over the baby, which wailed for the mother who could not come; and a sense of disturbance and desolation came over the child's mind, and kept him awake. All this happened while Beatrice was reposing peacefully at the Hall, encountering in her dreams this new figure of Mrs. Trevelyan, and snubbing her at leisure. Perhaps, had she accepted the invitation of Agnes, this night's watch together might have made a bond of union between the two; but, unfortunately, Beatrice this time, without any interposition of others, had taken once more the wrong turning in the doubtful and difficult path of life.

When the morning came in wintry and pale, it threw light upon a set of very wan and scared faces in the house on the Green. On Stanfield, down below, still listening intently for news from the sick room, and rousing himself, with all the colour quenched out of his cheeks, as he heard the doctor come downstairs; on little Walter above, turning a little white face to the entering light, knowing, and yet not knowing, how momentous a business was going on in the house, frightened and ready to cry, without being sure what he cried about; and on Agnes, pale also as the daylight, worn out and sick at heart, sitting by

the bedside, where the patient lay in a doubtful sleep, "in no immediate danger," as the doctor said. The crisis was over, and he was not likely to die now; but Mrs. Trevelyan knew what that doubtful sentence meant, and knew that her husband's shattered frame was not able to bear another such assault which might come any day. She heard the baby wailing upstairs, but she could not leave the bedside, where, notwithstanding the postponement of the sentence, she seemed to see Death slowly approaching to share her watch. That hopelessness was more terrible to bear than the certainty itself, when it should be accomplished. When all was over, it would be but herself who would have to bear it; but, in the meantime, it was Roger—Roger, with his mind all living, and young, and impatient, who must wake up presently and face the fact that he was going to die.

This was what Agnes was thinking of as she sat in the absolute silence of the sick room, with the pale morning light revealing the pallor of her face and the disorder of everything about, which gave token of the dreadful night they had come through. As for what was going to happen to her, the widowhood that was so near, her mind did not touch upon that. It seemed to her as if nothing mattered that should

happen *after*. Even in the pain of anticipation, her thoughts rushed forward and would have embraced any expedient to save Roger from that waiting and looking for death. It appeared to her as if she would have been thankful had he died then—that moment, in his sleep, and so have been saved the hopeless weariness of the waiting; but when that thought had passed through her mind, nature awoke, all startled and afraid, and she got up to lean over him and make sure that he was still breathing. This was how the miserable morning which brought no hope passed over Agnes. If she had been the sufferer, she could have taken it all very bravely and sweetly; and indeed Roger himself, though he was of a nature different from his wife, met the darkness like a man. What was insupportable was to sit by and know that he must bear it, and be unable to help or to save. But then that was an anguish which one time or other befalls most women; and Mrs. Trevelyan was aware, if that had been any comfort to her, that there was nothing extraordinary or out of nature in the cross she was called upon to bear.

All these thoughts that were going through her mind, absorbed her so entirely, that almost for the moment in thinking of Roger she had forgotten him, when she was suddenly roused by a

movement he made, and looking up hastily saw that he was awake and looking at her. He was so worn out, that all personal feeling seemed to have left him in his weakness; and upon her whose mind was so agitated by fear and pity for him, he looked with smiling composed eyes which she could scarcely bear.

“Well, yes, it has been a hard bout,” said Roger, “and I suppose I could not stand many more; but it’s always something to have a little ease. What o’clock is it? I don’t suppose you have had much rest to-night, any more than I.”

“It is seven o’clock,” said Agnes; “you have had two hours’ sleep; that will do you good, Roger; but you must not talk—everything depends upon keeping quiet, the doctor says.”

“Never mind what the doctor says,” said Roger. “When a man is come to this he ought to be left free to do what he likes. We are not going to be dismal for that. Sit down here and let us have a little talk.”

Agnes did as she was told, with her heart disturbed between fears for him, and fears of thwarting him. It seemed hard to shut her ears to what he had to say to her—if, indeed, he had something to say; and she was longing that he should speak and say something, which, to sus-

tain her in the long and lonely future, she could lay up in her heart.

“Poor soul, how pale she looks!” said Roger, “it is almost harder upon you than upon me; but at all events you are at home, and that is always something. What did you think of Beatrice last night?”

“Think of her?” said Agnes, vaguely. Her very understanding seemed to have failed her for everything that did not concern himself.

“She was a little put out when she saw you, I can tell you,” said Roger, with a faint laugh. “She has never been able to get over the idea that you were of the *Blowsibella* species. By Jove! when she saw you, it gave her ‘a turn,’ as Mrs. Stanfield says. By the way,” said Roger, whose worn and ghastly countenance looked so entirely out of accord with this ordinary conversation, “don’t have anything to do, nor let the children have anything to do, with that woman. Your father’s been taken in, you know—he’s just the man to be taken in. But about Bee—it’s a great pity she’s not married. You have not told me what you think of her looks.”

“Roger, dear, I can’t see anybody but you,” said Agnes. “I can’t think of anybody. I used to be very anxious about the first meeting

with Miss Trevelyan ; but I don't think I had any eyes to see her with last night."

"You did just what you ought to have done, my darling," said Roger. "You made *her* open her eyes at least ; and she's got fine eyes in some lights. Look at them next time you see her. Poor Bee ; after all, I believe there is some good in her, if she had been trained as she ought. She said she'd take me to Trevelyan, and nurse me, Agnes—and she such a one for society ! There was kindness in that."

"Yes," said Agnes, whose heart sank within her at the idea of any one sharing her cares of love, "but you know you are used to me. I don't want any assistance. I could not be comfortable if any one was nursing you but myself."

Roger laughed faintly once more. Even at that moment it rather pleased him to make his wife jealous. "Don't be afraid," he said ; "I don't look very able to go to Trevelyan, do I ? and as for Bee, I daresay she has changed her mind already. Tell her the baby is Beatrice, when she comes—it's a favourite name in our family ; she'll be pleased, I should think. Am I to have anything ? Physic of course, and some slops after it, I suppose. By Jove ! Agnes, it's a little hard upon a man at my age to be brought to this !"

“Oh, it’s hard, very hard!” cried Agnes. “I dare not think of it, Roger. It must be God’s will, but somehow that does not seem to make it easier to bear.”

“Yes,” said Roger, “some fellows are treated very differently—good health and everything in the world they can set their face to. But I suppose it’s God’s will, as you say. Give me the beef tea—it was atrocious stuff they sent me up yesterday; and now, if you won’t talk any more, I think I shall go to sleep.”

And so he did, and left Agnes watching, a prey to all those terrible thoughts that are born of suffering. Perhaps, if all this had happened a few years sooner, she could have borne it with a more Christian mind, as she had borne the death of her babies, thinking grievous sweet thoughts of the angels in heaven, who behold the face of the Father day and night. But middle age had come upon her before its time, and all the questions that rend the heart of man. She could not understand why it was that all the world was waking round her to life and hope, while Roger opened his eyes only to contemplate, drawing always nearer, the face of death; while at the same time, so many people were left in the world who would have been glad to die, and who kept alive only because they could not help it; and so

many more who were a burden to the world, and whose end would be a relief to human nature. As she sat in the silence, watching her husband's sleep, she turned over all these things in her mind, in an agony which was not impious only because it was so real; for in her very doubt, demanding in her anguish an account of what her Father was doing, she was so sure of that Father, so certain that it must be right, somehow, if He would but bow down from those heavens, which were so terribly vague and distant, and explain. And then there came the other wonder, almost as great, to see Roger, so well aware of his position, and yet so perfectly like himself, and so little thoughtful, to all appearance, of that preparation for death which Agnes had been accustomed to hear of all her life as the necessary preface and accompaniment of dying. Mr. Freke came often, and read the prayers for the sick at his bedside; but then Mr. Freke, who was also so candid about his difficulties, increased the doubt rather than the faith of the anxious wife; and when the prayers had been said, she knew very well how they all relapsed into such conversation as that which Roger had been carrying on before he fell asleep. And what, then, did it all mean? She was staggered in her ideas by this first encounter with the reality; and at

the same time she was no spectator, whose dismay and wonder might have passed off in words, but was so intimately and terribly concerned. She knew that Roger had thought but little in his lifetime of the serious questions of religion, and she knew it would be impossible to rouse him to think of them now, even at the risk of bringing his days to a summary conclusion by the excitement of an appeal to his conscience. And Agnes knew that the patience and gentleness with which he was regarding death, arose more from the subduing of all his faculties than from any special faith; and that Roger would die as he had lived, accepting everything without any thought or question, taking his religion as a thing outside of himself, with which his own heart and mind had next to nothing to do. She was too full of the tender prejudices of love, too full of the awe of nature, to say all this to herself in so many words; but it passed through her mind vaguely, as she sat by Roger's bedside; for up to this moment she, like all others who have never learned by experience, had been of opinion that a deathbed, of itself, must change the aspect of everything, and make a visible and conscious path between earth and heaven.

Roger had a long sleep, and woke up better; and his wife was able to leave him to see after

the children, and especially the little wailing baby, which had sought its mother all through the lingering night. Agnes had gone downstairs to give her necessary orders when Beatrice arrived from the Hall, as she had promised; and it was Mrs. Trevelyan's disagreeable business to keep her sister-in-law from proceeding at once to the sick room. She stopped her in the little hall, where Miss Trevelyan would fain have passed her by with a civil salutation; but even Beatrice's stately air had no effect upon Agnes.

"Come in here," she said, opening the door of the drawing-room, where little Walter was again seated with his book, looking as if he had never moved from his position since Beatrice left him the previous day. "You cannot go upstairs at present; let me speak to you here."

"Why cannot I go upstairs?" said Beatrice, naturally defiant. She thought the poor-spirited wife was jealous of Roger's sister, and that "a due respect for herself" made it necessary for her at once to enter the lists and defend her right.

"Because Roger has been very ill all night," said Agnes; "so ill that the doctor feared the worst. The crisis is over now, and he has a little repose; but he is so weak that I dare not let you see him. Pray don't be vexed; I am as

sorry to say so as you can be to hear it. Indeed I dare not let him be disturbed."

"And who imagined I would disturb him?" said Beatrice. "Do you forget that I am his sister, Mrs. Trevelyan? He was my brother before he was your husband. The rights of a wife may be paramount, even when she has brought nothing but harm; but I have yet to learn that they extend so far as to banish her husband's relations from his sick bed. I have come to see Roger, and I beg you to let me pass without any more words."

"I beg your pardon," said Agnes; "indeed, I want to banish no one from him—I asked you to stay, on the contrary; but the doctor thinks he was excited yesterday. Pardon me!—indeed I cannot help it;—he must have absolute quiet. I am not allowed to let him talk, even to me."

"Even to you!" said Beatrice, with a long-drawn panting breath of indignation and scorn. To be sure, the circumstances were a little hard, and regarding them from her point of view, it was easy enough to imagine that all this was an ingenious trick of the jealous wife. "I have business with my brother," Miss Trevelyan continued. "He expressed a desire yesterday to go to Trevelyan, and I offered to go with him, and nurse him. I must see him to arrange about the journey.

I thought yesterday it might be necessary to write to Sir Roger; but as affairs are so urgent and quiet so necessary, I will take the responsibility upon myself. He will get better all the quicker in his native air, and in his father's house."

"Here he is in his own house," said Agnes—and then she was ashamed of herself for having thought of making a defence at such a moment. "He is scarcely able to move in his bed, much less to undertake a journey," she said, with tears in her eyes. "I wish you would believe that I speak with no meaning beyond my words. Roger has been very ill all night; so ill, that we thought he would die."

"And I suppose it is I that am supposed to be the cause?" said Miss Trevelyan, indignantly.

"No, I do not think so," said Agnes—"and Roger, in the midst of his pain, said 'No'; but the doctor gave me orders that he was to see no one. If you will stay with us I shall be very glad; and then, when he is better, you can see him; or if you will wait till the doctor comes——"

"Yes," said Beatrice, "I will wait till the doctor comes. Are you sure it was not your fault that my brother was agitated yesterday?"

You were angry because he wanted to go to Trevelyan, and be among his own people; and you fretted and found fault with the poor fellow, who could not escape from you till you brought on a crisis. I feel as sure of it as though I had seen it; and then you prevent me from going to him. But one cannot shut out the devoted wife from the sick bed, even though she may be killing her husband in the dark. Yes, Mrs. Trevelyan, I will wait till the doctor comes."

Agnes did not make any reply to this unexpected accusation. She bowed her head gently without speaking, and went away, leaving her visitor in undisturbed possession of the room. What Beatrice had said was so wild and out of reason, that it made no impression upon the occupied mind of Mrs. Trevelyan. She went back into her own thoughts, her many cares and anxieties about Roger, without even recollecting, after a little, that downstairs a hostile stranger was sitting, waiting to get admission, and to bring an obstinate personal will and human rivalry to disturb the tranquillity of the sick chamber, which might so soon be a chamber of death.



CHAPTER XIX.

The End.

“**D**ID you tell her what we had called the baby?” said Roger. “Poor Bee! Why would not the doctor let her come upstairs? I dare say she is furious at you and everybody. Write her a little note, Agnes, and tell her to come to-morrow, before she leaves the Hall, and bid me good-bye. She’s ten years older than I am,” said Roger, “yet she’ll last, no doubt, ten years longer than I shall. And there’s Sir Roger, you know. After all, though he’s my father, he’s not such a very valuable member of society; and yet it is I who have to go, and they stay.”

“Dear Roger, don’t say that,” said Agnes, as well as she could speak in her choked voice, “it is you who will find the true life first—the greatest happiness must be for you.”

“Ah! so they say,” said Roger; “I’m not

going against it, but only it's odd, you know. I don't see, for my part, why there should be such a difference made. I am not much good in this world, but I am more good than Sir Roger is, so far as any man can see. But indeed, after all, to go to the bottom of things, I am not so sure of that. Most likely you'll get on better without me. You'll have your father, Agnes, to give you a hand—and then there's the boy—”

“Roger, don't, if you have any pity,” said the weeping wife.

“Pity, my darling? And then you are young, and there's no telling what may happen,” said Roger drearily. “I'll be happy, I suppose, and I shall not mind—I am not going against that, but only it's queer, you know. Most fellows at my age—but it's no good thinking of that. Be sure you send for Beatrice to bid me good-bye. Have you got your writing things here? Then write now, and let me see what you say.”

Agnes obeyed without any remonstrance, for even the doctor's prohibition was of less importance than Roger's wish, to which, for the brief time he had to remain in the world, everything was to bow. Though, to be sure, it was a little difficult for her to address Miss Trevelyan. She did not feel as if she could begin with the usual formula, or address as “dear” the woman who had insulted

and scorned her in the time of her need ; and yet there was no resentment nor bitterness in her heart ; and, after all, it was very simple what she had to say :—

“ Roger is anxious to see you and say good-bye, as he says. I am very sorry the doctor opposed your coming upstairs. It grieved me much to seem to stand between you and your brother, but it was not my fault. I beseech you come and see him, and bid him good-bye. He is not able to go to Trevelyan or anywhere else at present ; but when he is strong enough, do not think I will oppose anything that gives my husband pleasure. I hope you will forgive me my unwilling rudeness, and come, as Roger wishes, to bid him good-bye.

“ AGNES TREVELYAN.”

“ Let me see it,” said Roger ; “ you write in an odd sort of way, Agnes. Did you and she have a shindy downstairs ? She don’t understand, that’s what it is. As for going to Trevelyan, don’t vex yourself. I let Beatrice talk, but I never meant it ; and as for being strong enough—there, fold it up and send it away. Sir Roger wanted to have Walter, to pay for his schooling, you know, and bring him up ; but I never had a chance to speak

to you about it. Don't cry out. There never was anything decided, and I don't mean to do anything about it now."

"Do not let us talk of it," said Agnes, who had with difficulty restrained her cry of amazement and anguish; "we can talk about everything when you are better. Shall I read to you now?"

"Oh! yes, you may read," said Roger, "if I don't listen, perhaps I can go to sleep; that last is the best thing I can do. It saves thinking, and there's nothing very pleasant to think about. Is Freke coming to-night?"

"Yes, some time before the evening service," said Agnes; "but you must not talk any more."

"No," said Roger—"I don't know what's the good of his coming. He doesn't seem to know any more than I do. It's all very well to say a thing's odd when it comes into one's head, but I don't see the good of a clergyman, if that's all he can say to a man. He ought to know better what he's about. The doctor, you know, don't talk like that; and yet he's not a prig, like some of them. Where's that little shaver, Agnes? You can have him up, if you like; I don't think I want to hear you read."

Agnes went to ring the bell without making any answer, and Roger went on—

"He's a queer little shaver, that; he's neither

like you nor me. I believe it is Stanfield he resembles. I can't say I liked it when I noticed it first; but if he lives to be Sir Walter, that will be all the better for him. If he doesn't live, you'll have no claim upon them, Agnes. The two little girls can never do any good, you know. You had better take care of Watty; he will always give you a power over them. What's the good of crying? I see very well you're crying, though you turn your back to me. Look here, old boy, come and tell me what you're about."

"Nothing, papa," said Walter, coming to the bedside with wistful looks. His father's pallor, and the wild eyes, which seemed to be set in such wide circles, and looked so unnaturally translucent, rather frightened the little fellow; but he did not yield to his tremor. He came up bravely, and stood by the bedside. "Are you very ill, papa?" he asked, forcing himself to come nearer.

"Rather," said Roger. "I was ill all night, you know. I'm tired, and that is the worst of it. Is there anybody with you downstairs?"

"Nobody but Madelon, and little Agnes, and the baby," said the boy; "they were lonely up in the nursery. Papa, do you think it will be long before you can come downstairs?"

"I don't know," said Roger, with a sigh; and

then he added with a little fretfulness, "It was a very odd thing of Madelon to take the babies downstairs."

"But, papa, they were so lonely up in the nursery," said the child, unaware how sad a picture he was drawing of the sorrowful household, disorganized and unsettled by the one absorbing interest which left no eyes nor thoughts for anything else; "and then they were frightened, and came down for company. It is cheerfuller downstairs."

"All the same, she had no right to go," said Roger. "Agnes, you should see to these things. Suppose Beatrice were to come, and find the room occupied so. What had she got to be frightened for, I wonder? I never could make out what you brought that thickhead with you for; it was a piece of nonsense. Because I am ill, I don't see why you should let everything go to the bad. Send her off upstairs."

"Go, Walter, and tell her to go back to the nursery," said his mother. "Roger, dear, if you talk now, you will not be able to talk to Mr. Freke."

"Oh, hang Freke!" said Roger. "I tell you, he don't know his business, Agnes. There is nothing like parsons for that. Either they pull you up short, and are sure of everything, or else

they give in to you, and go further than you do. I am sick of it all. It's hard to have to do with a man that can't answer for you and take the responsibility. There, you can read a little now; but I should like to know what Madelon had to be frightened about, and why she took the liberty of going downstairs."

Agnes had to stop with a look the explanation which was on Walter's lips, in his eagerness that justice might be done—which was to the effect that Madelon was afraid, because she had heard mysterious tappings at the window, and movements about the house, such as always happened when anybody was going to die. In the heat of his desire to do Madelon justice, Walter had forgotten that there was anything more than a vague general prophecy of evil in the fact that somebody might be going to die. Agnes had already learned some of Madelon's terrors, and knew what her boy was going to say, and she sent him away with quickened steps, and took her book and began to read. It was a novel she was reading, strange as that may seem to some people; and in this terrible moment, when her heart was sinking within her under all kinds of sorrows, it was the agonies of a young girl who had quarrelled with her lover that the poor wife had to read. What could she do? There are

women, no doubt, who would have been brave enough to confine themselves at such a time to books of a character more in accordance with a death-bed ; but Agnes was a woman, humble and tender, with a sense of the impossibilities and of the cravings of nature. She knew, even if she could have done it, that it would have been no good to read religious books to Roger, and to try at that late period to interest him in them. She read the Bible to him when she could, but that was only now and then ; and therefore, though she suffered horribly as she did it, and those trivial fictitious woes seemed to her miserable and childish beyond expression, in face of her own, she went on reading her novel. It amused the sufferer by times, and made him forget himself and his pains and weakness for a moment, now and then ; and though Agnes felt in her heart that she might have attempted something different, and had to contend against the thought that she was yielding to necessity, and not doing her best, she took up her book, like a martyr, and went on. What could she do ? To have roused him a little, and made him think tenderly and hopefully of the Father and the Son, and that new world to which he was going, was a desire stronger in her heart than anything else in the world ; but in the meantime, all she

found it possible to do was to amuse him, and make the precious moments, of which he had now so few, pass more gently. This was all, except praying night and day by a kind of habit, which did not abandon her mind even when she was reading. All the time, as in an undertone, she was praying God for the dying man; and meanwhile, she went on reading the novel about the lovers' quarrel with the steadiest voice. As for Roger, he gave it but a half attention, but at the same time, he was pleased to hear it. Broken thoughts about Beatrice, who was coming to see him, and about Madelon, who was a fool to be frightened, and had no right to take the babies downstairs, alternated in his mind with the story of the pretty pensive young heroine who had quarrelled with her lover; and then in the midst, like a flash of light, would come the sense that all this would come to an end suddenly, and he would be gone—who could tell where?—into the presence of God—to the judgment-throne, which it was so hard to attach his thoughts to; and then a faint sort of wonder about what he believed in would come to his mind, and his thoughts would falter into the Creed, the easiest and simplest statement, “And in Jesus Christ his Son, our Lord.” After that the light would go out, as if it had been a lamp in

somebody's hand, going past, and he would come back again to the story and the love-quarrel, which Agnes always continued reading with her steady voice. Heaven knows it was an unsatisfactory way to go through one's dying, and by times the wife's heart contracted with pain, and doubt, and self-reproach; but those who know best what death-beds are, will, perhaps, blame Agnes Trevelyan the least.

In the morning Beatrice came, obeying the invitation she had received. Miss Trevelyan had had a struggle with herself before she did it, but in the end the better angel conquered. She did not say a word to Agnes, nor acknowledge her presence except by the coldest and briefest inclination of the head; but at heart she did not make any attack upon her sister-in-law, to aggravate Roger. As for Agnes, she was very nearly unconscious, so far as she was herself concerned, and might, indeed, have been subjected to many covert insults without knowing it. She had forgotten, so far as a human creature could, that she had a separate personality at all; and, indeed, by want of nourishment and want of rest, had attained—as perfect health and a strong inspiring motive sometimes make possible—a certain independence of her own bodily power and senses, and moved about with some-

thing of the freedom of a disembodied creature. Beatrice, who was herself not incapable of devotion, had anything ever occurred to her to draw it forth, perceived something of this without being willing to perceive it, and turned her back upon her brother's wife, that no sentiment of pity or sympathy might move her towards the woman whom she disliked. "If you will write to me as soon as you are able to be moved, I will make arrangements for receiving you at Trevelyan," she said to Roger, ignoring, half by force of natural opposition and antagonism, half because it seemed kind not to be aware how hopeless matters were, the fatal certainty that was written in every line of her brother's face.

"I shall never go to Trevelyan," said Roger, with a sigh; "it comes too late, like most things. You can tell my father I don't bear him any malice, though he's treated me shabbily. Good-bye, Beatrice. Did Agnes tell you about the baby? I think it's like the Trevelyans, and you might take a little interest in it when it grows up. That's all I've got to say. Don't let Sir Roger bother Agnes. Good-bye! She'll write and tell you if anything happens. I hope you will have a pleasant visit; if it doesn't come to too quick an end through me——"

"I hope it will come to a very quick end

through you, and that you'll call me soon to take you to Cornwall. Good-bye, Roger. Take great care, and don't let yourself be disturbed. We'll talk of everything when you get well. Good-bye!" said Beatrice. That was how she thought it best to signify her want of confidence in the wife, who had nothing to do with what they were to talk about; but though she spoke so indifferently, the kiss she gave her brother was long and sad, like a farewell, and she hurried out of the room to conceal the tears that were in her eyes. This time Mrs. Trevelyan did not follow her downstairs; on the contrary, Agnes took her place softly by the bed-side. If she had any sense of relief in feeling that her husband was thus left to her tendance without fear of interruption, it was made overwhelming and terrible by the accompanying feeling, that the ties of life were thus dropping off from him, and that now nothing remained to hold him to the world but the most intimate and closest bond of all. She could not ignore, like Beatrice, the certainty that was in Roger's worn and shining eyes.

"You are tired," she said. "I am going to read the Psalms, which you said you liked yesterday, Roger. If you lie quite still, perhaps by-and-by you will get to sleep."

"Presently," said Roger. "There's Beatrice

done with. She's the only one I ever cared about—not that she's much to boast of, you know ; but it feels a little queer to finish off like this. It's a dismal sort of thing saying good-bye to everybody ; I don't know, my darling, how I am to say it to you."

"Oh never, Roger, never!" said Agnes, putting her face down upon the thin hand which she was holding in her own.

"I suppose I shall be happy and not mind," said Roger, with a sigh. "That's what they all say, at least ; but it's odd to think of it, you know. Anyhow, I'll be too far gone to know when *you* leave me ; and now, if you like, you can get your book."

This was how Roger Trevelyan died—not that day, nor immediately, but before the year was ended—without very much more suffering, but also without any special intensification of feeling, or sense of awakening to the solemn things that lay before him. He made all the responses quite faithfully and humbly, and received all the consolations of the Church, without ever getting beyond the idea that he supposed he should be happy and not mind, and yet that, on the whole, it was strange and a little hard. His soul went out of the world without excitement—not complaining, certainly not afraid, but still a little

surprised and at a loss what to make of it. He never made any question about his faith, nor doubted that he should be happy, as he said ; but took it for granted, with a composure and simplicity which would have baffled any spectator of keen religious sensibilities. He died, and mourning and darkness fell upon the house that all this time had been so absorbed and preoccupied. And thus a termination came to the second period of Agnes Trevelyan's life.



CHAPTER XX.

Public Opinion.

ROGER TREVELYAN died, and darkness and silence fell on the house on the Green—the pretty house which Stanfield, in the first year of her marriage, before any trouble came, had built for his daughter. She was now mistress, sole mistress of the habitation provided for her by her father's love. The grand complication of her lot had come to an end. It mattered but little now that Sir Roger Trevelyan's son had married beneath him, that the blacksmith's daughter had made a match out of her own sphere. Society had nothing further to do with it. Agnes was again in her native village, supported by her father's bounty; and those ten momentous years, which embraced all her independent life, had passed away like a vision. Life itself is long and weary enough in most cases: it is the active existence—the por-

tions of life that are worth calling by that name—which pass away like a tale that is told.

And, naturally, Windholm and her old friends took possession of Agnes, who seemed thus thrown back upon them and left at their mercy. “She never was took no notice of in the family,” Mrs. Rogers said, who took the lead in the personal discussions of the village, “and now as *he’s* gone, poor gentleman, she’s got nothing to look to. I hope it’ll be a warning to you, all you girls,” the moralist continued, with that fine faculty for improving the occasion which is common to commentators, “never to have anything ado with *gentlemen*. A many of them’s deceivers—and if they ain’t deceivers, they’re no good, as is to be seen in Agnes Stanfield. It ain’t for her as I speak, for it was allays her pride that drew it all on; but if she had a hope as she was to be made a lady of, and lifted up over all our heads—and I haven’t no doubt in my mind as that was what she married for—look what it all comes to. She ain’t got a penny as doesn’t come from her poor old father, and never was took no notice of in the family; for they tell me Miss Trevelyan, as went to see her brother at the last, warn’t not to say civil to Agnes. She’s comed back on her own, with her little ’uns, as poor Polly Abbott did, her as married the

soldier. That's the end of it all. She'll never be made a lady now-a-days, if she was to live a hundred years."

"But," said one of the younger auditors, "our John, as works with Mr. Stanfield, says as the boy will be Sir Walter when his grandfather dies. He says as that bit of a child is as good as a baronet now poor Mr. Trevelyan's dead, and he'll have the Hall, and I don't know what he'll not have—and it stands to reason as his mother should be my lady——"

"Nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Rogers, indignantly. "You tell him from me to talk about things as he knows about. I tell you she'll never be my lady if she was to live to a hundred. No, no; she's lost her chance, Agnes has. The boy'll be put to school and brought up different, and it ain't a many young men as cares that about their mothers to make ladies of them as was never born to be ladies; even if she rares him, that's to say, and he ain't what I call a strong child;—boys is allays a trouble to rare. When they're babbies it's awful, as my poor Louisa could tell you. No, it's just an example and a warning, that's what it is. If one of mine was to take up with a gentleman, like Agnes Stanfield, I'd break my heart. He hadn't a penny, hadn't Mr. Trevelyan, for Sir Roger would have

nothing to say to him, as Mrs. Stanfield herself told me; and all her grand hopes as he'd make a lady of her——”

“But ain't she a lady?” interrupted one of the daughters thus specified. “I never see nobody as looks nicer—and keeps two servants, and a nurse as is furrin'. I'd be content if it was me. If he'd give me a house like Mrs. Trevelyan's, and three servants, and to go to all the parties, and be dressed up like she is, I'd marry the first gentleman as asked me; and Mary Jane thinks the same as me.”

“You're two young fools, that's what you are,” said the mother. “Go off to your work and don't you answer me. There's my Louisa, as was always considered one of the Windholm beauties, and far better educated than Agnes Stanfield—but she had too much sense, I can tell you, to have anything to say to the likes of young Trevelyan. She married a man in a comfortable way of business, as could buy them all up; and doing well and thriving, and her husband as hearty as hearty, and six as pretty children! And now you see the t'other, her as had set her heart on being a lady, she's come back a widder, without a penny. If she had married an honest man as could carry on old Stanfield's business——”

The conversation was interrupted at that

moment by an apparition which sent the gossips in the back shop into a flutter of dismay and consternation. To be sure, there was a glass door closed between them, and Mary Jane, who was presiding at the counter, was innocent of any complicity in the gossip ; but guilt is never courageous. It was Mrs. Trevelyan who had entered the shop, with Walter, to give some trifling order. They all peeped at her from behind the little blinds, with sensations very different from those which the prelections of their entertainer were intended to produce. Agnes was pale, and her profound mourning and the close line of white round her face under her black bonnet, increased the effect of her natural paleness and of her exhausted looks. The young critics in the back parlour were not only silenced by the sight, but perhaps moved by a deeper touch of sympathetic envy—a more profound admiration than if Agnes had been “made a lady of,” according to Mrs. Rogers’ sense of the words. No sort of brilliant surroundings could have made the picture so impressive to the young imagination, even when accustomed to ruder emblems, as the mourning of the young widow, her sadness and quietness, and that atmosphere of profound feeling that surrounded her. She was separated by her grief as much as

by the other peculiarities of her lot, and set above them in a way more effectual than if Lady Trevelyan's carriage had been waiting at the door. No doubt, Louisa Rogers, whose husband was hearty as hearty, who was thriving in business, and had six pretty children, was the happier woman of the two; but if the choice between the two had been offered at that moment to the spectators in the background, the lot of Mrs. Trevelyan, even in her distress and widowhood, would certainly have carried the day. The young women looked with a natural wonder and awe and interest upon a woman who had sounded so many depths. When she went away again with her boy's hand in hers, there was not a word further said about Agnes. "Who could have thought she'd come in just at that moment!" Mrs. Rogers said, looking, experienced woman as she was, just a little disconcerted—and it was certain that the moral she had taken such pains to draw failed altogether of its effect upon the minds of her daughters and their friends, none of whom were at all discouraged as to the results of marrying a gentleman by the sight of Agnes Trevelyan. On the whole, if the result was to be equal, not one of these enterprising young women would have shrank from the necessary means.

But it was not alone in the lower regions of Windholm that Agnes and her fortunes were discussed. She was a good deal talked of in the Cedars, where Minnie Fox had cried over Roger's death, and had been sobered and yet encouraged in her folly by his premature end. She was very sorry for Agnes in her heart, which was not a bad little heart at bottom, and a little ashamed of herself, and yet more certain than ever that poor Mr. Trevelyan would have been very different if his wife had been a woman worthy of him, and who could have made him happy. Little Miss Fox almost thought it was her mission to devote herself to Roger's children, and try to make up to them for the deficiencies of their mother—but there were difficulties in the way of that pious intention; for, to be sure, when she was in Mrs. Trevelyan's company, Miss Minnie did not feel herself so superior as when she looked at Agnes from a distance, and remembered that she was the blacksmith's daughter. As for the vicar and his wife, they were interested more seriously, yet each in a different way. Mr. Freke, as everybody knows, was eccentric, and had very odd ideas. It had never been his opinion, for example, that Roger Trevelyan had had the worse of it in the unquestionable inequality of his marriage. No doubt there was a

great difference between the baronet's son and the blacksmith's daughter; but then the vicar, who was always odd, took it upon him to think that there was also a difference of another description between the woman who inherited William Stanfield's large and tender nature, and the man who derived to some extent the qualities of his mind from Sir Roger Trevelyan; and, to tell the truth, Mr. Freke was not so sorry for Agnes in her present distress, as under all the circumstances he ought to have been. The vicar, for his own part, was happy enough in his way, and yet had never been particularly happy all his life. He had nothing to complain of, and got along very well, on the whole; and his wife was a good woman, who, if she did not enter into his speculations, and the special workings of his mind, still understood him better than anybody else understood him. But with all this moderate and temperate enjoyment, his life had been such, that the question of happiness had never come prominently before him, as the great question of existence; and looking at Agnes Trevelyan, not as a wife who had lost her husband, but as a human creature placed in better or worse circumstances for full development, he was not, as we have said, so grieved for her in her widowhood as would have become her clergyman, whose

duty it was to console and sympathize with the wounded and sorrowful of his flock.

“So far as I can see, it was the best thing he could do,” said the vicar. “He never was good for much, poor fellow! I don’t mean to say I am not sorry for him;—that is, I don’t mean to say it is not altogether a horrible mystery why that old sinner of a father should be left living, and this young fellow, who was not a bad fellow, should be hurried off so quickly;—but it is no use talking of these things. And so far as she is concerned, you know, I think for my own part it was the best thing he could do.”

“Mr. Freke, you are always past my comprehension,” said his wife. “How can it possibly be the best thing for her? It never was a marriage I approved of; though I thought it my duty to stand by her, for she was always a very good girl in her way. But nobody can deny that she has turned out very well, and done a great deal better than anyone had a right to expect. It is just like you to say it is the best thing for her. I don’t know anything more sad, for my part, than to be left a young widow with little children to bring up, and all the responsibility; and then, whatever faults Agnes may have, nobody could ever say she was not very fond of her husband. Poor thing! I am very, very sorry for her, for my part.”

“Oh yes, to be sure,” said the vicar, “that is all right; I am sorry for her too—but on the whole, you know, though I see very little good in philosophy, or in anything else for that matter, one has to look at things occasionally from the broader point of view. A big grief and to be done with it, is better than being cut into little pieces for years and years—and then a man when he dies leaves charity and peace behind him, whereas, when he lives, he is often horribly aggravating. I’ve seen scenes with that good Stanfield that were enough to make the poor girl hate her husband. I am sure I cannot tell why she did not. If she had been a reasonable being, with a due sense of logic, she would have conceived such a contempt for Trevelyan as is quite inconsistent with love in my way of thinking. There was Stanfield supporting them all, and yet coming in, in his modest way, as if it was they who were doing him a favour; and there was Trevelyan insulting him, sneering at him, setting him down as if he knew nothing. Agnes had a great deal too good a head not to have seen all that. Fortunately, women are inaccessible to reason, or else she would have hated him as I say.”

“It is very cruel of you to call up such recollections,” said Mrs. Freke. “The poor fellow

is dead and gone, and it is dreadful to discuss his faults *now*."

"To be sure," said the vicar, "that is exactly what I expected you to say. Indeed, it is exactly what I have been saying. Now she forgets all that, you know. Poor Roger is restored back again to the ideal shape which I have no doubt he wore when she consented to marry him;—and these children will grow up to think their father was the best man that ever lived, and the most dreadful loss to them, instead of finding him out to be very ordinary and very useless, as they would have been sure to do had he lived. To be sure it was no virtue of his, poor fellow, to die;—but if you turn to the other aspect of affairs, why that old reprobate should not have been cleared off the face of the earth, and poor Roger left to mellow in prosperity, that's what I can't tell you. That side of the question is too terrible for me. I daresay he would have made a very tolerable squire, and been happy enough, and given Agnes leave to be as happy as she could. That's the solution I should have chosen, had I had anything to do with it. I suppose it is better as it is. At all events," said Mr. Freke, getting up hastily, "a man would go mad altogether if he could not believe it *must* be best."

"I am sure a great many people in the parish

would think you had gone mad already if they heard you," said his wife, with a tone of injury. "I wish you would not talk in that dreadful way. I don't see, for my part, why Sir Roger should be killed off to make way for Agnes Stanfield, and make her happy. I don't suppose, from all one hears, that the change would be much to *his* benefit, poor man; and poor Roger, on the contrary, was so pious and so resigned. I am going to call there, and ask how the baby is, Mr. Freke. It had a little cold yesterday, when I met it out with Madelon. There will be some change made, I should think, when she has had time to come to herself. I never could think how they were able to keep up three servants and a boy for the garden, even when *he* was living, poor fellow; and it would be quite absurd for Agnes, who, of course, will be seeing nobody. I shall ask her about it as soon as I have an opportunity. Mrs. Percy would be glad to have Madelon, to speak German in their nursery. These are things that never come into a man's head; but it would be a great deal more sensible to give a little thought to that than to say, when the poor thing's husband dies, that it is the best thing he could do."

"It is quite true, notwithstanding," said the vicar, retiring a little before the practical aspect

of affairs as presented to him by his wife. He had not much to say on that question, nor did he feel himself qualified to advise. "For my part, I'd rather not meet her just now, for it is hard to know what to say to her," said Mr. Freke. "It's a little hard to tell a woman like that, that it's all for the best. Yes, go, Harriet; you will do her more good than I should." And with this the vicar walked all round the room with the skirts of his long coat flying behind him, and bolted out of the door when he got to it the second time—which was his general mode of retiring when he had been beaten; as, to be sure, he generally was.

Mrs. Freke was very well aware she would do Agnes more good than her husband; she was very sorry for the sorrowful young woman, but her sorrow was not of the speculative, nor even of the caressing and sentimental sort. She thought it would be a great deal better for Mrs. Trevelyan to be roused up a little, and recalled to her motherly anxieties about the baby, and to the cares of economy, which were now more necessary than ever—or at least so Mrs. Freke concluded. Perhaps, on the whole, with the kindest intentions in the world, she was even less charitable to Agnes than the gossips in Mrs. Rogers' back shop; for, to do them justice, the

worst they proposed was to make an example of her, as an instance of unsuccessful ambition ; whereas the vicar's wife felt a little like a benevolent tiger, whose natural prey had been restored, and went forth with the full intention of taking Agnes into her own hand, and making a summary end of any fine-lady affectations, or self-indulgence that was ridiculous—as Mrs. Freke concluded—in her condition of life. If Roger's widow had been a lady, then, to be sure, she might have had some right to be prostrated with grief, and unequal to any exertion ; but the matter was entirely different with Agnes Stanfield. Mrs. Freke accordingly made her way to the Green, intending to “ speak seriously ” to Mrs. Trevelyan about her circumstances, and to tell her that it was a duty she owed her children to dismiss Madelon and diminish her household. She had even the intention of appealing to Agnes's conscience, whether it was right to go on occupying a house of that size, and whether it would not be wise, on the whole, to go back to her father's, where there was plenty of room, as Mrs. Freke knew ; thus, on the whole, it was not a vague mission of consolation which led the clergywoman of the parish to Windholm Green. Perhaps the vicar was right in thinking that to die was about the best thing

Roger Trevelyan could do; but at the same time, if he was not much good to her in other ways, her husband had been a defence to Agnes. However well-disposed friends may be, they can scarcely take upon them to administer this kind of advice and admonition to a wife who has her husband to stand by her. Now all that was changed, and the natural authorities considered it not only their right, but their duty, to interfere.

“My dear, you must not fret too much,” Mrs. Freke said, taking Mrs. Trevelyan’s hand. “It must be for the best that things have happened as they have done. *He* is happy, and does not want you any more; and you must bear up for the sake of your family. Poor things! what would become of them if anything were to happen to you? The Trevelyans might take Walter; but think of your two dear little girls—and baby had a very nasty cough when I met her out yesterday. I should not have trusted her out of doors had it been me.”

Agnes was roused by this, as was natural, to sudden anxiety—anxiety quick and sharp, that went to her heart. In her deep depression and discouragement she was ready to think every cloud a storm.

“Baby?” she said, faltering. “Did you think she looked ill? I thought it was nothing.

Perhaps I have been thoughtless, and preoccupied with myself."

"My dear, I do not blame you," said Mrs. Freke. "I am sure it is quite natural, and the cough may be nothing, you know; but still, at this time of the year—and then so many things come on with a cough—and I think I have heard you say that they had never had the measles nor anything. Speaking of that, I should like to know what you mean to do about Madelon. I suppose you don't mean to keep her *now*?—a foreign nurse is a kind of luxury, you know; and then, I understand you don't have anything from the Trevelyans, and to keep up a house like this must be a little hard on your father, Agnes. I think I know of a very good place for Madelon as soon as you have made up your mind what you are going to do."

"I do not think Madelon wishes to leave us," said Agnes, faintly. She was so quiet and composed that Mrs. Freke had not thought a great deal of preface necessary; and Mrs. Trevelyan felt as if she had suddenly been seized upon and dragged forth into the noise of life out of a sorrowful dream. She woke up to answer with a painful dull surprise, and that realization of her changed circumstances which, after one of those pauses of anguish which interpret a life,

always comes upon the forlorn survivor with the question, "What do you mean to do?"

"I was not talking of Madelon's wishes," said Mrs. Freke, "but of what you think best in the circumstances, my dear. I am sure you don't want so many servants now. Of course, it will be some time before you think of going into society; and being as you are with the Trevelyans, and no prospect now of coming into the property——"

"Please don't say any more," said Agnes; "I suppose I shall have to think about these things some time; but not now. It is so short a time—I am not able; don't say any more now."

"My dear, it will do you good to cry," said the vicar's wife. "Don't mind me; you know that all I wish is to be a true friend to you, Agnes. I am sure there is nobody in the world more sorry than I am. I felt it as if he had been one of my own connexions," said Mrs. Freke, drying her eyes; "and so young—and so nice as he always was. I was always very fond of Mr. Trevelyan. But then he is happy, my dear! That is always the great consolation; and the longer you are of looking things in the face, the harder it will be. It is not Madelon alone, but everything. You know you have your family to think of, now that they have

nobody but you. As long as they are so young, it is so much casier to save a little; and then to look after them yourself would do you good. There is nothing so good as occupation. I would advise you, if you would be guided by me, to leave this house, which is so expensive to keep up, and choose one of the maids to go with you. And then you could either go to your father's, or take a little cottage, or find apartments, or something. That is what I would advise, if you would be guided by me."

While Mrs. Freke was making this speech, Agnes, whose calmness was not yet so strongly established as to be able to maintain itself in the face of mingled condolence and attack, had broken down completely; but even her breaking down, and the despair that came over her, were self-restrained, and did not frighten the spectator. The peculiarity in her grief was that it seized upon her and struggled with her visibly, but that she never gave herself up to it, nor abdicated her painful sway and authority over herself. She was scarcely able to speak when her visitor's address had come to an end; and yet she did speak, and made an end of the interference, which in its very kindness was humiliating. Agnes felt all her faculties quickened and made vivid by her grief. She

was conscious of everything that passed and everything that was said to her as she had never been before ; and even in a way she felt the mortification which her visitor did not intend her to feel. There was, perhaps, even a certain consolation to her wounded love in this sudden proof that things could be said to Roger's widow which never would have been said to his wife. And thus the new wound did the little that was possible to heal the great wound, by giving her a new reason to mourn over Roger—a new occasion to feel her bitter loss.

“ My father will help me to arrange everything,” said Agnes. “ He is so good to me, he has not said anything yet. Pardon me if I cannot talk about it. God has still left me one natural counsellor—but I know it is kind of you !” Mrs. Trevelyan added, with a little haste. She did not say the appearance and manner were cruel, but perhaps something in her tone or her look conveyed that idea to the mind of Mrs. Freke. The vicar's wife drew away her hand suddenly and grew crimson, and had a great mind to be angry ; but then she was a good woman, and felt that Agnes had reason for what she had said.

“ Oh ! I do not mean to interfere,” she said ; and then there was a pause. It is not pleasant

to have good advice rejected, even when it is given unasked; and the mortification had transferred itself to the wrong side, and Mrs. Freke was undergoing the pain, not always disagreeable, of suffering for well-doing. And, to be sure, she could have borne that; but then at that moment Mrs. Trevelyan, who was one of those people who could not be calculated upon exactly as to what she might do or say, took back the hand that had been withdrawn from her between her own two hands, which were so blanched and worn, and put down her wan face upon it.

“I have no more heart to think of anything,” she said. “It is so long that I have only planned, and thought, and lived for *him*; and now I can do nothing—nothing—for him,” said Agnes. The words came singly out like sobs, with a hard stifled breath between. The vicar’s wife was not a woman to resist that pathetic confidence. She put her arms round the mournful figure beside her, and burst out crying into tears more passionate than those of Agnes. She could be intrusive and troublesome, and even impertinent, without thinking of it, but she could not fight against nature; and she was a good woman in her heart.