

# BROWNLOWS

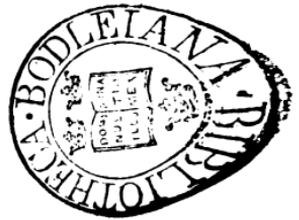
BY

MRS OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF 'CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS  
EDINBURGH AND LONDON  
MDCCCLXVIII

250. v 5.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE

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# B R O W N L O W S .

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### A CATASTROPHE.

AFTER that day of curious abandonment and imprudence, Mr Brownlow returned to his natural use and wont. He could not account to himself next day even for his want of control, for his injudiciousness. What end could it serve to lay open his plans to Sara? He had supposed she would take it seriously, as he had done, and, lo! she had taken it very lightly, as something at the first glance rather amusing than otherwise. Nothing could have so entirely disconcerted her father. His position, his good name, his very life, seemed to hang upon it, and Sara had taken it as a singularly piquant novelty, and nothing more. Then it was that it had occurred to him about that softening of the brain, and the thought had

braced him up, had reawakened all his energies, and sealed his lips, and made him himself again. He went to the office next day, and all the following days, and took no more notice of young Powys than if he had never tried to win his confidence, and never introduced him to his daughter. No doubt it was a disappointment to the young man. No doubt a good deal of the intoxication of the moment had remained in Powys's brain. He had remembered and dwelt upon the effect of that passing sunbeam on Miss Brownlow's hair and her dress, much more than he need have done. And though he did not look at it much, the young Canadian had hung up the Claude in his memory—the Claude with a certain setting round it more important than its actual frame. This he had done naturally, as a kind of inevitable consequence. And it was not to be denied that he watched for Mr Brownlow's coming next morning, and waited for some little sign of special friendship, something that should show, on his employer's part as well, a consciousness of special favour extended. But no such sign came. He might have been a cabbage for all the notice Mr Brownlow took of him as he passed to his own office. Not a glance, not a word, betrayed anything different from the ordinary not unkind but quite indifferent demeanour of the lawyer to his clerks. Then, as was to be expected, a certain sur-

prise and painful enlightenment—such as everybody has to encounter, more or less, who are noticed by their social superiors—came upon the young man. It was all a caprice, then, only momentary and entirely without consequences, which had introduced him to Mr Brownlow's table and his daughter. He belonged to a different world, and it was vain to think that the other world would ever open to him. He was too unimportant even to be kept at a distance. He was her father's clerk. In Canada that would not have mattered so much, but in this old hard long-established England—— Poor young fellow! he knew so little. The thought brought with it a gush of indignation. He set his teeth, and it seemed to him that he was able to face that horrible conventional system, and break a lance upon it, and make good his entrance. He forgot his work even, and laid down his pen and stared at Mr John, who was younger than himself. How was he better than himself? that was the question. Then an incipient sneer awoke in the soul of the young backwoodsman. If there was such a difference between the son of a country solicitor and his clerk, what must there be between the son and the clients, all the county people who came to have their difficulties solved? But then Mr Brownlow was something more than a solicitor. If these two men—the one

old and full of experience, the other young and ignorant, with only a screen of glass and a curtain between them—could have seen into each other's thoughts, how strange would have been the revelation! But happily there is one refuge secured for humanity. They were each safe, beyond even their own powers of self-interpretation, in the recesses of their hearts.

Mr Brownlow, by a superhuman effort, not only took no notice of young Powys, but, so far as that was possible, dismissed all thought of him from his mind. It was a difficult thing to do, but yet he all but did it, plunging into the Wardell case, and other cases, and feeling with a certain relief that, after all, *he* had not any particular symptoms of softening of the brain. The only thing he could not do was to banish from his own mind the consciousness of the young man's presence. Busy as he was, occupied to the full extent of his powers, considering intently and with devotion fine points of law and difficult social problems, he never for one minute actually forgot that young Powys was sitting on the other side of the screen. He could forget anything else without much difficulty. Neither Sara nor Brownlows were in his mind as he laboured at his work. He thought no more of Jack's presence in the office, though he knew very well he was there, than of the

furniture; but he could have made a picture of the habitual attitude in which his clerk sat, of the way he bent over his work, and the quick upward glance of his eyes. He could not forget him. He could put out of his mind all his own uncomfortable speculations, and even the sense that he had conducted matters unwisely, which is a painful thought to such a man. All this he could do, but he could not get rid of Powys's presence. He was there a standing menace, a standing reminder. He did not even always recall to himself, in the midst of his labours, why it was that this young man's presence disturbed him; but he never could for a moment get free of the consciousness that he was there.

At the same time he regarded him with no unfriendly feelings. It was not hatred any more than it was love that moved him. He carried the thought with him, as we carry about with us, as soon as they are gone, that endless continual thought of the dead which makes our friends in the unseen world so much closer to us than anybody still living to be loved and cherished. Mr Brownlow carried his young enemy, who at the same time was not his enemy, about with him, as he would have carried the thought of a son who had died. It came to his mind when he got up in the morning. It went side by side with him wherever he went—not a ghost, but

yet something ghostly in its perseverance and steady persistency. When he laid down his pen, or paused to collect his thoughts for a moment, the spectre of this youth would cross him whatever he might be doing. While Mr Wrinkell was talking to him, there would suddenly glide across Mr Wrinkell's substantial person the apparition of a desk and a stool and the junior clerk. All this was very trying; but still Mr Brownlow wisely confined himself to this one manifestation of Powys's presence, and sternly silenced in his own mind all thought on the subject. On that one unlucky day of leisure he had gone too far; in the rebound he determined to do nothing, to say nothing—to wait.

This was perhaps as little satisfactory to Sara as it was to young Powys. She had, there cannot be a doubt, been much amused and a little excited by her father's extraordinary proposal. She had not taken it solemnly indeed, but it had interested her all the same. It was true he was only her father's clerk, but he was young, well-looking, and he had amused her. She felt in her soul that she could (or at least so she thought) make an utter slave of him. All the absurdities that ever were perpetrated by a young man in love would be possible to that young man, or else Sara's penetration failed her; whereas the ordinary young men of society were incapable of absur-

dities. They were too much absorbed in themselves, too conscious of the possibility of ridicule, to throw themselves at a girl's feet heart and soul; and the girl who was still in the first fantastic freshness of youth despised a sensible and self-respecting lover. She would have been pleased to have had the mysterious Canadian produced again and again to be operated upon. He was not *blasé* and instructed in everything like Jack. And as for having to marry him, if he was the man, that was still a distant evil, and something quite unexpected no doubt would come of it; he would turn out a young prince in disguise, or some perfectly good reason which her father was now concealing from her, would make everything suitable. For Sara knew too well the important place she held in her father's opinion to imagine for a moment that he meant to mate her unworthily. This was how the tenor of her thoughts was turned; and Mr Brownlow was not insensible to the tacit assaults that were made upon him about his *protégé*. She gave up her judgment to him as she never had done before, with a filial self-abandonment that would have been beautiful had there been no *arrière pensée* in it. "I will do as papa thinks proper. You know best, papa," she said, in her new-born meekness, and Mr Brownlow understood perfectly what she meant.

"You have turned dreadfully good all of a sudden," said Jack. "I never knew you so dutiful before."

"The longer one lives one understands one's duties the better," said Sara, sententiously; and she looked at her father with a mingled submission and malice which called forth a smile about the corners of his mouth.

"I hope so," said Mr Brownlow; "though you have not made the experiment long enough to know much about it yet."

"There are moments which give one experience as much as years," said Sara, in the same lofty way, which was a speech that tempted the profane Jack to laughter, and made Mr Brownlow smile once more. But though he smiled, the suggestion did not please him much. He laid his hand caressingly on her head, and smoothed back her pretty hair as he passed her; but he said nothing, and showed no sign of consciousness in respect to those moments which give experience. And the smile died off his lip almost before his hand was withdrawn from her hair. His thought as he went away was that he had been very weak; he had betrayed himself to the child who was still but a child, and knew no better than to play with such rude edge-tools. And the only remedy now was to close his lips and his heart,

to tell nobody anything, never to betray himself, whatever might happen. It was this thought that made him look so stern as he left Brownlows that morning—at least that made Pamela think he looked stern, as the dogcart came out at the gate. Pamela had come to be very learned in their looks as they flashed past in that rapid moment in the early sunshine. She knew, or she thought she knew, whether Mr John and his father were quite “friends,” or if there had been a little inevitable family difference between them, as sometimes happened; and it came into her little head that day that Mr Brownlow was angry with his son, perhaps because—— She would not put the reason into words, but it filled her mind with many reflections. Was it wrong of Mr John to come home early so often?—to stay at home so often the whole day?—to time his expeditions so fortunately that they should end in stray meetings, quite accidental, almost every day? Perhaps he ought to be in the office helping his father instead of loitering about the avenue and elsewhere, and finding himself continually in Pamela’s way. This she breathed to herself inarticulately with that anxious aim at his improvement which is generally the first sign of awakening tenderness in a girl’s heart. It occurred to her that she would speak to him about it when she saw him next; and then it occurred to her with

a flush of half-guilty joy that he had not been in the dogcart as it dashed past, and that, accordingly, some chance meeting was very sure to take place that day. She meant to remonstrate with him, and put it boldly before him whether it was his duty to stay from the office; but still she could not but feel rather glad that he had stayed from the office that day.

As for Mr John, he had, or supposed he had—or at least attempted to make himself suppose that he had—something to do at home on that particular day. His fishing-tackle had got out of order, and he was anxious to have a day's fishing; and he had been in Masterton for two days in succession. Thus his conscience was very clear. It is true that he dawdled the morning away looking for Pamela, who was not to be found, and was late in consequence—so late that young Keppel, whom he had meant to join, had gone off with his rod on his shoulder to the Rectory to lunch, and was on his way back again before Jack found his way to the water-side. There are certain states of mind in which even dinner is an indifferent matter to a young man; and as for luncheon, it was not likely he would take the trouble to think of that.

“You are a nice fellow,” said Keppel, “to keep a man lounging here by himself all the time that's any

good ; and here you are now when the sun is at its height. I don't understand that sort of work. What have you been about all day ?”

“ I have not been lunching at the Rectory,” said Jack. “ Have a cigar, old fellow ? Now we are here, let's make the best of it. I've been waiting about, kicking my heels, while you've been having lunch with Fanny Hardcastle. But I'll tell you what, Keppel ; I'd drop that if I were you ?”

“ Drop what ?” cried Mr Keppel, guiltily.

“ Dancing about after every girl who comes in your way,” said Jack. “ Why, you were making an ass of yourself only the other day at Brownlows.”

“ Ah, that was out of my reach,” said Keppel, shaking his head solemnly, and he sighed. The sigh was such that Jack (who, as is well known, was totally impervious to sentimental weaknesses) burst into a fit of laughter.

“ I suppose you think little Fanny is not out of your reach,” he said ; “ but Fanny is very wide awake, I can tell you. You haven't got any money ; you're neglecting your profession——”

“ It is my profession that is neglecting me,” said Keppel, meekly. “ Don't be hard upon a fellow, Jack. They say here that it is you who are making an ass of yourself. They say you are to be seen about all the lanes——”

“ Who says ? ” said Jack ; and he could not prevent a certain guilty flush from rising to his face. “ Let every man mind his own business, and woman too. As for you, Keppel, you would be inexcusable if you were to do anything ridiculous in that way. A young fellow with a good profession that may carry him as high as he likes—as high as he cares to work for, I mean ; of course nothing was ever done without work ; and you waste your time going after every girl in the place—Fanny Hardcastle one day, somebody else the next. You’ll come to a bad end, if you don’t mind.”

“ What is a fellow to do ? ” said Keppel. “ When I see a nice girl—I am not a block of wood, like you—I can’t help seeing it. When a man has got eyes in his head, what is the use of his being reasoned with by a man who has none ? ”

“ As good as yours any day,” said Jack, with natural indignation. “ What use do you make of your eyes ? I have always said marrying early was a mistake ; but, by Jove, marrying early is better than following every girl about like a dog. Fanny Hardcastle would no more have you than Lady Godiva——”

“ How do you know that ? ” said Keppel, quickly. “ Besides — I—don’t — want her to have me,” he added, with deliberation ; and thereupon he oc-

cupied himself for a long time very elaborately in lighting his cigar.

“It is all very well to tell me that,” said Jack. “You want every one of them, till you have seen the next. But look here, Keppel; take my advice; never look at a woman again for ten years, and then get married offhand, and you’ll bless me and my good counsel for all the rest of your life.”

“Thank you,” said Keppel. “You don’t say what I’m to do with myself during the ten years; and, Jack, good advice is admirable—only one would like to know that one’s physician healed himself.”

“Physicians never heal themselves; it is an impossibility upon the face of it,” said Jack, calmly. “A doctor is never such an idiot as to treat his own case. Don’t you know that? When I want ghostly counsel, I’ll go to—Mr Hardcastle. I never attempt to advise myself——”

“You think he’d give Fanny to you,” said Keppel, ruefully, “all for the sake of a little money. I hate moneyed people,—give us another cigar;—but she wouldn’t have you, Jack. I hope I know a little better than that.”

“So much the better,” said Jack; “nor you either, my boy, unless you come into a fortune. Mr Hardcastle knows better than that. Are we going to stay

here all day? I've got something to do up at the house."

"What have you got to do? I'll walk up that way with you," said Keppel, lifting his basket from the grass.

"Well, it is not exactly at the house," said Jack. "The fact is, I am in no particular hurry; I have somebody to see in the village—that is, on the road to Ridley; let's walk that way, if you like."

"Inhospitable, by Jove!" said Keppel. "I believe, after all, what they say must be true."

"What do they say?" said Jack, coldly. "You may be sure, to start with, that it is not true; what they say never is. Come along, there's some shade to be had along the river-side."

And thus the two young men terminated the day's fishing for which Jack had abandoned the office. They strayed along by the river-side until he suddenly bethought himself of business which led him in quite an opposite direction. When this recollection occurred to his mind, Jack took leave of his friend with the air of a man very full of occupation, and marched away as seriously and slowly as if he had really been going to work. He was not treating his own case. He had not even as yet begun to take his own case into consideration. He was simply intent upon his own way for the moment, and not dis-

posed to brook any contradiction, or even inquiry. No particular intention, either prudent or imprudent, made his thoughts definite as he went on ; no aims were in his mind. A certain soft intoxication only possessed him. Somehow to Jack, as to everybody else, his own case was entirely exceptional, and not to be judged by ordinary rules. And he neither criticised nor even inquired into his personal symptoms. With Keppel the disease was plain, and the remedy quite apparent ; but as for himself, was he ill at all, that he should want any physician's care ?

This question, which Jack did not consider for himself, was resolved for him in the most unexpected way. Mr Brownlow had gone thoughtful and almost stern to the office, reflecting upon his unfortunate self-betrayal—vexed and almost irritated by the way in which Sara essayed to keep up the private understanding between them. He came back, no doubt, relieved of the cloud on his face ; but still very grave, and considering within himself whether he could not tell his daughter that the events of that unlucky day were to count for nothing, and that the project he had proposed to her was given over for ever. His thoughts were still so far incomplete, that he got down at the gate in order to walk up the avenue and carry them on at leisure. As he did so he looked across, as he too had got a habit of doing, at Mrs

Swayne's window—the bright little face was not there. It was not there; but, in place of it, the mother was standing at the door, shading her eyes from the rare gleam of evening sun which reached the house, and looking out. Mr. Brownlow did not know anything about this mother, and she was not so pleasant to look at as Pamela; yet, unawares, there passed through his mind a speculation, what she was looking for? Was she too, perhaps, in anxiety about her child? He felt half-disposed to turn back and ask her, but did not do it; and by the time he had passed old Betty's cottage the incident had gone entirely from his mind. Once more the sunshine was slanting through the avenue, throwing the long tree-shadows and the long softly-moving figure of the wayfarer before him as he went on. He was not thinking of Jack, or anything connected with him, when a startling apparition met his eyes, and brought him to a standstill. The sight which made him suddenly stop short was a pretty one, had it been regarded with indifferent eyes; and, indeed, it was the merest chance, some passing movement of a bird or flicker of a branch, that roused Mr. Brownlow from his own thoughts and revealed that pretty picture to him. When the little flutter, whatever it was, roused him and he raised his eyes, he saw among the trees, at no great distance from him, a pair such as are wont to

wander over soft sod, under blue sky, and amid all the sweet interlacements of sunshine and shade. Two creatures—young, hopeful, and happy—the little one half-timid, half-trustful, looking up into her companion's face; he so much taller, so much stronger, so much bolder, looking down upon her—taking the shy hand which she still withdrew, and yet still left to be retaken;—two creatures, unaware as yet why they were so happy—glad to be together, to look at each other, to touch each other—thinking no evil. Mr Brownlow stood on the path and looked, and his senses seemed to fail him. It was a bit out of Arcadia, out of fairyland, out of Paradise; and he himself once in his life had been in Arcadia too.

But in the midst of this exquisite little poem one shrill discord of fact was what most struck the father's ear—was it Jack? Jack!—he who was prudence itself—too prudent, even so far as words went, for Mr Brownlow's simple education and habits. And, good heavens! the little neighbour, the little bright face at the window which had won upon them all with its sweet friendly looks! Mr Brownlow was a man and not sentimental, but yet the sight after the first surprise gave him a pang at his heart. What did it mean? or could it mean anything but harm and evil? He waited, standing on the path, clearly visible while they came softly

forward, absorbed in each other. He was fixed, as it were, in a kind of silent trance of pain and amazement. She was Sara's little humble friend—she was the little neighbour, whose smiles had won even his own interest—she was the child of the worn woman at the cottage door, who stood shading her eyes and looking out for her with that anxious look in her face. All these thoughts filled Mr Brownlow's eyes with pity and even incipient indignation. And Jack! was this the result of his premature prudence, his character as a man of the world? His father's heart ached as they came on so unconsciously. At last there came a moment when that curious perception of another eye regarding them, which awakens even sleepers, came over the young pair. Poor little Fanny gave a start and cry, and fell back from her companion's side; and Jack, for perhaps the first time in his life thoroughly confounded and overwhelmed, stood stock-still, gazing in consternation at the unthought-of spectator.

Mr Brownlow's conduct at this difficult conjuncture was such as some people might blame. When he saw their consternation he did not at that very moment step in to improve the occasion. He paused that they might recognise him; and he took off his hat very gravely, with a certain compassionate respect for the woman—the little weak foolhardy

creature who was thus playing with fate ; and then he turned slowly and went on. It was as if a thunderbolt had fallen at the feet of the foolish young pair. Hitherto, no doubt, these meetings had been clandestine, though they did not know it ; but now all at once illumination flashed upon both. They were ashamed to be found together, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, both of them became conscious of the shame. They gave one glance at each other, and then looked no more. What had they been doing ? all those stolen hours—all those foolish words, all those soft touches of the warm rosy young fingers—what did they all mean ?

The shock was so great that they scarcely moved or spoke for a minute, which felt like an age. Perhaps it was greatest to Jack, who saw evidently before him a paternal remonstrance, against which his spirit rose, and a gulf of wild possibilities which made him giddy. But still Pamela was the one whom it overwhelmed the most. She grew very pale, poor child ! the tears came to her eyes. “ Oh, what will he think of me ? ” she said, wringing her poor little hands. “ Never mind what he thinks,” said Jack ; but he could not keep out of his voice a certain tone which told the effect which this scene had had upon him also. He walked with her to the gate, but it was in a dutiful sort of way. And then their shame flashed

upon them doubly when Pamela saw her mother in the distance watching for her at the door. "Don't come any farther," she said under her breath, not daring to look at him ; and thus they parted ashamed. They had not only been seen by others ; they had found themselves out.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### TREATING HIS OWN CASE.

IT may be imagined after this with what sort of feelings the unhappy Jack turned up the avenue in cold blood, and walked home to dinner. He thought he knew what awaited him, and yet he did not know, for up to this moment he had never come seriously in collision with his father. He did not know what was going to be said to him, what line of reproach Mr Brownlow would take, what he could reply; for in reality he himself had made as great or a greater discovery than his father had done. He was as totally unaware what he meant as Mr Brownlow was. What did he mean? Nothing; to be happy—to see the other fair little creature happy, to praise her, to admire her, to watch her pretty ways—to see her look up with her dewy eyes, tender and sweet, into his face. That was all he had meant; but now that would answer no longer. If he had

been a little less brave and straightforward, Jack would have quailed at the prospect before him. He would have turned his back upon the awful dinner-table, the awful hour after dinner, which he felt awaited him. But at the same time his spirit was up, and he could not run away. He went on doggedly, seeing before him in the distance his father still walking slowly, very slowly he thought, up to the house. Jack had a great respect for his father, but he had been so differently educated, his habits and ways of thinking were so different, that perhaps in ordinary cases the young man was a little impatient of paternal direction ; and he did not know now how he could bear it, if Mr Brownlow took matters with a high hand.

Besides, even that was not the most urgent question. How could he answer any one? what could he say for himself? He did not know what he meant. He could not acknowledge himself a fool, and admit that he meant nothing. His thoughts were not pleasant as he went slowly after his father up the avenue. Perhaps it would convey but an uncomfortable impression of Jack were I to say that he had been quite sincere, and was quite sincere even now in what he had said about marriage. He had no particular desire to change his own condition in any way. The idea of taking new responsibili-

ties upon him had not yet entered into his mind. He had simply yielded to a very pleasurable impulse, meaning no harm; and all at once, without any warning, his pleasure had turned into something terrible, and stood staring at him with his father's eyes—with eyes still more severe and awful than his father's. In an hour or two, perhaps even in a minute or two, he would be called to account; and he could not tell what to answer. He was utterly confounded and stupefied by the suddenness of the event, and by the startling revelation thus made to him; and now he was to be called up to the bar, and examined as to what he meant.

These thoughts were but necessary companions as he went home where all this awaited him; and he did not know whether to be relieved or to feel more disconcerted still, when he met a messenger at the door, who had just been sent in hot haste to the Rectory to ask Mr Hardcastle to join the Brownlows party—a kind of thing which the Rector, in a general way, had no great objection to do. Was Mr Hardcastle to be called in to help to lecture him? This was the idea that crossed Jack's mind as he went—it must be acknowledged, very softly and quietly—up-stairs to his own room. He met nobody on the way, and he was glad. He let the bell ring out, and made sure that everybody was ready, before

he went down-stairs. And he could not but feel that he looked like a culprit when finally he stole into the drawing-room, where Mr Hardcastle was waiting along with his father and sister. Mr Brownlow said, "You are late, Jack," and Jack's guilty imagination read volumes in the words; but nothing else was said to him. The dinner passed on as all dinners do; the conversation was just as usual. Jack himself was very silent, though generally he had his own opinion to give on most subjects. As he sat and listened, and allowed the talk to float over his head, as it were, a strong conviction of the nothingness of general conversation came over him. He was full to brimming with his own subject, and his father at least might be also supposed to be thinking more of that than of anything else. Yet here they were talking of the most trifling matters, feeling bound to talk of anything but the one thing. He had known this before, no doubt, in theory, but for the first time it now appeared to him in reality. When Sara left the room, it is not to be denied that his heart gave a jump, thinking now perhaps they would both open upon him. But still not a word was said. Mr Hardcastle talked in his usual easy way, and with an evident unconsciousness of any particular crisis. Mr Brownlow was perhaps more silent than usual, and left the conversation more in the hands

of his guest. But he did not speak *at* his son, or show him any displeasure. He was grave, but otherwise there was no difference in him.

Thus the evening passed on, and not a word was said. When Mr Hardcastle went away Jack went out with him to walk part of the way across the park, and then only a certain consciousness showed itself in his father's face. Mr Brownlow gave his son a quick warning look—one glance, and no more. And when Jack returned from his walk, which was a long and not a comfortable one, his father had gone to his room, and all chances of collision were over for that evening at least. He had escaped, but he had not escaped from himself. On the contrary, he sat half the night through thinking over the matter. What was he to do?—to go away would be the easiest, perhaps in every way the best. But yet, as he sat in the silence of the night, a little fairy figure came and stood beside him. Could he leave her, give her up, let her remain to wake out of the dream, and learn bitterly by herself that it was all over? He had never seen any one like her. Keppel might rave about his beauties, but not one of them was fit to be named beside Pamela. So sweet too, and fresh and innocent, with her dear little face like a spring morning. Thinking of that, Jack somehow glided away from his perplexities.

He made a leap back in his mind to that frosty, icy day on which he had seen her in the carrier's cart—to the moment when she sprained her ankle—to all the trifling pleasant events by which they had come to this present point. And then all at once, with a start, he came back to their last meeting, which had been the sweetest of all, and upon which hard fate, in the shape of Mr Brownlow, had so solemnly looked in.

Poor Jack! it was the first time anything of the kind had ever happened to him. He had gone through a little flirtation now and then before, no doubt, as is the common fate of man; but as for any serious crisis, any terrible complication like this, such a thing had never occurred in his life; and the fact was, after all, that the experienced-man-of-the-world character he was in the habit of putting on did him no service in the emergency. It enabled him to clear his brow, and dismiss his uncomfortable feelings from his face during the evening, but it did him no good now that he was by himself; and it threw no light upon his future path. He could talk a little polite cynicism now and then, but in his heart he was young, and fresh, and honest, and not cynical. And then Pamela. It was not her fault. She had suffered him to lead her along those primrose paths, but it was always he who had led the way, and now was

he to leave her alone to bear the disappointment and solitude, and possibly the reproach? She had gone home confused, and near crying, and probably she had been scolded when she got home, and had been suffering for him. No doubt he too was suffering for her; but still the sternest of fathers cannot afflict a young man as a well-meaning mother can afflict a girl. Poor little Pamela! perhaps at this moment her pretty eyes were dim with tears. And then Jack melted altogether and broke down. There was not one of them all that was fit to hold a candle to her—Sara! Sara was handsome, to be sure, but no more to be compared to that sweet little soul—— So he went on, the foolish young fellow. And if he did not know what he meant at night, he knew still less in the morning, after troublous hours of thought, and a great deal of discomfort and pain.

In the morning, however, what he had been dreading came. As bad luck would have it he met his father on the stairs going down to breakfast; and Mr Brownlow beckoned his son to follow him into the library, which Jack did with the feelings of a victim. "I want to speak to you, Jack," Mr Brownlow said; and then it came.

"When I met you yesterday you were walking with the—with Mrs Swayne's young lodger," said

Mr Brownlow, "and it was evidently not for the first time. You must know, Jack, that—that—this sort of thing will not do. It puts me out as much—perhaps more than it can put you out—to have to speak to you on such a subject. I believe the girl is an innocent girl——"

"There can be no doubt about that, sir," cried Jack, firing up suddenly and growing very red.

"I hope not," said Mr Brownlow; "and I hope—and I may say I believe—that you don't mean any harm. But it's dangerous playing with edge-tools; harm might come of it before you knew what you were doing. Now look here, Jack; I know the time for sermons is past, and that you are rather disposed to think you know the world better than I do; but I can't leave you without warning. I believe the girl is an innocent girl, as I have said; but there are different kinds of innocence—there is that which is utterly beyond temptation; and there is that which has simply never been tempted——"

"It is not a question I can discuss, sir," cried Jack. "I beg your pardon. I know you don't mean to be hard upon me, but as for calling in question—her—innocence, I can't have it. She is as innocent as the angels; she doesn't understand what evil means."

"I am glad you think so," said Mr Brownlow;

“but let me have out my say. I don't believe in seduction in the ordinary sense of the word——”

“Sir!” cried Jack, starting to his feet with a countenance flaming like that of an angry angel. Mr Brownlow only waved his hand and went on.

“Let me have out my say. I tell you I don't believe in seduction; but there are people in the world—and the most part of the people in the world—who are neither good nor bad, and to such a sudden impulse one way or other may be everything. I would not call down upon a young man's foolish head all the responsibility of such a woman's misery,” said Mr Brownlow, thoughtfully, “but still it would be an awful thought that somebody else might have turned the unsteady balance the right way, and that your folly had turned it the wrong. See, I am not going into it as a question of personal vice. That your own heart would tell you of; but I don't believe, my boy—I don't believe you mean any harm. I say this to you once for all. You could not, if you were a hundred times the man you are, turn one true, good, pure-hearted girl wrong. I don't believe any man could; but you might develop evil that but for you would only have smouldered and never come to positive harm. Who can tell whether this poor child is of the one character or the other? Don't interrupt me.

You think you know, but you can't know. Mind what you are about. This is all I am going to say to you, Jack."

"It is too much," cried Jack, bursting with impatience, "or it is not half, not a hundredth part enough. I, sir—do you think I would harm her? Not for anything that could be offered me—not for all the world!"

"I have just said as much," said Mr Brownlow, calmly. "If I had thought you capable of a base intention I should have spoken very differently; but intention is one thing, and result another. Take care. You can't but harm her. To a girl in her position every word, every look of that kind from a young man like you is a kind of injury. You must know that. Think if it had been Keppel—ah, you start—and how is it different being you?"

"It may not be different, sir," exclaimed Jack, "but this I know, I can't carry on this conversation. Keppel! any man in short—that is what you mean. Good heavens, how little you know the creature you are talking of! She talk to Keppel or to any one! If it was not you who said it——"

Mr Brownlow's grave face relaxed for one half moment. It did not come the length of a smile; but it had unawares the same effect upon his son

which a momentary lightening of the clouds has, even though no break is visible. The atmosphere, as it were, grew lighter. The young man stopped almost without knowing it, and his indignation subsided. His father understood better than he thought.

“If all you say is true,” said Mr Brownlow, “and I am glad to see that you believe it at least, how can you reconcile yourself to doing such a girl such an injury? You and she belong to different spheres. You can do her nothing but harm, she can do you no good. What result can you look for? What do you mean? You must see the truth of what I say.”

Upon which Jack fell silent, chilled in the midst of his heat, struck dumb. For he knew very well that he had not meant anything; he had no result to propose. He had not gone so far as to contemplate actual practical consequences, and he was ashamed and had nothing to say.

“This is the real state of the case,” said Mr Brownlow, seeing his advantage. “You have both been fools, both you and she, but you the worst, as being a man and knowing better; and now you see how matters stand. It may give you a little pang, and I fear it will give her a pang too; but when I say you ought to make an immediate end of it, I know

I advise what is best for both. I am not speaking to you as your judge, Jack. I am speaking to you as your friend."

"Thanks," said Jack, briefly; his heart was full, poor fellow, and to tell the truth he said even that much reluctantly, but honesty drew it out of him. He felt that his father was his friend, and had not been dealing hardly with him. And then he got up and went to the window, and looked out upon the unsuspecting shrubberies, full of bitter thoughts. Make an end of it! make an end of the best part of his life—make an end of her probably. Yes, it was a very easy thing to say.

"I will not ask any answer or any promise," said Mr Brownlow. "I leave it to your own good sense and good feeling, Jack. There, that is enough; and if I were you I would go to the office to-day."

This was all he said. He went out of the library, leaving his son there, leaving him at liberty to follow out his own reflections. And poor Jack's thoughts were not pleasant. When his father was gone he came from the window, and threw himself into the nearest chair. Make an end of it! Yes, that was it. Easy to say, very easy to advise, but how to do it? Was he simply to skulk away like a villain, and leave her to pine and wonder?—for she would wonder and pine, bless her! She believed in him,

whatever other people might do. Keppel, indeed! as if she would look at Keppel, much less talk to him, walk with him, lift her sweet eyes to him as she had begun to do. And, good heavens, this was to end! Would it not be better that life itself should end? That, perhaps, would please everybody just as well.

Poor Jack! this was the wild way he went on thinking, until the solemn butler opened the door and begged his pardon, and told him breakfast was ready. He could have pitched something at poor Willis's head with pleasure, but he did not do it. He even got up, and thrust back his thoughts into the recesses of his brain, as it were, and after a while settled his resolution and went to breakfast. That was one good of his higher breeding. It did not give him much enlightenment as to what he should do, but it taught him to look as if nothing was the matter with him, and to put his trouble in his pocket, and face the ordinary events of life without making a show of himself or his emotions, which is always a triumph for any man. He could not manage to eat much, but he managed to bear himself much as usual, though not entirely to conceal from Sara that something had happened; but then she was a woman, and knew every change of his face. As for Mr Brownlow, he was pleased by his son's

steadiness. He was pleased to see that he bore it like a man, and bore no malice; and he was still more pleased when Jack jumped into the dogcart, and took the reins without saying anything about his intention. It is true the mare had her way that morning, and carried them into Masterton at the speed of an express train, scattering everybody on her route as if by magic. Their course was as good as a charge of cavalry through the streets of the suburb they had to go through. But notwithstanding his recklessness, Jack drove well, and nobody came to any harm. When he threw the reins to the groom the mare was straining and quivering in every muscle, half to the admiration, half to the alarm, of her faithful attendant, whose life was devoted to her. "But, bless you, she likes it," he said in confidence to his friends, when he took the palpitating animal to her stable at the Green Man. "Nothing she likes better, though he's took it out of her this morning, he have. I reckon the governor have been a-taking it out of 'im."

The governor, however, was a man of honour, and did not once again recur to the subject on the way, which would have been difficult, nor during the long day which Jack spent in the office within his father's reach. In the afternoon some one came in and asked him suddenly to dinner, somewhere on the other

side of Masterton, and the poor young fellow consented in a half despair which he tried to think was prudence. He had been turning it over and over in his mind all day. Make an end of it! These words seemed to be written all over the office walls; as if it was so easy to make an end of it! And poor Jack jumped at the invitation in despairing recklessness, glad to escape from himself anyhow for the moment. Mr Brownlow thus went home alone. He was earlier than usual, and he found Sara at Mrs Swayne's door, praying, coaxing, and teasing Pamela to go up the avenue with her. "Oh, please, I would rather not," Mr Brownlow heard her say, and then he caught the quick upward glance, full of a certain wistful disappointment, as she looked up and saw that Jack was not there. Poor Pamela did not know what to say or what to think, or how to look him in the face for confusion and shame, when he alighted at the gate and came towards the two girls. And then for the first time he began to talk to her, though her mind was in such a strange confusion that she could not tell what he said. He talked and Sara talked, drawing her along with them, she scarcely could tell how, to the other side of the road, to the great open gates. Then Mr Brownlow gave his daughter suddenly some orders for old Betty; and Pamela, in utter consternation and alarm, found herself stand-

ing alone by his side, with nobody to protect her. But he did not look unkind. He looked down upon her, on the contrary, pitifully, almost tenderly, with a kind of fatherly kindness. "My poor child," he said, "you live with your mother, don't you? I daresay you must think it dull sometimes. But life is dull to a great many of us. You must not think of pleasure or amusement that is bought at the expense of better things."

"I?" said Pamela, in surprise; "indeed I never have any amusement;" and the colour came up hotly in her cheeks, for she saw that something was in the words more than met the ear.

"There are different kinds of amusement," said Mr Brownlow. "Does not your mother come out with you when you come to walk? You are too young to be left by yourself. Don't be vexed with me for saying so. You are but a child;—and I once knew some one who was like you," he said, looking at her again with friendly compassionate eyes. He was thinking as he looked at her that Jack had been right. He was even sorry in an inexorable way for her disappointment, her inevitable heartbreak, which he hoped, at her age, would be got over lightly. Yes; no doubt she was innocent, poor little thing, in her folly; and it was she who would have to pay for that — but spotless and guileless all

through, down to the very depths of her dewy eyes.

Pamela stood before her mentor with her cheeks blazing and burning and her eyes cast down. Then she saw but too well what he meant. He had seen her yesterday with his son, and he had sent Mr John away, and it was all ended for ever. This was what it meant, as Pamela thought. And it was natural that she should feel her heart rise against him. He was very kind, but he was inexorable. She stood by him with her heart swelling so against her bosom that she thought it would burst, but too proud to make any sign. This was why he had addressed her, brought her away from her mother's door, contrived to speak to her alone. Pamela's heart swelled and a wild anger took possession of her. He had no claim upon her that she should take his advice or obey him. To him at least she had nothing to say.

"It is true, my poor child," he repeated, "there are some pleasures that are very costly, and are not worth the cost. You are angry, but I cannot help it. Tell your mother, and she will say the same thing as I do—and go with her when you go out. You are very young, and you will find this always the best."

"I don't know why you should speak to me so," said Pamela, with her heart beating as it were in

her very ears. "Miss Brownlow goes out by herself. I—I—am a poor girl—I cannot be watched always—and, oh, why should I, why should I?" cried the girl, with a little burst of passion. Her cheeks were crimson, and her eyes were full, but she would not have dropped the tears that were brimming over her eyelids, or let him see her crying—not for the world.

"Poor child!" said Mr Brownlow. It was all he said; and it gave the last touch to her suppressed rage and passion—how did he dare call her poor child? But Sara came out just then from old Betty's, and stood stock-still, confounded by her friend's looks. Sara could see that something had happened, but she could not tell what it was. She looked from Pamela to her father, and from her father to Pamela, and could make nothing of it. "What is the matter?" she asked, in surprise; and then it was Pamela's turn to bethink herself, and defend her own cause.

"There is nothing the matter," she said, "except that you have left me standing here, Miss Brownlow, and I must go home. I have things of my own to look after, but I can't expect you to think of that. There is nothing wrong."

"You are angry because I left you," said Sara, in dismay. "Don't be so foolish, Pamela. I had something to say to old Betty—and then papa was here."

“And mamma is waiting for me,” said Pamela in her passion. “Good-bye. She wants me, and you don’t. And I daresay we shall not be very long here. Good-night, good-night.” Thus she left them, running, so that she could not hear any call, though indeed her heart was beating too loud to let anything else be audible, jarring against her ears like an instrument out of tune. “She has got her father—she doesn’t want me. Nobody wants me but mamma. We will go away—we will go away!” Pamela said to herself: and she ran passionately across the road, and disappeared before anything could be done to detain her. The father and daughter looked after her from the gate with different thoughts: Sara amazed and a little indignant—Mr Brownlow very grave and compassionate, knowing how it was.

“What ails her?” said Sara—“papa, what is the matter? Is she frightened for you? or what have I done? I never saw her like this before.”

“You should not have left her so long by herself,” said Mr Brownlow, seizing upon Pamela’s own pretext.

“You told me to go,” cried Sara, injured. “I never thought little Pamela was so quick-tempered. Let me go and tell her I did not mean it. I will not stay a moment—wait for me, papa.”

“Not now,” said Mr Brownlow, and he took his

daughter's arm and drew it within his own with quiet decision. "Perhaps you have taken too much notice of little Pamela. It is not always kind, though you mean it to be kind. Leave her to herself now. I have something to say to you," and he led her away up the avenue. It was nothing but the promise of this something to say which induced Sara, much against her will, to leave her little friend uncomforted; but she yielded, and she was not rewarded for yielding. Mr Brownlow had nothing to say that either explained Pamela's sudden passion or threw any light upon other matters which might have been still more interesting. However, she had been taken home, and dinner was impending before Sara was quite aware of this, and Pamela, poor child, remained unconsolated.

She was not just then thinking of consolation. On the contrary, she would have refused any consolation Sara could have offered her with a kind of youthful fury. She rushed home, poor child, thinking of nothing but of taking refuge in her mother's bosom, and communicating her griefs and injuries. She was still but a child, and the child's impulse was strong upon her; notwithstanding that all the former innocent mystery of Mr John's attentions had been locked in her own bosom, not so much for secrecy's sake as by reason of that "sweet shamefacedness"

which made her reluctant, even to herself, to say his name, or connect it anyhow with her own. Now, as was natural, the lesser pressure yielded to the greater. She had been insulted, as she thought, her feelings outraged in cold blood, reproach cast upon her which she did not deserve, and all by the secret inexorable spectator whose look had destroyed her young happiness, and dispelled all her pleasant dreams. She rushed in just in time to hide from the world — which was represented to her by old Betty at her lodge window, and Mrs Swayne at her kitchen door—the great hot scalding tears, big and sudden, and violent as a thunderstorm, which were coming in a flood. She threw the door of the little parlour open, and rushed in and flung herself down at her mother's feet. And then the passion of sobs that had been coming burst forth.

Mrs Preston in great alarm gathered up the little figure that lay at her feet into her arms, and asked, "What was it?—what was the matter?" making a hundred confused inquiries; until at last, seeing all reply was impossible, the mother only soothed her child on her bosom, and held her close, and called her all the tender names that a mother's fancy could invent. "My love, my darling, my own child!" the poor woman said, holding her closer and closer, trembling with Pamela's sobs, beginning to feel her

own heart beat loud in her bosom, and imagining a thousand calamities. Then by degrees the short broken story came. Mr John had been very kind. He used to stop sometimes, and to say a word or two, and Mr Brownlow had seen them together. No, Mr John had never said anything—never, oh, never anything that he should not have said—always had been like—like—— Rude! Mamma! No, never, never, never! And Mr Brownlow had come and spoken to her. He had said—but Pamela did not know what he had said. He had been very cruel, and she knew that for her sake he had sent Mr John away. The dogcart had come up without him. The cruel, cruel father had come alone, and Mr John was banished—“And it is all for my sake!” This was Pamela’s story. She thought in her heart that the last was the worst of all, but in fact it was the thing which gave zest and piquancy to all. If she had known that Mr John was merely out at dinner, the chances are that she would never have found courage to tell her pitiful tale to her mother. But when the circumstances are so tragical the poor little heroine-victim becomes strong.

Pamela’s disappointment, her anger, and the budding sentiment with which she regarded Mr John, all found expression in this outburst. She was not to see him to-night, nor perhaps ever again. And

she had been seeing him most days and most evenings, always by chance, with a sweet unexpectedness which made the expectation always the dearer. If that was taken out of her life, how grey it would become all in a moment! And then Mr Brownlow had presumed to scold her, to blame her for what she had been doing, she whom nobody ever blamed, and to talk as if she sought amusement at the cost of better things. And Pamela was virtuously confident of never seeking amusement. "He spoke as if I were one to go to balls and things," she said through her tears, not remembering at the moment that she did sometimes think longingly of the youthful indulgences common enough to other young people from which she was shut out. All this confused and incoherent story Mrs Preston picked up in snatches, and had to piece them together as best she could. And as she was not a wise woman, likely to take the highest ground, she took up what was perhaps the best in the point of view of consolation at least. She took her child's part with all the unhesitating devotion of a partisan. True, she might be uneasy about it in the bottom of her heart, and startled to see how much farther than she thought things had gone; but still in the first place and above all, she was Pamela's partisan, which was of all devices that could have been contrived the one

most comforting. As soon as she had got over her first surprise, it came to her naturally to pity her child, and pet and caress her, and agree with her that the father was very cruel and unsympathetic, and that poor Mr John had been carried off to some unspeakable banishment. Had she heard the story in a different way, no doubt she would have taken up Mr Brownlow's *rôle*, and prescribed prudence to the unwary little girl; but as soon as she understood that Pamela had been blamed, Mrs Preston naturally took up arms in her child's defence. She laid her daughter down to rest upon the horsehair sofa, and got her a cup of tea, and tended her as if she had been ill; and as she did so all her faculties woke up, and she called all her reason together to find some way of mending matters. Mr John! Might he perhaps be the protector—the best of all protectors—with whom she could leave her child in full security? Why should it not be so? Mrs Preston went and kissed her daughter again as this idea began to work within her. "Wait a little," she said, "wait a little; we may do better than you think for. Your poor mother can do but little for you, my pet, but yet we may find friends——"

"I don't know who can do anything for us," Pamela answered, disconsolately. And then her mother nodded her head as if to herself, and went away

with a gleam of superior understanding in her eye. The plan was one that could not be revealed to the child, and about which, indeed, the child, wrapped up in her own thoughts, was not curious. It was not a new intention. It was a plan she had been hoarding up to be made use of should she be ill—should there be any danger of leaving her young daughter alone in the world. Now, thank heaven, the catastrophe was not so appalling as that, and yet it was appalling, for Pamela's happiness was concerned. She watched over her child through all the evening, soothed, took her part, adopted her point of view with a readiness that startled Pamela; and all the time she was nursing her project in her own heart. She laid all her plans as she soothed her little daughter, shaking as it were little gleams of comfort from the lappets of her cap, as she nodded reassuringly at her child. "We may find friends yet, Pamela," she would say; "we are not so badly off as to be without friends."

It would have been difficult to say which was the more simple of the two. The mother was building hopes upon the frailest, most uncertain foundation. She was trusting in an intercession which would never be granted to her—which would be quite useless were it granted; while the thoughts of the little creature by her side were bounded by the narrow

circle which centred in Mr John. Pamela was thinking, where was he now? was he thinking of her? was he angry because it was through her he was suffering? and then with bitter youthful disdain of the cruel father who had banished him and reproved her, and who had no right—no right! But when her passion died away, sadness and despondency crept over Pamela. She was not strong even now, and shivered and cried piteously on her mother's shoulder when her excitement was over. As for Mrs Preston, she was supported by something Pamela wot not of. "We may find friends—we are not so helpless as that," she said to herself. She knew what she was going to do. And it seemed to her, as to most inexperienced plotters, that her plan was elaborate and wise in the extreme, and that it must be crowned with success.

## CHAPTER XIX.

PHCEBE THOMSON.

It was only two days after this when Mr Brownlow received that message from old Mrs Fennell which disturbed him so much. The message was brought by Nancy, who was in the office waiting for him when he made his appearance in the morning. Nancy, who had been old Mrs Thomson's maid, was not a favourite with Mr Brownlow, and both she and her present mistress were aware of that fact; but Mrs Fennell's message was urgent, and no other messenger was to be had. "You was to come directly, that was what she said." Such was Nancy's commission. She was a very tall gaunt old woman, and she stood very upright and defiant, as in an emeny's country, and no questions could draw any more from her. "She didn't tell me what she was a-wanting of. I'm not one as can be trusted," said Nancy. "You was to go directly, that was what she said."

“Is she ill?” said Mr Brownlow.

“No, she ain’t ill. She’s crooked; but she’s always crooked since ever I knew her. You was to come directly; that’s all as I know.”

“Is it about something she wants?” said Mr Brownlow again; for he was keeping himself down, and trying not to allow his anxiety to be reawakened. “I am very busy. My son shall go over. Or if she will let me know what it is she wants?”

“She wants you,” said Nancy. “That’s what she wants. I can’t say no more, for, I scorn to deny it, I don’t know no more; but it ain’t Mr John she wants, it’s you.”

“Then tell her I will come about one o’clock,” said Mr Brownlow; and he returned to his papers. But this was only a pretence. He would not let even such a despicable adversary as old Nancy see that the news disturbed him. He went on with his papers, pretending to read them, but he did not know what he was reading. Till one o’clock! It was but ten o’clock then. No doubt it might be some of her foolish complaints, some of the grievances she was constantly accumulating; or, on the other hand, it might be—— Mr Brownlow drew his curtain aside for a minute, and he saw that young Powys was sitting at his usual desk. The young man had fallen back again into the cloud from which he had seemed

to be delivered at the time of his visit to Brownlows. He was not working at that moment; he was leaning his head on his hand, and gazing with a very down-cast look at some minute characters on a bit of paper before him—calculations of some kind it seemed. Looking at him, Mr Brownlow saw that he began to look shabby—white at the elbows, as well as clouded and heavy over the eyes. He drew back the curtain again and returned to his place, but with his mind too much agitated even for a pretence at work. Had the old woman's message anything to do with this youth? Had his calculations which he was attending to when he ought to have been doing his work any connection with Mrs Fennell's sudden summons? Mr Brownlow was like a man surrounded by ghosts, and he did not know from what quarter or in what shape they might next assail him. But he had so far lost his self-command that he could not wait and fight with his assailants till the hour he mentioned. He took up his hat at last, hurriedly, and called to Mr Wrinkell to say that he was going out. "I shall be back in half an hour," Mr Brownlow said. The head-clerk stood by and watched his employer go out, and shook his head. "He'll retire before long," Mr Wrinkell said to himself. "You'll see he will; and I would not give a sixpence for the business after he is gone." But Mr Brownlow was not aware

of this thought. He was thinking nothing about the business. He was asking himself whether it was the compound interest that young Powys was calculating, and what Mrs Fennell knew about it. All his spectres, after a moment of ineffectual repression, were bursting forth again.

Mrs Fennell had put on her best cap. She had put it on in the morning before even she had sent Nancy with her message. It was a token to herself of a great emergency, even if her son-in-law did not recognise it as such. And she sat in state in her little drawing-room, which was not adorned by any flowers from Brownlows at that moment, for Sara had once more forgotten her duties, and had not for a long time gone to see her grandmother. But there was more than the best cap to signalise the emergency. The fact was, that its wearer was in a very real and genuine state of excitement. It was not pretence but reality which freshened her face under her grim bands of false hair, and made her eyes shine from amid their wrinkles. She had seated herself in state on a high arm-chair, with a high footstool; but it was because, really and without pretence, she had something to say which warranted all her preparations. A gleam of pleasure flashed across her face when she heard Mr Brownlow knock at the door. "I thought he'd come sooner than

one," she said with irrepressible satisfaction, even though Nancy was present. She would not betray the secret to the maid whom she did not trust, but she could not but make a little display to her of the power she still retained. "I knew he'd come," she went on with exultation; to which Nancy, on her part, could not but give a provoking reply.

"Them as plots against the innocent always comes early," said Nancy. "I've took notice of that afore now."

"And who is it in this house that plots against the innocent?" said Mrs Fennell, with trembling rage. "Take you care what you say to them that's your mistress, and more than your mistress. You're old, and you'd find it harder than you think to get another home like this. Go and bring me the things I told you of. You've got the money. If it wasn't for curiosity and the keyhole you'd been gone before now."

"And if it wasn't as there's something to be cur'us about you wouldn't have sent me, not you," said Nancy, which was so near the truth that Mrs Fennell trembled in her chair. But Nancy did not feel disposed to go to extremities, and as Mr Brownlow entered she disappeared. He had grown pale on his way up the stairs. The moment had come when, perhaps, he must hear his own secret discovery pro-

claimed as it were on the housetop, and it cannot be denied that he had grown pale.

“Well?” he said, sitting down opposite to his mother-in-law on the nearest chair. His breath and his courage were both gone, and he could not find another word to say.

“Well, John Brownlow,” she said, not without a certain triumph mingled with her agitation. “But before I say a word let us make sure that Nancy and her long ears is out of the way.”

Mr Brownlow rose with a certain reluctance, opened the door, and looked up and down the stair. When he came in again, a flush had taken the place of his paleness, and he came and drew his chair close to Mrs Fennell, bending forward towards her. “What is the matter?” he said; “is it anything you want, or anything I can do for you? Tell me what it is!”

“If it was anything as I wanted it might pass,” said Mrs Fennell, with a little bitterness; “you know well it wasn’t that you were thinking of. But I don’t want to lose time. There’s no time to be lost, John Brownlow. What I’ve got to say to you is that *she’s* been to see me. I’ve seen her with my own eyes.”

“Who?” said Mr Brownlow.

Then the two looked at each other. She, keen,

eager, and old, with the cunning of age in her face, a heartless creature, beyond all impressions of honesty or pity—he, a man, very open to such influences, with a heart both true and tender, and yet as eager, more anxious than she. They faced each other, he with eyes which, notwithstanding their present purpose, “shone clear with honour,” looking into her bleared and twinkling orbs. What horrible impulse was it that, for the first time, united two such different beings thus? .

“I’ve seen her,” said Mrs Fennell. “There’s no good in naming names. She’s turned up at last. I might have played you false, John Brownlow, and made better friends for myself, but I thought of my Bessie’s bairns, and I played you true. She came to see me yesterday. My heart’s beating yet, and I can’t get it stopped. I’ve seen her—seen her with my own eyes.”

“That woman? Phoebe——?” Mr Brownlow’s voice died away in his throat; he could not pronounce the last word. Cold drops of perspiration rose to his forehead. He sank back in his chair, never taking his eyes from the weird old woman who kept nodding her head at him, and gave no other reply. Thus it had come upon him at last without any disguise. His face was as white as if he had fainted; his strong limbs shook; his eyes were glassy and

without expression. Had he been anything but a strong man, healthy in brain and in frame, he would have had a fit. But he was healthy and strong; so strong that the horrible crisis passed over him, and he came to himself by degrees, and was not harmed.

"But you did not know her," he said, with a gasp. "You never saw her; you told me so. How could you tell it was she?"

"Tell, indeed!" said Mrs Fennell, with scorn; "me that knew her mother so well, and Fennell that was her blood relation! But she did not make any difficulty about it. She told me her name, and asked all about her old mother, and if she ever forgave her, and would have cried about it, the fool, though she's near as old as me."

"Then she did not know?" said Mr Brownlow, with a great jump of his labouring breast.

"Know! I never gave her time to say what she knew or what she did not know," cried Mrs Fennell; "do you think I was going to have her there, hanging on, a-asking questions, and maybe Nancy coming in that knew her once? I hope I know better than that, for my Bessie's children's sake. I packed her off, that was what I did. I asked her how she could dare to come nigh me as was an honest woman, and had nothing to do with fools that run away. I told her she broke her mother's heart; and so she

would, if she had had a heart to break. I sent her off quicker than she came. You have no call to be dissatisfied with me."

Here John Brownlow's heart, which was in his breast all this time, gave a great throb of indignation and protest. But he stifled it, and said nothing. He had to bring himself down to the level of his fellow-conspirator. He had no leisure to be pitiful: a little more courtesy or a little less, what did it matter? He gave a sigh, which was almost like a groan, to relieve himself a little, but he could not speak.

"Oh yes, she came to me to be her friend," said the old woman, with triumph: "talking of her mother, indeed! If her mother had had the heart of a Christian she would have provided for my poor Fennell and me. And to ask me to wrong my Bessie's children for a woman I never saw——"

"What did she ask you?" said Mr Brownlow, sternly; "better not to talk about hearts. What did she know? what did she say?"

"John Brownlow," said Mrs Fennell, "you're not to speak like that to me, when I've just been doing you a service against myself, as it were. But it was not for you. Don't you think it was for you. It was for my Bessie's bairns. What do you suppose she could know? She's been away for years and years. She's been a-soldiering at the other side of the world.

But I could have made her my friend for ever, and got a good provision, and no need to ask for anything I want. Don't you think I can't see that. It was for their sakes."

Mr Brownlow waved his hand impatiently; but still it was true that he had brought himself to her level, and was in her power. After this there was silence, broken only by the old woman's exclamations of triumph. "Oh yes; I sent her away. I am not one that thinks of myself; though I might have made a kind friend," said Mrs Fennell; and her son-in-law sat and listened to her, gradually growing insensible to the horror, thinking of the emergency alone.

"Did she say anything about her son?" he asked at last, glancing round the room as he did so with a little alarm. He would scarcely have been surprised had he seen young Powys standing behind him with that calculation of compound interest in his hand.

"I don't know about no son," said Mrs Fennell. "Do you think I gave her time to talk? I tell you I packed her off faster, a deal faster, than she came. The impudence to come to me! But she knows you, John Brownlow, and if she goes to you, you had best mind what you say. Folks think you're a good lawyer, but I never had any opinion of your law. You're a man that would blurt a thing out, and never think

if it was prudent or not. If she goes to you, she'll get it all out of you, unless you send her to me—ay, send her to me! To come and cry about her mother, the old fool, and not far short of my age!”

“What was she like?” said Mr Brownlow again. He did not notice the superfluous remarks she made. He took her answer into his mind, and that was all; and as for her opinion of himself, what did that matter to him? At any other time he would have smiled.

“Like? I don't know what she was like,” said Mrs Fennell; “always a plain thing all her life, though she would have made me think that Fennell once—stuff and nonsense, and a pack of lies; like? She was like—Nancy; that kind of tall creature. Nancy was a kind of a relation, too. But as for what she was like in particular, I didn't pay no attention. She was dressed in things I wouldn't have given six-pence for, and she was in such a way——”

“What sort of a way? what brought her here? How did she find you out?” said Mr Brownlow. “Afterwards I will listen to your own opinions. Tell me simply the facts now. Remember of how much importance it is.”

“If I had not known it was of importance I should not have sent for you,” said Mrs Fennell; “and as for my opinions, I'll give them when I think proper.

You are not the man to dictate to me. She was in a way, and she came to me to stand her friend. She thought I had influence, like. I didn't tell her, John Brownlow, as she was all wrong, and I hadn't no influence. It's what I ought to have, me that brought the mother of these children into the world; but folks forget that, and also that it was of us the money came. I told her nothing, not a word. It's least said that's soonest mended. I sent her away, that's all that you want to know."

Mr Brownlow shook his head. It was not all he wanted to know. He knew it was not over and ended with this one appearance, though his dreadful auxiliary thought so in her ignorance. For him it was but the beginning, the first step in her work. There were still five months in which she could make good her claims; find them out first if she did not know them—prove anything, everything, as people do in such cases. But he did not enter into vain explanations.

"It is not all over," he said. "Do not think so. She will find it out, and she will turn up again. I want to know where she lives, and how she found you. We are not done with her yet," said Mr Brownlow, again wiping the heavy moisture from his brow.

"You are done with her if you are not a fool to go and seek her," said Mrs Fennell. "I can't tell you

what she is, nor where she is. She's Pbebe Thomson. Oh, yes, you're frightened when I say her name—frightened lest Nancy should hear; but I sent Nancy out on purpose. I am not one to forget. Do you think I got talking with her to find out everything? I sent her away. That's what I did for the children, not asking and asking, and making a talk, and putting things into her head as if she was of consequence. I turned her to the door, that's what I did; and if you're not a fool, John Brownlow, or if you have any natural love for your children, you'll do the same."

Again Mr Brownlow groaned within himself, but he could not free himself from this associate. It was one of the consequences of evil-doing, the first obvious one which had come in his way. He had to bear her insults, to put himself on her level, even to be, as she was, without compunction. Their positions were changed, and it was he now who was in the old woman's power; she had a hundred supposed injuries hoarded up in her mind to avenge upon him, even while she did him substantial service. And she was cruel with the remorseless cold-blooded cruelty of a creature whose powers of thought and sympathy were worn out. He wondered at her as he saw her old eyes glisten with pleasure at the thought of having sent this poor

injured robbed woman away. And he was her accomplice, her instigator; and it was for Bessie's children. The thought made him sick and giddy. It was only with an effort that he recovered himself.

"When a woman comes back after twenty-five years, she does not disappear again," he said. "I am not blaming you. You did as was natural to you. But tell me everything. It might have been an impostor—you never saw her. How can you be sure it was Phoebe Thomson? If Nancy even had been here——"

"I tell you it *was* Phoebe Thomson," said Mrs Fennell, raising her voice. And then all of a sudden she became silent. Nancy had come quietly up-stairs, and had opened the door, and was looking in upon her mistress. She might have heard more, she might not even have heard that. She came in and put down some small purchases on the table. She was quite self-possessed and observant, looking as she always did, showing no signs of excitement. And Mr Brownlow looked at her steadily. Like Nancy! but Mrs Powys was not like Nancy. He concluded as this passed through his mind that Mrs Fennell had named Nancy only as the first person that occurred to her. There was no likeness—not the slightest. It went for nothing, and yet it was a kind of relief to him all the same.

“Why do you come in like that, without knocking, when I’ve got some one with me?” said Mrs Fennell, with tremulous wrath. “It’s like a common maid-of-all-work, that knows no better. I have told you that before.”

“It’s seldom as one of the family is here,” said Nancy, “or I’d think on’t. When things happen so rare folks forgets. Often and often I say as you’re left too much alone; but what with the lady yesterday and Mr Brownlow to-day——”

“What lady yesterday?” cried Mrs Fennell. “What do you know about a lady yesterday? Who ever said there was a lady yesterday? If you speak up to me bold like that, I’ll send you away.”

“Oh, it’s nothing to me,” said Nancy. “You know as I was out. They most always comes when I’m out. Fine folks is not partial to me; but if you’re a-going to be better looked to, and your own flesh and blood to come and see you, at your age, it will be good news to me.”

“My own flesh and blood don’t think a great deal about an old woman,” said Mrs Fennell, swallowing the bait. “I’m little good to anybody now. I’ve seen the day when it was different. And I can still be of use to them that’s kind to me,” she said, with significance. Mr Brownlow sat

and listened to all this, and it smote him with disgust. He got up, and though it cost him an effort to do so, held out his hand to the old woman in her chair.

"Tell me, or tell Jack, if you want anything," he said. "I can't stay now; and if anything occurs let me know," he added. He took no notice of the vehement shaking of her head as she turned towards Nancy. He looked at Nancy again, though he did not like her. She at least was not to be in the conspiracy, and he had a satisfaction in showing that at least he was not afraid of her. "If there is anything that can make your mistress more comfortable," he said, sternly, "I have already desired you to let me know; and you understand that she is not to be bullied either by you or any one else—good-day."

"Bullied!" said Nancy, in consternation; but he did not condescend to look at her again. He went away silently, like a man in a dream. Up to this moment he had been able to doubt. It was poor comfort, yet there was some comfort in it. When the evidence looked the most clear and overwhelming, he had still been able to say to himself that he had no direct proof, that it was not his business, that still it might all be a mistake. Now that last standing-ground was taken from under his feet.

Mrs Thomson's heir had made herself known. She had told her name and her parentage, and claimed kindred with his mother-in-law, who, if she had been an impostor, could have convicted her; and the old woman, on the contrary, had been convinced. It was a warm summer day, but Mr Brownlow shivered with cold as he walked along the familiar streets. If she had but come twenty years, five-and-twenty years ago! If he had but followed his own instincts of right and wrong, and left this odious money untouched! It was for Bessie's sake he had used it, to make his marriage practicable, and now the whirligig of time had brought about its revenges. Bessie's daughter would have to pay for her mother's good fortune. He felt himself swing from side to side as he went along, so confused was he with the multitude of his thoughts, and recovered himself only with a violent effort. The decisive moment had come. It had come too soon—before the time was out at which Phœbe Thomson would be harmless. He could not put himself off any longer with the pretext that he was not sure. And young Powys in the office, whom he had taken in, partly in kindness and partly with evil intent, sat under his eyes calculating the amount of that frightful interest which would ruin him. Mr Brownlow passed several of his acquaintances in the street without noticing

them, but not without attracting their notice. He was so pale that the strangers who passed turned round to look at him. No further delay—no putting off—no foolish excuses to himself. Whatever had to be done must be done quickly. Unconsciously he quickened his pace, and went on at a speed which few men could have kept up with. He was strong, and his excitement gave him new strength. It must be done, one thing or another; there was no way of escaping the alternative now.

There are natures which are driven wild and frantic by a great excitement, and there are others which are calmed and steadied in face of an emergency. Mr Brownlow entered his private office with the feeling of a man who was about to die there, and might never come out alive. He did not notice any one—he even waved Wrinkell away, who was coming to him with a bag of papers. “I have some urgent private business,” he said; “take everything to my son, and don’t let me be disturbed.” He said this in the office, so that every one heard him; and though he looked at nobody, he could see Powys look up from his calculations, and Jack come in some surprise to the open door of his room. They both heard him, both the young men, and wondered. Jack, too, was dark and self-absorbed, engaged in a struggle with himself. And they looked at the

master, the father, and said to themselves, in their youthful folly, that it was easy for him to talk of not being disturbed. What could he have to trouble him—he who could do as he liked, and whom nobody interfered with? Mr Brownlow, for his part, saw them both without looking at them, and a certain bitter smile at his son's reserve and silence came to him inwardly. Jack thought it a great matter to be checked in his boyish love-making; while, good heavens! how different were the burdens, how much harder the struggles of which the boy was ignorant! Mr Brownlow went in and shut the door. He was alone then—shut out from everybody. No one could tell, or even guess, the conflict in his mind—not even his young adversary outside, who was reckoning up the compound interest. He paused a little, and sat down, and bent his head on his hands. Was he praying? He could not have told what it was. It was not prayer in words. If it had been, it would have been a prayer for strength to do wrong. That was what he was struggling after—strength to shut out all compunctions—to be steadily cruel, steadily false. Could God have granted him that? but his habits were those of a good man all the same. He paused when he was in perplexity, and was silent, and collected his thoughts, not without a kind of mute customary appeal; and

then flung his hands away from his face, and started to his feet with a thrill of horror. "Help me to sin!" was that what it had been in his heart to say?

He spent the whole day in the office, busy with very hard and heavy work. He went minutely into all those calculations which he supposed young Powys to be making. And when he had put down the last cipher, he opened all his secret places, took out all his memorandums, every security he possessed, all his notes of investments, the numberless items which composed his fortune. He worked at his task like a clerk making up ordinary accounts, yet there was something in his silent speed, his wrapt attention, the intense exactness of every note, which was very different from the steady indifference of daily work. When he had put everything down, and made his last calculation, he laid the two papers together on his desk. A little glimmering of hope had, perhaps, awakened in him, from the very fact of doing something. He laid them down side by side, and the little colour that had come into his face vanished out of it in an instant. If there had been but a little over! If he could have felt that he had something left, he might still, at the eleventh hour, have had strength to make the sacrifice; but the figures which stared him in the face meant ruin. Restitution would cost him everything—more than everything.

It would leave him in debt; it would mortgage even that business which the Brownlows of Masterton had maintained so long. It would plunge his children down, down in an instant out of the place they had been educated to fill. It would take from himself the means of being as he was — one of the benefactors of the county, foremost in all good works. Good works! when it was with the inheritance of the widow and the orphans that he did them. All this came before him as clearly as if it had been written in lines of light. An uneducated, imprudent woman — a creature who had run away from her friends, and abandoned her mother; a boy who was going to the bad; a family unaccustomed to wealth, who would squander and who would not enjoy it; — and, on the other hand, himself who had increased it, used it well, served both God and man with it. The struggle was long, and it was hard, but in the end the natural result came. His half-conscious appeal was answered somehow, though not from on high. The strength came to him which he had asked for — strength to do wrong. But all the clerks started, and Mr Wrinkell himself took off his spectacles, and seriously considered whether he should send for a doctor, when in the evening, just before the hour for leaving the office, Mr Brownlow suddenly opened the door and called young Powys into his private room.

## CHAPTER XX.

### POWYS'S BITS OF PAPER.

MR BROWNLOW, perhaps, did not know very well what he meant when he called young Powys into his room. He was in one of those strange states of mental excitement, in which a man is at once confused and clear; incapable of seeing before him what he is about to do, yet as prompt and distinct in the doing of it as if it had been premeditated to the last detail. He could not have explained why nor told what it was he proposed to himself; in short, he had in his own mind proposed nothing to himself. He was swayed only by a vague, intense, and overwhelming necessity to have the matter before him set straight somehow, and, confused as his own mind was, and little as he knew of his own intentions, he yet went on, as by the directest inspiration, marching boldly, calmly, yet wildly, in a kind of serious madness, into the darkness of this unknown

way. He called the young man to him in sharp, decided tones, as if he knew exactly what he wanted, and was ready to enter fully into it at once ; and yet he did not in the least know what he wanted, nor what question he was to ask, nor what he was to say the next moment ; the only thing that helped him was, that as he looked out of his office to call Powys, he could see him pick up hastily and put in his pocket the bits of paper all dotted over with calculations, which he had already remarked on the young man's desk.

“Sit down,” said Mr Brownlow, “I have something to say to you ;” and he resumed his own seat at his writing-table as if there had been nothing particular in the conference, and began mechanically to arrange the papers before him : as for Powys, he put his hand upon the back of the chair which stood on the other side of the table, and waited, but did not sit down, being bewildered a little, though not half so much as his employer was, by this sudden summons.

“Sit down,” said Mr Brownlow,—“sit down ; I want to speak to you : I hope you know that I have always intended to be your friend——”

“Intended ! sir,” said Powys, “I know that you have been my friend, and a far better friend than I deserved——” Here he made one of those pauses

of embarrassment which sometimes mean so much, and often mean so little. Mr Brownlow, who knew more than Powys did, took it to signify a great deal, and the idea gave him strength to proceed; and the fact is that for once the two, unknown to each other, were thinking of the same thing—of the bits of paper covered with figures that were in Powys's pocket,—only their thoughts ran in a very different strain.

“That must be decided rather by the future than by the past,” said Mr Brownlow. “I can say for myself without any doubt thus far, that I have meant to be your friend—but I must have your confidence in return; I do not think you can have any more trustworthy counsellor.” As Mr Brownlow said this, it seemed to him that some one else, some unseen third party, was putting the words into his mouth; and his heart gave a flutter as he said them, though it was little in accordance either with his age or character that the heart should take any such prominent part in his concerns.

As for the young man, there came over his face a quick flush, as of shame. He touched with his hand instinctively, and without knowing it, the breast-pocket in which these papers were—all of which actions were distinct and full of meaning to the anxious eyes that were watching him—and he

faltered as he spoke. "I know that you would be my most trustworthy counsellor—and I don't know how to thank you," he said; but he had lowered his voice and cast down his eyes. He stood holding the back of the chair, and it trembled in his grasp. He could not meet the gaze that was fixed upon him. He stood shuffling his feet, looking down, red with embarrassment, confusion, and shame. Was it that he felt himself a traitor? eating the Brownlows' bread, receiving their kindness, and plotting against them? It seemed to his companion as clear as day.

"Sit down," said Mr Brownlow, feeling his advantage, "let us talk of it as friends——" and then he himself made a pause, and clenched his hand unawares, and felt his heart contract as he put the last decisive question. "What are those calculations you have been making all day?"

Young Powys started, and became violently red, and looked up suddenly into his employer's face. No doubt this was what he had been thinking of; but the question was so sudden, so point-blank, that it dispersed all the involuntary softenings of which he had been conscious, and brought back to him all his youthful pride and *amour propre* and reserve about his own affairs. He looked Mr Brownlow full in the face, and his agitation took a different form. "Calculations, sir?" he said, with even a touch of

indignation in his voice; and then he too stopped, lest he should be uncourteous to his employer, who he was confident wished him well though he was so strangely curious. "The only calculations I have made are about my own affairs," he went on. "They are of no interest to any one. I am sorry you should have thought I was taking up my time——"

"I did not think of your time," said Mr Brownlow, with an impatient sigh. "I have seen many young men like you who have—who have—gone wrong—from lack of experience and knowledge of the world. I wish to serve you. Perhaps—it is possible—I may have partly divined what is on your mind. Can't you see that it would be best in every way to make a confidant of me?"

All this the lawyer said involuntarily as it were, the words being put into his mouth. They were false words, and yet they were true. He wanted to cheat and ruin the young man before him, and yet he wanted to serve him. He desired his confidence that he might betray it, and yet he felt disposed to guide and counsel him as if he had been his son. The confusion of his mind was such that it became a kind of exaltation. After all he meant him well—what he would do for him would be the best. It might not be justice; justice was one thing; kindness, friendship, bounty, another—and these last

he was ready to give. Thus, in the bewilderment of motives and sentiments that existed in his mind, he came to find himself again as it were and to feel that he did really mean well to the boy. "I wish to serve you," he repeated, with a kind of eagerness. Would not this be to serve him better than by giving to his inexperienced hands a fairy fortune of which he would not know how to make use? These thoughts went vaguely but powerfully through Mr Brownlow's mind as he spoke. And the result was that he looked up in the young man's face with a sense of uprightness which had for some time deserted him. It would be best in every way that there should be confidence between them—best for the youth, who, after all, had he ever so good a case, would probably be quite unaware how to manage it—and best, unquestionably best, for himself, as showing at once what he had to hope or fear. Of this there could be no doubt.

As for Powys, he was touched, and at the same time alarmed. It was the same subject which occupied them both, but yet they looked upon it with very different eyes. The Canadian knew what was in those scraps of paper with their lines of figures and awful totals, and it seemed to him that sooner than show them to any one, sooner than make a clean breast of what was in them, he would rather

die. Yet the kindness went to his heart, and made him in his own eyes a monster. "Divined!" he said half to himself, with a look of horror. If Mr Brownlow had divined it, it seemed to Powys that he never could hold up his head before him again. Shame would stand between them, or something he thought shame. He had not done much that was wrong, but he could have shrunk into the very ground at the idea that his thoughts and calculations were known. In spite of himself he cast a piteous glance at the whiteness of his elbows—was that how it came about that Mr Brownlow divined? Pride, shame, gratitude, compunction surged up in his mind, into his very eyes and throat, so that he could not speak or look at the patron who was so good to him, yet whom he could not yield to. "Sir," he stammered, when he had got a little command of himself—"you are mistaken. I—I have nothing on my mind—nothing more than every man has who has a—a—life of his own. Indeed, sir," the poor youth continued with eagerness, "don't think I am ungrateful—but I—I—*can't* tell you. I can't tell my own mother. It is my own fault. It is nothing to any other creature. In short," he added, breaking off with an effort, and forcing a smile, "it *is* nothing—only I suppose that I am unaccustomed to the world——"

“Sit down,” said Mr Brownlow ; “come nearer to me, and sit down upon this chair. You are very young——”

“I am five-and-twenty,” said Powys. He said it hastily, answering what he thought was a kind of accusation ; and the words struck the lawyer like a a blow. It was not new to him, and yet the very statement of that momentous number seemed to carry a certain significance. The ill-omened fortune which made these two adversaries had come to the one just when the other was born.

“Well,” said Mr Brownlow, who felt his utterance stopped by these innocent words, “it does not matter. Sit down ; I have still a great deal to say——”

And then he stopped with a gasp, and there was a pause like a pause in the midst of a battle. If Powys had not been preoccupied by the subject which to him was so absorbing, though he denied its interest to any other, he could not have failed to be struck by the earnestness, and suppressed excitement, and eager baffled looks of his employer. But he was blinded by his own anxieties, and by that unconscious self-importance of youth which sees nothing wonderful in the fact of other people’s interest in its own fortunes. He thought Mr Brownlow was kind. It did not occur to him that a stronger motive was necessary for these persistent questions

and for this intense interest. He was not vain—but yet it came natural to receive such attention, and his mind was not sufficiently disengaged to be surprised.

As for the lawyer, he paused and took breath, and looked into the frank yet clouded face which was so open and communicative, and yet would not, could not, reveal to him the secret he wanted to seize. It was not skill, it was not cunning, that preserved the young man's secret—was it innocence? Had he been mistaken?—was there really, in Powys's consciousness at least, no such secret, but only some youthful trouble, some boyish indiscretion, that was "on his mind." As Mr Brownlow paused, and looked at his young companion, this thought gradually shaped itself within him, and for the moment it gave him a strange relief. He too was absorbed and preoccupied, and thrust out of the region of such light as might have been thrown on the subject by the whiteness of the seams of the young fellow's coat; and then he had come to be in such deadly earnest that any lighter commonplace explanation would have seemed an insult to him. Yet he paused, and after a few moments felt as if a truce had been proclaimed. It had not come yet to the last struggle for death or life. There was still time to carry on negotiations, to make terms, to convert the enemy into a firm friend and supporter. This

conviction brought comfort to his mind, notwithstanding that half an hour before he had started up in the temerity of despair, and vowed to himself that, for good or evil, the decisive step must be taken at once. Now the clouds of battle rolled back, and a soft sensation of peace fell upon Mr Brownlow's soul—peace at least for a time. It melted his heart in spite of himself. It made him think of his home, and his child, and the gentle evening that awaited him after the excitement of the day; and then his eye fell upon Powys again.

“I have still a great deal to say,” he went on—and his voice had changed and softened beyond all doubt, and Powys himself, surprised, had perceived the change, though he had not an idea what it meant—“I have been pleased with you, Powys. I am not sure that you have quite kept up during the last few weeks; but you began very well, and if you choose to steady yourself, and put away any delusion that may haunt you”—here Mr Brownlow made a little pause to give full force to his words—“you may be of great service to me. I took you only on trial, you know, and you had the junior clerk's place; but now I think I am justified in treating you better—after this your salary shall be double——”

Powys gave a great start in his seat, and looked

at Mr Brownlow with a look of stupefaction. "Double!" he cried, with an almost hysterical gasp. He thought his ears or his imagination were deceiving him. His wonder took all the expression, almost all the intelligence, out of his face. He sat gazing, with his mouth open, waiting to hear what it could mean.

"I will double your salary from the present time," said Mr Brownlow, smiling in spite of himself.

Then the young man rose up. His face became the colour of fire. The tears sprang into his eyes. "This was why you said you divined!" he said, with a voice that was full of tears and an ineffable softness. His gratitude was beyond words. His eyes seemed to shoot arrows into Mr Brownlow's very soul — arrows of sharp thanks, and praise, and grateful applause, which the lawyer could not bear. The words made him start, too, and threw a sudden flood of light upon the whole subject; but Mr Brownlow could not get the good of this, for he was abashed and shame-struck by the tender, undoubting, half-filial gratitude in the young man's eyes.

"But I don't deserve it," cried Powys, in his eagerness—"I don't deserve it, though you are so good. I have not been doing my work as I ought—I know I have not. These bills have been going between me and my wits. I have not known what

I was doing sometimes. Oh! sir, forgive me; I don't know what to say to you, but I don't deserve it—the other fellows deserve it better than I.”

“Never mind the other fellows,” said Mr Brownlow, collecting himself; “I mean to make a different use of you. You may be sure that it is not out of goodness I am doing this,” he added, with a strange smile that Powys could not understand—“you may be sure it is because I see in you certain—certain capabilities——”

Mr Brownlow paused, for his lips were dry; he was telling the truth, but he did not mean it to be received as truth. This was how he went on from one step to another. To tell a lie, or to tell a truth as if it were a pleasant fiction, which was worst? The lie seemed the most straightforward, the most innocent of the two; and this was why his lips were dry, and he had to make a pause in his speech.

Powys sat down again, and leaned on the table, and looked across at his master, his benefactor. That was how the young man was calling him in his heart. His eyes were shining as eyes only do after they have been moistened by tears. They were soft, tender, eager, moved by those last words into a deeper gratitude still, an emotion which awoke all his faculties. “If I have any capabilities,” he said

—“I wish they were a hundred and a hundred times more. I can’t tell you, sir—you can’t imagine—how much you have done for me in a moment. And I was ashamed when you said you had divined. I have been very miserable. I have not known what to do.”

“So that was all,” said Mr Brownlow, drawing a long breath. “My young friend, I told you you should confide in me. I know sixty pounds a-year is very little; and so you must remember is twice sixty pounds a-year——”

“Ah, but it is double,” said young Powys, with a tremulous smile. “But I have not worked for it,” he went on, clouding over—“I have not won it, I know I don’t deserve it; only, sir, if you have something special—anything in this world, I don’t care how hard—that you mean to give me to do——”

“Yes,” said Mr Brownlow, “I have something very special; I can’t enter upon the details just now. The others in the office are very well; but I want some one I can depend upon, who will be devoted to me.”

Upon this the young man smiled; smiled so that his face lighted up all over—every line in it answering as by an individual ray. “Devoted!” he said, “I should think so indeed—not to the last drop of blood, for that would do you no good—but to

the last moment of work, whatever, however, you please——”

“Take care,” said Mr Brownlow, “you may be too grateful ; when a man promises too much he is apt to break down.”

“But I shall not break down,” said the Canadian. “You took me in first when I had nobody to speak for me, and now you save me from what is worse than starving — from debt and hopeless struggles. And I was beginning to lose heart ; I felt as if we could not live on it, and nobody knew but me. I beg your pardon, sir, for speaking so much about myself——”

“No, no ; go on about yourself,” said Mr Brownlow. He was leaning back in his chair like a man who had had a fit and was recovering from it. His whole countenance had relaxed in a manner wonderful to behold. He listened to the young fellow’s open-hearted babble as if it had been celestial music. It was music to his ears. It distilled upon him like the dew, as the Bible says, penetrating through and through, pervading his whole being with a sense of blessed ease and relief and repose. He lay back in his chair, and was content to listen. He did not care to move or think, but only to realise that the crisis had passed over ; that for the moment all was still rest and security and peace. It was the best

proof how much his nerves had been tried in the former part of the day.

“But you must recollect,” he said at last, “that this great fortune you have come into is, after all, only a hundred and twenty pounds a-year; it is a very small income. You will have to be very careful; but if you get into any difficulties again, the thing you ought to do is to come to me. I will always be ready to give you my advice, and perhaps help, if you want it. Don’t thank me again; I shall have a great many things for you to do, which will make up.”

“Nothing will ever make up for the kindness,” said young Powys; and then he perceived that his audience was over. Already even the lines were beginning to tighten in Mr Brownlow’s face. The young man withdrew and went back to his desk, walking on air as he thought. It was a very small matter to be so glad about, but yet there are circumstances in which ten pounds to pay and only five pounds to pay it with will make as much anguish as the loss of a battle or a kingdom—especially to the inexperienced, the sensitive, and proud. This awful position he was suddenly relieved from when he saw no hope. And no wonder that he was elated. It was not a chronic malady to which he had grown accustomed. The truth was, he had never been in

debt before all his life. This may be accounted for by the fact that he had never had any money to speak of, and that he had been brought up in the backwoods.

Mr Brownlow did not change his position for some time after his clerk had left him. Passion was new to him, though he was on the declining side of life. The sharp tension, the sudden relief, the leap from anxiety, suspicion, and present danger, into calm and tranquillity, was new to him. His mind had never been disturbed by such conflicts while he was young, and accordingly they came now in all their freshness, with a power beyond anything in his experience, to his soul. Thus he continued motionless, leaning back in his chair; taking the good of his respite. He knew it was only a temporary respite; he knew the danger was not past; but withal it was a comfort to him. And then, as he had this time disquieted himself in vain, who could tell if perhaps his other fears might vanish in the same way? God might be favourable to him, even though perhaps his cause was not just such a cause as could with confidence be put into God's hands. It was not always justice that prevailed in this world; and perhaps—— So strangely does personal interest pervert the mind, that this was how John Brownlow, an upright man by nature and by long habit, calculated with himself. It seemed to him natural some-

how that God should enter into the conspiracy with him—for he meant no harm even to the people who were to be his victims. Far from that; he meant, on the contrary, bit by bit, to provide for them, to surround them with comforts, to advance and promote in every way the young man whose inheritance he had so long enjoyed. He meant to be as good to him as any father, if only he could be successful in alienating for ever and ever his just right from him. Possibly he might still even carry out the plan he had conceived and abandoned, and give the crown of all his possessions, his beautiful child, to the lucky youth. Anything but justice. As he sat and rested, a certain sense of that satisfaction which arises from happiness conferred came into Mr Brownlow's mind. In the mean time, he had been very good to Powys. Poor young fellow! how grateful, how elated, how joyous he was—and all about a hundred and twenty pounds a-year! His trouble had involved only a little money, and how easy it was to make an end of that! It was not by a long way the first time in Mr Brownlow's life at which this opportunity of bringing light out of darkness had occurred to him. There were other clerks, and other men not clerks, who could, if they would, tell a similar tale. He had never been a hard man; he had been considerate, merciful, lending like the righteous man, and

little exacting as to his recompense. He had served many in his day, and though he never boasted of it, he knew it. Was it in reason to give up without a struggle his power of serving his neighbours, all the admirable use he had made of his fortune, when he might keep his fortune, and yet withal do better for the real heir than if he gave it up to him? The sense of coming ruin, and the awful excitement of that conflict for life and death which he had anticipated when he called Powys into his office, had exhausted him so entirely that he allowed himself to be soothed by all those softer thoughts. The danger was not over—he knew that as well as any one; but he had a reprieve. He had time to make of his adversary a devoted friend and vassal: and it was for his adversary's good.

Such were the thoughts that went softly, as in a veiled and twilight procession, through his mind. After a while he raised himself up, and gathered together all the calculations at which he had been working so hard, and locked all his private drawers, and put all his memorandums by. As he did so, his halcyon state by degrees began to be invaded by gleams of the everyday daylight. He had doubled Powys's salary, and he had a right to do so if he pleased; but yet he knew that when he told it to Mr Wrinkell, that functionary would be much surprised

and that a sense of injury would be visible upon the countenances of the other clerks. Certainly a man has a right to do what he likes with his own, but then every man who does so must make up his mind to certain little penalties. He will always be able to read the grudge of those who have borne the burden and heat of the day in their faces, however silent they may be; and even an emperor, much less a country lawyer, cannot fail to be conscious when he is tacitly disapproved of. How was he to tell Wrinkell of it even? how to explain to him why he had taken so unusual a step? The very fact was a kind of confession that something more was in it than met the eye. And Jack——; but Jack and Wrinkell too would have greater cause of astonishment still, which would throw even this into the shade. Mr Wrinkell knocked at Mr Brownlow's door when he had come this length in his thoughts. The manager had not troubled him so long as he had been alone and apparently busy; but after the long audience accorded to young Powys, Mr Wrinkell did not see how he could be shut out. He came in accordingly, and already Mr Brownlow saw the disapproval in his eye. He was stately, which was no doubt a deportment becoming a head clerk, but not precisely in the private office of his principal; and he did not waste a single word in what he had to say. He was

concise almost to the point of abruptness; all of which particulars of disapprobation Mr Brownlow perceived at once.

“Wrinkell,” he said, when they had dismissed in this succinct way the immediate business in hand, “I want to speak to you about young Powys. I am interested in that young fellow. I want to raise his salary. But I should like to know first what you have got to say.”

It was a hypocritical speech, but Mr Wrinkell happily was not aware of that; he pursed up his lips and screwed them tight together, as if, in the first place, he did not mean to say anything, but relented after a minute’s pause.

“At the present moment, sir,” said Mr Wrinkell, “I am doubtful what to say. Had you asked me three months since, I should have answered, ‘By all means.’ If you had asked me one month since, I should have said, ‘Certainly not.’ Now, I avow my penetration is baffled, and I don’t know what to say.”

“You mean he is not doing so well as he did at first?” said Mr Brownlow. “Nobody ever does that I know of. And better than he did later? Is that what you mean to say?”

“Being very concise,” said Mr Wrinkell, slowly, “I should say that was a sort of a summary. When he came first he was the best beginner I ever had in

hand ; and I did not leave him without signs of my approval. I had him to my 'umble 'ome, Mr Brownlow, as perhaps you are aware, and gave him the opportunity of going to chapel with us. I don't hesitate to avow," said Mr Wrinkell, with a little solemnity, "that I had begun to regard him as a kind of son of my own."

"And then there was a change?" said the lawyer, with a smile.

"There was a great change," said Mr Wrinkell. "It was no more the same young man—a cheerful bright young fellow that could laugh over his tea of a Sunday, and walk steadily to chapel after with Mrs Wrinkell and myself. We are not of those Christians who think a little cheerfulness out of season of a Sunday. But he changed of that. He would have no tea, which is a bad sign in a young man. He yawned in my very pew by Mrs Wrinkell's side. It grieved me, sir, as if he had been my own flesh and blood ; but of course we had to give up. The last few weeks he has been steadier," Mr Wrinkell added, quickly—"there can't be any doubt about that."

"But he might decline tea and yawn over a sermon without going to the bad," said Mr Brownlow. "I hope so at least, for they are two things I often do myself."

“Excuse me,” said Mr Wrinkell, who liked now and then to take high ground. “There is all the difference. I fully admit the right of private judgment. You judge for yourself; but a young man who has kind friends anxious to serve him—there is all the difference. But he has been steady of late,” the head clerk added, with candour; “I gladly acknowledge that.”

“Perhaps he had something on his mind,” said Mr Brownlow. “At all events I don’t think much harm has come of it. I take an interest in that young fellow. You will double his salary, Mr Wrinkell, next quarter-day.”

“Double it!” said Mr Wrinkell, with a gasp. He fell back from his position by the side of the table, and grew pale with horror. “Double it?” he added, after a pause, inquiringly. “Did I understand, sir? was *that* what you said?”

“That was what I said,” said Mr Brownlow; and, after the habit of guilty men, he began immediately to defend himself. “I trust,” he said, unconsciously following the old precedent, “that I have a right to do what I like with my own.”

“Certainly — certainly,” said Mr Wrinkell; and then there was a pause. “I shall put these settlements in hand at once,” he resumed, with what the lawyer felt was something like eagerness to escape

the subject. "Mr Robinson is waiting for the instructions you have just given me. And the Wardell case is nearly ready for your revision—and—may I ask if the—the—increase you mention in Mr Powys's salary is to begin from next quarter-day, or from the last?"

"From the last," said Mr Brownlow, with stern brevity.

"Very well, sir," said Mr Wrinkell. "I cannot conceal from you that it may have a bad effect—a painful effect."

"Upon whom?" said Mr Brownlow.

"Upon the other clerks. They are pretty steady—neither very good nor very bad; and he has been both good and bad," said Mr Wrinkell, stoutly. "It will have an unpleasant effect. They will say we make favourites, Mr Brownlow. They have already said as much in respect to myself."

"They had better mind their own affairs," was all Mr Brownlow said; but, nevertheless, when he went out into the office afterwards, he imagined (prematurely, for it had not yet been communicated to them) that he read disgust in the eyes of his clerks; and he was not unmoved by it, any more than General Haman was by the contempt of the old man who sat in the gate.

## CHAPTER XXI.

HOW A MAN CAN DO WHAT HE LIKES WITH HIS OWN.

IT was not for some days that the clerks in Mr Brownlow's office found out the enormity of which their employer had been guilty—which was almost unfortunate, for he gave them full credit for their disapproval all the time. As it was, Mr Wrinkell embodied within his own person all the disapprobation on a grand scale. It was not that he disapproved of Powys's advancement. Without being overwhelmingly clever or fascinating, the young Canadian was one of those open-hearted open-eyed souls who find favour with most good people. There was no malice nor envy nor uncharitableness about him; he was ready to acknowledge everybody's good qualities, ready to appreciate whatever kindness might be offered to him, open to see all that was noble or pleasant or of good report—which is the quality of all others most generally wanting in a limited community, from an

office up to—even a University. Mr Wrinkell was a head clerk and a Dissenter, and not a tolerant man to speak of, but he liked the more generous breadth of nature without very well knowing why ; and he was glad in his heart that the young fellow had “got on.” But still, for all that, he disapproved—not of Powys, but of Mr Brownlow. It was caprice, and caprice was not to be supported—or it was from consideration of capability, apart from all question of standing in the office, which was, it must be allowed, more insupportable still. Mr Wrinkell reflected that he had himself been nearly forty years in the employment of the Brownlaws of Masterton without once having his salary doubled. And he felt that if such a dangerous precedent were once established, the consequences might be tremendous. Such a boy, for example, if he but happened to be clever and useful, might be put over everybody’s head, before anybody was aware. Mr Wrinkell, who was grand vizier, was not afraid for his own place, but he felt that it was an example to be summarily discouraged. After all, when a man is not clever it is not his fault ; whereas, when he is respectable and steady, the virtue and praise is purely his own. “It’s revolutionary,” he said to his wife. “There is Brown, who has been years and years in the office—there never was a steadier fellow. I don’t remember that he ever lost

a day—except when he had that fever, you know ; but twenty pounds a-year increase was as much as ever was given to him.”

“ When he had the fever they were very kind to him,” said Mrs Wrinkell ; “ and, after all, Mr Brownlow has a right to do what he likes with his own.”

“ He may have a right,” said Mr Wrinkell, doubtfully, “ but it’s a thing that always makes a heart-burning, and always will.”

“ Well, Thomas, we may be thankful it can’t make any difference to us,” said his wife. This was the sum of the good woman’s philosophy, but it answered very well. It was always her conviction that there would be peace in our day.

As for Brown, when he first heard the news, he went home to the bosom of his family with bitterness in his heart. “ I can’t call to mind a single day I ever missed, except that fever, and the day Billy was born,” he said to Mrs Brown, despondingly ; “ and here’s this young fellow that’s been six months in the office——”

“ It’s a shame,” said that injured woman ; “ it’s a black burning shame. A bit of a lad picked up in the streets that don’t know what money is ; and you a married man with six—not to say the faithful servant you have been. I wonder for my part how Mr Brownlow dares to look you in the face.”

“He don’t mind much about that. What he thinks is, that the money’s his own,” said poor Brown, with a sigh.

“But it ain’t his own,” said the higher-spirited wife. “I would just like to know who works hardest for it, him or you. If I saw him every day as you do, I would soon give him a piece of my mind.”

“And lose my place altogether,” said the husband. But, notwithstanding, though he did not give Mr Brownlow a piece of his mind, Brown did not hesitate to express his feelings a little in the tone of his voice, and the disapproval in his eye.

All this, however, was as nothing to the judgment which Mr Brownlow brought upon himself on the following Sunday. The fact that his father had doubled any clerk’s salary was a matter of great indifference to Jack. He smiled in an uncomfortable sort of way when he heard it was young Powys on whom this benefit had fallen; but otherwise it did not affect him. On Sunday, however, as it happened, something occurred that brought Mr Brownlow’s favouritism—his extraordinary forgetfulness of his position and of what was due to his children—home in the most striking way to his son. It was a thing that required all Mr Brownlow’s courage; and it cannot be said that he was quite comfortable about it. He had done what never had been done before

to any clerk since the days of Brownlows began. He had invited young Powys to dinner. He had even done more than that—he had invited him to come early, to ramble about the park, as if he had been an intimate. It was not unpleasant to him to give the invitation, but there is no doubt that the thought of how he was to communicate the fact to his children, and prepare them for their visitor, did give him a little trouble. Of course it was his own house. He was free to ask any one he liked to it. The choice lay entirely with himself; but yet—he said nothing about it until the very day for which his invitation had been given; not that he had forgotten the fact, but somehow a certain constraint came over him whenever he so much as approached the subject. It was only Thursday when he asked young Powys to come, and he had it on his mind all that evening, all Friday and Saturday, and did not venture to make a clean breast of it. Even when Jack was out of the way, it seemed to the father impossible to look into Sara's face, and tell her of the coming guest. Sunday was very bright—a mid-summer day in all its green and flowery glory. Jack had come to the age when a young man is often a little uncertain about his religious duties. He did not care to go and hear Mr Hardcastle preach. So he said; though the Rector, good man, was very

merciful, and inflicted only fifteen minutes of sermon ; and then he was very unhappy, and restless, and uneasy about his own concerns ; and he was misanthropical for the moment, and disliked the sight and presence of his fellow-creatures. So Jack did not go to church. And Sara and her father did, walking across the beautiful summer park, under the shady trees, through the paths all flecked with sunshine. Sara's white figure gave a centre to the landscape. She was not angelic, notwithstanding her white robes, but she was royal in her way—a young princess moving through a realm that belonged to her, used to homage, used to admiration, used to know herself the first. Though she was as sweet and as gracious as the morning, all this was written in her face ; for she was still very young, and had not reached the maturer dignity of unconsciousness. Mr Brownlow, as he went with her, was but the first subject in her kingdom. Nobody admired her as he did. Nobody set her up above every competitor with the perfect faith of her father ; and to see her clinging to his arm, lifting up her fresh face to him, displaying all her philosophies and caprices for his benefit, was a pretty sight. But yet all through that long walk to Dewsbury and back, he never ventured to disclose his secret to her. All the time it lay on his heart, but he could not bring himself to say it.

It was only when they were all leaving the table after luncheon, that Mr Brownlow unburdened himself. "By the way," he said suddenly, as he rose from his chair, "there is some one coming out to dinner from Masterton. Oh, not anybody that makes much difference—a young fellow——"

"Some young fellows make a great deal of difference," said Sara. "Who is it, papa?"

"Well—at present he is—only one of my clerks," said Mr Brownlow, with an uneasy, and, to tell the truth, rather humble and deprecating smile—"one you have seen before—he was out here that day I was ill."

"Oh, Mr Powys!" said Sara; and in a moment, before another word was spoken, her sublime indifference changed into the brightest gleam of malice, of mischief, of curiosity, that ever shone out of two blue eyes. "I remember him perfectly well—all about him," she said, with a touch of emphasis that was not lost on her father. "Is there anybody else, papa?"

"Powys!" said Jack, turning back in amaze. He had been going out not thinking of anything; but this intimation, coming just after the news of the office about Powys's increase of salary, roused his curiosity, and called him back to hear.

"Yes, Powys," said Mr Brownlow, standing on his

defence like a guilty man. "I hope you have not any objection."

"Objection, sir?" said Jack; "I don't know what you mean. It is your house, to ask anybody you like. I never should have thought of making any objection."

"Yes, it is my own house," said Mr Brownlow. It made him feel a little sore to 'have the plea about doing what he liked with his own thus taken, as it were, out of his very mouth.

"But I don't remember that you ever asked any of the clerks before," said Jack. It was not that he cared much about the invitation to the clerk; it was rather because he was disagreeable himself, and could not resist the chance of being disagreeable to others, being in a highly uncomfortable state of mind.

"I don't regard Powys as a mere clerk—there are circumstances," said Mr Brownlow. "It is useless to explain at this moment; but I don't put him on the same level with Brown and Robinson. I should be glad if you could manage to be civil to him, Jack."

"Of course I shall be civil," said Jack. But he said, "That beggar again!" through his clenched teeth. Between himself and Powys there was a natural antagonism, and just now he was out of sorts and

out of temper. Of course it was his father's house, not his, that he should make any pretension to control it, and of course he would be civil to his father's guest; but he could not help repeating, "*That beggar!*" to himself as he went out. Was his father bewitched? He had not the slightest idea what there could be to recommend this clerk, or to distinguish him from other clerks; and as for the circumstances of difference of which Mr Brownlow spoke, Jack did not believe in them. He would be civil, of course; but he certainly did not undertake to himself to be anything more cordial. And he went away with the determination not to be visible again till dinner. Powys!—a pretty thing to have to sit at table and make conversation for the junior clerk.

• "Never mind, papa," said Sara. "Jack is dreadfully disagreeable just now; but you and I will entertain Mr Powys. He is very nice. I don't see that it matters about his being one of the clerks."

"I was once a clerk myself," said Mr Brownlow. "I don't know what difference it should make. But never mind; I have not come to that pitch that I require to consult Jack."

"No," said Sara, a little doubtfully. Even she, though she was a dutiful child, was not quite so clear on this subject. Mr Brownlow had a right to do what he would with his own—but yet—— Thus

Sara remonstrated too. She did not give in her whole adhesion, right or wrong. She was curious and mischievous, and had no objection to see Powys again; but she was not quite clear in her mind, any more than the other people, about a man's utter mastery over his own. Mr Brownlow saw it, and left her with something of the same feeling of discomfort which he had in the presence of Mr Wrinkell and Mr Brown. Was there anything in this world which a man could really call his own, and of which he was absolutely free to dispose? It seemed to the lawyer, thinking it over, that there was no such absolute personal possession. After all, he of the vineyard settled the matter in a quite arbitrary way; and nowadays, amid all the intricacies of extreme civilisation, such a simple way of cutting the knot was impracticable. Nobody knew that Mr Brownlow's house, and money, and goods were not entirely and honestly his own property; and yet nobody would consent that he should administer them absolutely in his own way. He could not but smile at the thought as he went into the library, where he always felt himself so little at home. His position and relationship to everything around him seemed to have changed in these days. He had been a just man all his life; but now it seemed to him that justice stood continually in his way. It was a

rigid, unmanageable, troublesome principle, which did harm by way of doing right, and forbade the compromises which were essential in this world. Justice to Brown denied him the liberty to advance his clever junior. Justice to Jack forbade him his natural right to entertain whomsoever he pleased at his table. In fact, it was vain to use the possessive pronoun at all; nothing was his—neither his office, nor his money, nor his house—unless under the restriction of everybody else's rights, and of public opinion beyond all. So Mr Brownlow mused as he left Sara and retired to his solitude. "Is thine eye evil because I am good?" But then in the days of the parable there were fewer complications, and a man was more confident in his own power.

As for Sara, in her reflections on the subject, it occurred to her as very probable that Mr Powys was coming early, and she stayed indoors accordingly. She put herself into her favourite corner, by the window—that window which was close to the Claude—and took a little pile of books with her. Sunday afternoon, especially when one is very young, is a difficult moment. One never knows exactly what one ought to read. Such at least was Sara's experience. Novels, except under very rare and pressing circumstances, were clearly inadmissible—

such circumstances, for instance, as having left your heroine in such a harrowing position that common charity required you to see her through it without delay. And real *good* books—those books which it is a merit to read—were out of Sara's way. I should be afraid to tell which were the special volumes she carried with her to the window, in case it might convey to some one, differently brought up perhaps, a false impression of the soundness of her views. She had Eugenie de Guerin's Letters in her hand, which ought to cover a multitude of sins; but she was not reading them. There was the ghost of a smile, a very ghost, appearing and disappearing, and never taking bodily shape, about her pretty mouth. What she was thinking was, who, for instance, this Mr Powys could be? She did not believe he was a mere clerk. If he were a mere clerk, was it possible that he would be brought here and presented to her like this? That was not to be thought of for a moment. No doubt it was a prince in disguise. He might be an enchanted prince, bewitched out of his proper shape by some malignant fairy; but Sara knew better than to believe for a moment that he could be only a clerk. And he was very nice—he had nice eyes, and a nice smile. He was not exactly what you would call handsome, but he had those special gifts which are indispensable. And then

poor papa was in a way about him, afraid to tell his secret, compelled to treat him as if he were only a clerk, afraid Jack should be uncivil. Jack was a bear, Sara concluded to herself, and at this moment more a bear than ever; but she should take care that the enchanted prince should not be rendered uncomfortable by his incivility. Sara's musings were to this effect, as she sat in her corner by the window, with Eugenie de Guerin in her hand. It was a soft, warm, balmy, sunny afternoon, one of those days in which the very air is happiness, and into which no trouble seems capable of entering—and she was nineteen years old—and a fairy prince in disguise was coming to test her dispositions under his humble incognito. Do you think the young creature could forget all that, and enter into Mademoiselle de Guerin's pure virginal world of pensive thoughts and world-renunciation, because it was Sunday? But Sara did all she could towards this end. She held that tender talisman in her hand; and, no doubt, if there were any ill spirits about, it kept them out of the way.

Powys for his part was walking up the avenue with a maze of very pleasant thoughts in his mind. He was not thinking particularly of Miss Brownlow. He was too sensible not to know that for him, a junior clerk just promoted to the glory of a hundred

and twenty pounds a-year, such an idea would have been pure madness. He was thinking, let us say, of the Claude, of how it hung, and all the little accessories round it, and of the sunshine that fell on Sara's dress, and on her hair, and how it resembled the light upon the rippled water in the picture, and that he was about to witness all that again. This is what he was thinking of. He was country bred, and to breathe the fresh air, and see the trees waving over his head, was new life to him; and warm gratitude, and a kind of affection to the man who generously gave him this pleasure, were in his mind. And notwithstanding the horrible effect that the burden of debt had so recently had upon him, and the fact that a hundred and twenty pounds a-year are far, very far, from being a fortune, there was no whiteness now visible at his seams. He was as well dressed as he could be made in Masterton, which was a commencement at which Mr Wrinkell, or any other good economist, would have frowned. Mr Brownlow went to join his daughter in the drawing-room as soon as he heard that his visitor had come to the door, and met him in the hall, to Powys's great comfort and satisfaction. And they went upstairs together. The sunshine crossed Mr Brownlow's grizzled locks, just as it had crossed the ripply shining hair, which glistened like the water in

Claude's picture. But this time Powys did not take any notice of the effect. Sara was reading when they went in, and she rose, and half-closed her book, and gave the guest a very gracious majestic welcome. It was best to be indoors just then, while it was so hot, Sara thought. Yes, that was the Claude—did he recollect it? Most likely it was simply because he was a backwoodsman, and entirely uncivilised, that Powys conducted himself so well. He did not sit on the edge of his chair as even Mr Wrinkell did. He did not wipe his forehead, nor apologise for the dust, as Mr Brown would have done. And he was grateful to Mr Brownlow, and not in the least anxious to show that he was his equal. After a while, in short, it was the master of the house who felt that he was set at ease—as it was he who had been the most embarrassed and uncomfortable, and whose mind was much more occupied than that of his visitor by thinking of the effect that Powys might produce.

At dinner, however, it was more difficult. Jack was present, and Jack was civil. It is at such a moment that breeding shows; anybody, even the merest pretender, can be rude to an intruder, but it requires careful cultivation to be civil to him. Jack was so civil that he all but extinguished the rest of the party. He treated Mr Powys with the most

distinguished politeness. He did not unbend even to his father and sister. As for Willis, the butler, Jack behaved to him as if he had been an archbishop; and such very fine manners are troublesome when the party is a small one and disposed to be friendly and agreeable. Under any circumstances it would have been difficult to have kept up the conversation. They could not talk of their friends and ordinary doings, for Powys knew nothing about these; and though this piece of courtesy is by no means considered needful in all circles, still Mr Brownlow was old-fashioned, and it was part of his code of manners. So they had to talk upon general subjects, which is always difficult; about books, the universal resource; and about the park, and the beauties of nature, and the difference of things in Canada; and about the music in Masterton church, and whether the new vicar was High or Low, which was a very difficult question for Powys, and one to which he did not know how to reply.

“I am sure he is High,” said Sara. “The church was all decorated with flowers on Ascension Day. I know, for two of the maids were there and saw them; and what does it matter about a sermon in comparison with that?”

“Perhaps it was his wife’s doing,” said Mr Brownlow, “for I think the sermon the best evi-

dence. He is Low — as Low as you could desire.”

“As I desire!” cried Sara. “Papa, you are surely forgetting yourself. As if I could be supposed to like a Low Churchman! And Mr Powys says they have good music. That is proof positive. Don’t you think so, Jack?”

This was one of many little attempts to bring back Jack to common humanity; for Sara, woman-like, could not be contented to leave him disagreeable and alone.

“I think Mr Powys is extremely good to furnish you with information; but I can’t say I am much interested in the question,” said Jack, which brought the talk to a sudden pause.

“Mr Powys has not seen our church, papa,” Sara resumed. “It is such a dear old place. The chancel everybody says is pure Norman, and there are some bits of real old glass in the west window. You should have gone to see it before dinner. Are you very fond of old glass?”

“I am afraid I don’t know,” said Powys, who was bright enough to see the manufactory of conversation which was being carried on, and was half amused by it and half distressed. “We have no old churches in Canada. I suppose they could scarcely be looked for in such a new world.”

"Tell me what sort of churches you have," said Sara. "I am very fond of architecture. *We* can't do anything original nowadays, you know. It is only copying and copying. But there ought to be a new field in a new world. Do tell me what style the people there like best."

"You strain Mr Powys's powers too far," said Jack. "You cannot expect him to explain everything to you from the vicar's principles upwards—or downwards. Mr Powys is only mortal, I presume, like the rest of us. He can't know everything in heaven or earth."

"I know a little of that," said Powys. "Out there we are Jacks-of-all-trades. I once made the designs for a church myself. Miss Brownlow might think it original, but I don't think she would admire it. We have to think less of beauty than of use."

"As if use and beauty could not go together," said Sara, with a little indignation. "Please don't say those things that everybody says. Then you can draw, if you have made designs? and I want some cottages so much. Papa, you promised me the cottages; and now Mr Powys will come and help me with the plans."

"There is a certain difference between a cottage and a church," said Mr Brownlow; but he made

no opposition to the suggestion, to the intense amazement and indignation of Jack.

"You forget that Mr Powys's time is otherwise engaged," he said; "people can't be Jacks-of-all-trades here."

Mr Brownlow gave his son a warning glance, and Sara, who had been very patient, could bear it no longer.

"Why are you so disagreeable, Jack?" she said; "nobody was speaking to you. It was to Mr Powys I was speaking. He knows best whether he will help me or not."

"Oh, it was to Mr Powys you were speaking!" said Jack. "I am a very unimportant person, and I am sorry to have interposed."

Then there came a very blank disagreeable pause. Powys felt that offence was meant, and his spirit rose. But at the same time it was utterly impossible to take offence; and he sat still and tried to appear unconscious, as people do before whom the veil of family courtesy is for a moment blown aside. There are few things which are more exquisitely uncomfortable. He had to look as if he did not observe anything; and he had to volunteer to say something to cover the silence, and found it very hard to make up his mind as to what he ought to say.

Perhaps Jack was a little annoyed at himself for

his freedom of speech, for he said nothing further that was disagreeable, until he found that his father had ordered the dogcart to take the visitor back to Masterton. When he came out in the summer twilight, and found the mare harnessed for such an ignoble purpose, his soul was hot within him. If it had been any other horse in the stable—but that his favourite mare should carry the junior clerk down to his humble dwelling-place, was bitterness to Jack. He stood and watched in a very uncomfortable sort of way, with his hands in his pockets, while Powys took his leave. The evening was as lovely as the day had been, and Sara too had come out, and stood on the steps, leaning on her father's arm. "Shall you drive, sir?" the groom had asked, with a respect which sprang entirely from his master's cordiality. It was merely a question of form, for the man expected nothing but a negative; but Powys's countenance brightened up. He held out his hands for the reins with a readiness which perhaps savoured more of transatlantic freedom than ought to have been the case; but then he had been deprived of all such pleasures for so long. "Good heavens!" cried Jack, "Tomkins, what do you mean? It's the bay mare you have in harness. He can't drive *her*. If she's lamed, or if she lames you——"

And he went up to the side of the dogcart, almost as if he would have taken the reins out of Powys's hand. The Canadian grew very red, and grasped the whip. They were very ready for a quarrel—Jack standing pale with anger, talking with the groom; Powys red with indignation, holding his place. But it was the latter who had the most command of himself.

“I shall not lame her,” he said, quietly, “nor let any one be lamed; jump up.” He was thus master of the situation. The groom took his place; the mare went off straight and swift as an arrow down the avenue. But Jack knew by the look, as he said, of the fellow's wrist, by the glance in his eye, that he knew what he was about, though he did not at this moment confess the results of his observation. They stood all three on the steps when that fiery chariot wheeled away; and Jack, to tell the truth, did not feel very much satisfied with himself.

“Jack,” said Mr Brownlow, calmly, “when I have any one here again, I must require of you to keep from insulting them. If you do not care for the feelings of the stranger, you may at least have some regard for yourself.”

“I had no intention of insulting any one, sir,” said Jack, with a little defiance; “if you like him

to break his neck or the horse's knees it is not my affair; but for a fellow who probably never had the reins in his hand before, to attempt with that mare——”

“He has had the reins in his hand oftener than either I or you,” said Mr Brownlow. The fact was, he said it at hazard, thinking it most likely that Powys could drive, but knowing nothing more about it, while Jack knew by sight and vision, and felt himself in his heart a snob as he strolled away from the door. He was uncomfortable, but he succeeded in making his father more uncomfortable still. The mare, too, was his own, though it was Jack's favourite, and if he liked to have her lamed he might. Such was the Parthian arrow which Mr Brownlow received at the end of the day. Clearly that was a distant land—a land far removed from the present burden of civilisation—a primitive and blessed state of existence, in which a man could be permitted to do what he liked with his own.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE DOWNFALL OF PHILOSOPHY.

JACK BROWNLOW was having a very hard time of it just at that moment. There had been a lapse of more than a week, and he had not once seen the fair little creature of whom every day he had thought more and more. It was in vain that he looked up at the window—Pamela now was never there. He never saw her even at a distance—never heard so much as her name. Sara, who had been ready enough to speak of her friend—even Sara, indiscreet, and hasty, and imprudent—was silent. Poor Jack knew it was quite right—he recognised, even though he hated it, the force that was in his father's arguments. He knew he had much better never see her—never even speak of her again. He understood with his intelligence that utter separation between them was the only prudent and sensible step to be taken; but his heart objected to under-

stand with a curious persistency which Jack could scarcely believe of a heart of his. He had found his intellect quite sufficient to guide him up to this period; and when that other part of him, with which he was so much less acquainted, fought and struggled to get the reins in hand, it would be difficult to express the astonishment he felt. And then he was a young man of the present day, and he was not anxiously desirous to marry. A house of his own, with all its responsibilities, did not appear to him the crown of delight which perhaps it ought to have done. He was content to go on with his life as it had been, without any immediate change. It still appeared to him, I am sorry to admit, that for a young man, who had his way to make in the world, a very early marriage was a sort of suicidal step to take. This was all very well for his mind, which wanted no convincing. But for his heart it was very different. That newly-discovered organ behaved in the most incomprehensible sort of way. Even though it possibly gave a grunt of consent to the theory about marriage, it kept on longing and yearning, driving itself frantic with eagerness, just to see her, just to hear her, just to touch her little hand, just to feel the soft passing rustle of her dress. That was all. And as for talking reason to it, or representing how profitless such a gratifi-

cation would be, he might as well have preached to the stones.

Jack went back and forward to the office for a whole week with this conflict going on within him, keeping dutifully to his work, doing more than he had done for years at Masterton, trying to occupy himself with former thoughts, and with anticipations of the career he had once shaped out for himself. He wanted to get away from the office, to get into public life somehow, to be returned for the borough, and have a seat in Parliament. Such had been his ambition before this episode in his life. Such surely ought to be his ambition now; but it was amazing, incredible, how this new force within him would break through all his more elevated thoughts with a kind of inarticulate cry for Pamela. She was what he wanted most. He could put the other things aside, but he could not put her aside. His heart kept crying out for her, whatever his mind might be trying to think. It was extraordinary and despicable, and he could not believe it of himself; but this was how it was. He knew it was best that he should not see her; yet it was no virtue nor self-denial of his that kept them apart. It was she who would not be visible. Along the roads, under the trees, at the window, morning or evening, there was no appearance of her. He thought sometimes

she must have gone away. And his eager discussion with himself whether this separation would make her unhappy gradually gave way to irritation and passionate displeasure. She had gone away, and left no sign; or she was shutting herself up, and sacrificing all that was pleasant in his existence. She was leaving him alone to bear the brunt; and he would gladly have taken it all to spare her; but if he bore it, and was the victim, something at least he ought to have had for his recompense. A last meeting, a last look, an explanation, a farewell—at least he had a right to that. And notwithstanding his anger he wanted her all the same—wanted to see her, to speak to her, to have her near him, though he was not ready to carry her off, or marry her on the spot, or defy his father and all the world on her account. This was the painful struggle that poor Jack had to bear as he went back and forward all those days to Masterton. He held very little communication with his father, who was the cause of it all. He chose to ride or to walk rather than have those *tête-à-tête* drives. He kept his eyes on every turn of the way, on every tree and hedge which might possibly conceal her; and yet he knew he must part from her, and in his heart was aware that it was a right judgment which condemned him to this sacrifice. But it was not in him, poor fellow,

to take it cheerfully or suffer with a good grace. He kept it to himself, and scorned to betray to his father or sister what he was going through. But he was not an agreeable companion during this interval, though the fact was that he gave them very little of his society, and struggled, mostly by himself, against his hard fate.

And probably he might have been victorious in the struggle. He might have fought his way back to the high philosophical ground from which he was wont to preach to his friend Keppel. At the cost of all the first freshness of his heart, at the cost of many buds of grace that never would have bloomed again, he might have come out victor, and demonstrated to himself beyond all dispute that in such matters a strong will is everything, and that there is no love or longing that may not be crushed on the threshold of the mind. All this Jack might have done, and lived to profit by it and smart for it, but for a chance meeting by which Fate, in spite of a thousand precautions, managed to balk his philosophy. He had gone home early in the afternoon, and he had been seen by anxious eyes behind the curtains of Mrs Swayne's window—not Pamela's eyes, but those of her mother—to go out again dressed, about the time when a man who is going to dinner sets out to fulfil his engagement. And Jack

was going out to dinner; he was going to Ridley, where the family had just come down from town. But there had come that day a kind of crisis in his complaint, and when he was half-way to his friend's house a sudden disgust seized him. Instead of going on he jumped down from the dogcart, and tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, on which he scribbled a hasty word of apology to Keppel. Then, while the groom went on with his note, he turned and went sauntering home along the dusty road in his evening coat. Why should he go and eat the fellow's dinner? What did he care about it? Go and make an ass of himself, and laugh and talk when he would much rather run a tilt against all the world! And what could she mean by shutting herself up like this, and never so much as saying good-bye? It could harm nobody to say good-bye. Thus Jack mused in pure despite and contrariety, without any intention of laying a snare for the object of his thoughts. He had gone a long way on the road to Ridley before he changed his mind, and consequently it was getting late when he drew near Brownlows coming back. It was a very quiet country road, a continuation of that which led to Masterton. Here and there was a clump of great trees making it sombre, and then a long stretch of hedgerow with the fragrant meadow on the other

side of it, and the cows lowing to go home. There was nobody to be seen up or down the road except a late carter with his horse's harness on his shoulder, and a boy and a girl driving home some cows. In the distance stood Swayne's Cottages, half lost in the twilight, with two faint curls of smoke going up into the sky. All was full of that dead calm which chafes the spirit of youth when it is in the midst of its troubles—that calm which is so soothing and so sweet when life and we have surmounted the first battles, and come to a moment of truce. But there was no truce as yet in Jack Brownlow's thoughts. He wanted to have his own way and he could not have it; and he knew he ought not to have it, and he would not give it up. If he could have kicked at the world, and strangled Nature and made an end of Reason, always without making a fool of himself, that would have been the course of action most in consonance with his thoughts.

And it was just then that a certain flutter round the corner of the lane which led to Dewsbury caught his eye,—the flutter of the soft evening air in a black dress. It was not the "*creatura bella vestita in bianca*" which comes up to the ideal of a lover's fancy. It was a little figure in a black dress, with a cloak wrapped round her and a broad hat shading

her face, all dark among the twilight shadows. Jack saw, and his heart sprang up within him with a violence which took away his breath. He made but one spring across the road. When they had parted they had not known that they were lovers; but now they had been a week asunder and there was no doubt on the subject. He made but one spring, and caught her and held her fast. "Pamela!" he cried out; and though there had been neither asking nor consent, and not one word of positive love-making between them—and though no disrespectful or irreverent thought of her had ever entered his mind, poor Jack, in his ardour and joy and surprise and rage, kissed her suddenly with a kind of transport. "Now I have you at last!" he cried. And this was in the open road, where all the world might have seen them; though happily, so far as was apparent, there was nobody to see.

Pamela, too, gave a cry of surprise and fright and dismay. But she was not angry, poor child. She did not feel that it was unnatural. Her poor little heart had not been standing still all this time any more than Jack's. They had gone over all those tender, childish, celestial preliminaries while they were apart; and now there could not be any doubt about the bond that united them. Neither the one nor the other affected to believe that further preface

was necessary: circumstances were too pressing for that. He said, "I have you at last," with eyes that gleamed with triumph; and she said, "Oh, I thought I should never, never see you again!" in a voice which left nothing to be confessed. And for the moment they both forgot everything—fathers, mothers, promises, wise intentions, all the secondary lumber that makes up the world.

When this instant of utter forgetfulness was over, Pamela began to cry, and Jack's arm dropped from her waist. It was the next inevitable stage. They made two or three steps by each other's side, separate, despairing, miserable. Then it was the woman's turn to take the initiative. She was crying, but she could still speak—indeed, it is possible that her speech would have been less natural had it been without those breaks in the soft voice. "I am not angry," she said, "because it is the last time. I shall never, never forget you; but oh, it was all a mistake, all from the beginning. We never—meant—to grow fond of each other," said Pamela through her sobs; "it was all—all a mistake!"

"I was fond of you the very first minute I saw you," said Jack; "I did not know then, but I know it now. It was no mistake;—that time when I carried you in out of the snow. I was fond of you then, just as I am now—as I shall be all my life."

“No,” said Pamela, “oh no. It is different—every day in your life you see better people than I am. Don’t say anything else. It is far better for me to know. I have been a—a little—contented ever since I thought of that.”

These words once more put Jack’s self-denial all to flight: “Better people than you are?” he cried. “Oh, Pamela! I never saw anybody half as sweet, half as lovely, all my life.”

“Hush! hush! hush!” said Pamela: they were not so separate now, and she put her soft little hand up, as if to lay it on his lips. “You think so, but it is all—all a mistake!”

Then Jack looked into her sweet tearful eyes, nearer, far nearer than he had ever looked before—and they were eyes that could bear looking into, and the sweetness and the bitterness filled the young man’s heart. “My little love!” he cried, “it is not you who are a mistake.” And he clasped her, almost crushed her waist with his arm in his vehemence. Everything else was a mistake—himself, his position, *her* position, all the circumstances; but not Pamela. This time she disengaged herself, but very softly, from his arm.

“I do not mind,” she said, looking at him with an innocent, wistful tenderness, “because it is the last time. If you had not cared, I should have been

vexed. One can't help being a little selfish. Last time, if you had said you were fond of me, I should have been frightened ; but now I am glad, very glad you are fond of me. It will always be something to look back to. I shall remember every word you said, and how you looked. Mamma says life is so hard," said Pamela, faltering a little, and looking far away beyond her lover, as if she could see into a long stretch of life. So she did ; and it looked a desert, for he was not to be there.

"Don't speak like that," cried Jack ; "life shall not be hard to you—not while I live to take care of you—not while I can work——"

"Hush, hush !" said the girl, softly. "I like you to say it, you know. One feels glad ; but I know there must be nothing about that. I never thought of it when—when we used to see each other so often. I never thought of anything. I was only pleased to see you ; but mamma has been telling me a great deal—everything, indeed : I know better now——"

"What has she been telling you ?" said Jack. "She has been telling you that I would deceive you ; that I was not to be trusted. It is because she does not know me, Pamela. You know me better. I never thought of anything either," he added, driven to simplicity by the force of his emotions, "except that I could not do without you, and that I was very

happy. And, Pamela, whatever it may cost, I can't live without you now."

"But you must," said Pamela: "if you could but hear what mamma says! She never said you would deceive me. What she said was, that we must not have our own way. It may break our hearts, but we must give up. It appears life is like that," said Pamela, with a deep sigh. "If you like anything very much, you must give it up."

"I am ready to give up everything else," said Jack, carried on by the tide, and forgetting all his reason; "but I will not give you up. My little darling, you are not to cry—I did not know I was so fond of you till that day. I didn't even know it till now," cried the young man. "You mustn't turn away from me, Pamela—give me your hand; and whatever happens to us, we two will stand by each other all our lives."

"Ah no," said Pamela, drawing away her hand; and then she laid the same hand which she had refused to give him, on his shoulder and looked up into his face. "I like you to say it all," she went on,— "I do; it is no use making believe when we are just going to part. I shall remember every word you say. I shall always be able to think that when I was young I had some one to say these things to me. If your father were to come now, I should not

be afraid of him ; I should just tell him how it was. I am glad of every word that I can treasure up. Mamma said I was not to see you again ; but I said if we were to meet we had a right to speak to each other. I never thought I should have seen you to-night. I shouldn't mind saying to your father himself that we had a right to speak. If we should both live long and grow old, and never meet for years and years, don't you think we shall still know each other in heaven ?”

As for poor Jack he was driven wild by this, by the sadness of her sweet eyes, by the soft tenderness of her voice, by the virginal simplicity and sincerity which breathed out of her. Pamela stood by him with the consciousness that it was the supreme moment of her existence. She might have been going to die ; such was the feeling in her heart. She *was* going to die out of all the sweet hopes, all the dawning joys of her youth ; she was going out into that black desert of life where the law was that if you liked anything very much you must give it up. But before she went she had a right to open her heart, to hear him disclose his. Had it been possible that their love should have come to anything, Pamela would have been shy and shamefaced ; but that was not possible. But a minute was theirs, and the dark world gaped around to swallow them up from

each other. Therefore the words flowed in a flood to Pamela's lips. She had so many things to say to him,—she wanted to tell him so much; and there was but this minute to include all. But her very composure—her tender solemnity—the pure little white martyr that she was, giving up what she most loved, gave to Jack a wilder thrill, a more headlong impulse. He grasped her two hands, he put his arm round her in a sudden passion. It seemed to him that he had no patience with her or anything,—that he must seize upon her and carry her away.

“Pamela,” he cried, hoarsely, “it is of no use talking,—you and I are not going to part like this. I don't know anything about heaven, and I don't want to know—not just now. We are not going to part, I tell you. Your mother may say what she likes, but she can't be so cruel as to take you from a man who loves you and can take care of you—and I will take care of you, by heaven! Nobody shall ever come between us. A fellow may think and think when he doesn't know his own mind: and it's easy for a girl like you to talk of the last time. I tell you it is not the last time—it is the first time. I don't care a straw for anything else in the world—not in comparison with you. Pamela, don't cry; we are going to be together all our life.”

“You say so because you have not thought about

it," said Pamela, with an ineffable smile; "and I have been thinking of it ever so long—ever so much. No; but I don't say you are to go away, not yet. I want to have you as long as I can; I want to tell you so many things—everything I have in my heart."

"And I will hear nothing," said Jack,—“nothing except that you and I belong to each other. That's what you have got to say. Hush, child! do you think I am a child like you? Pamela, look here—I don't know when it is to be, nor how it is to be, but you are going to be my wife."

"Oh no, no!" said Pamela, shrinking from him, growing red and growing pale in the shock of this new suggestion. If this was how it was to be, her frankness, her sad openness, became a kind of crime. She had suffered his embrace before, prayed him to speak to her, thought it right to take full advantage of the last indulgence accorded to them; and now the tables were turned upon her. She shrank away from him, and stood apart in the obscure twilight. There had not been a blush on her cheek while she opened her innocent young heart to him in the solemnity of the supposed farewell, but now she was overwhelmed with sudden shame.

"I say yes, yes, yes!" said Jack, vehemently, and he seized upon the hands that she had clasped together by way of safeguard. He seized upon them

with a kind of violence appropriating what was his own. His mind had been made up and his fate decided in that half-hour. He had been full of doubts up to this moment; but now he had found out that without Pamela it was not worth while to live—that Pamela was slipping through his fingers, ready to escape out of his reach; and after that there was no longer any possibility of a compromise. He had become utterly indifferent to what was going on around as he came to this point. He had turned his back on the road, and could not tell who was coming or going. And thus it was that the sudden intrusion which occurred to them was entirely unexpected, and took them both by surprise. All of a sudden, while neither was looking, a substantial figure was suddenly thrust in between them. It was Mrs Swayne, who had been at Dewsbury and was going home. She did not put them aside with her hands, but she pushed her large person completely between the lovers, thrusting one to one side and the other to the other. With one of her arms she caught Pamela's dress, holding her fast, and with the other she pushed Jack away. She was flushed with walking and haste, for she had seen the two figures a long way off, and had divined what sort of meeting it was; and the sight of her fiery countenance between them startled the two so completely that they fell back on either

side and gazed at her aghast, without saying a word. Pamela, startled and overcome, hid her face in her hands, while Jack made a sudden step back, and got very hot and furious, but for the moment found himself incapable of speech.

“For shame of yourself!” said Mrs Swayne, panting for breath; “I’ve a’most killed myself running, but I’ve come in time. What are you a-persuadin’ of her to do, Mr John? Oh for shame of yourself! Don’t tell me! I know what young gentlemen like you is. A-enticin’ her, and persuadin’ her, and leading her away, to bring her poor mother’s grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Oh for shame of yourself! And her mother just as simple and innocent, as would believe anything you like to tell her; and nobody as can keep this poor thing straight and keep her out o’ trouble but me!”

While she panted out this address, and thrust him away with her extended hand, Jack stood by in consternation, furious but speechless. What could he do? He might order her away, but she would not obey him. He might make his declaration over again in her presence, but she would not believe him, and he did not much relish the idea; he could not struggle with this woman for the possession of his love, and at the same time his blood boiled at her suggestions. If she had been a man

he might have knocked her down quietly, and been free of the obstruction; but women take a shabby advantage of the fact that that they cannot be knocked down. As he stood thus with all his eloquence stopped on his lips, Pamela, from across the bulky person of her champion, stretched out her little hand to him and interposed.

“Hush,” she said; “we were saying good-bye to each other, Mrs Swayne. I told mamma we should say good-bye. Hush, oh hush, she doesn’t understand; but what does that matter? we must say good-bye all the same.”

“I shall never say good-bye,” said Jack; “you ought to know me better than that. If you must go home with this woman, go—I am not going to fight with her. It matters nothing about her understanding; but, Pamela, remember it is not good-bye. It shall never be good-bye——”

“Understand!” said Mrs Swayne, whose indignation was furious; “and why shouldn’t I understand? Thank Providence, I’m one as knows what temptation is. Go along with you home, Mr John; and she’ll just go with this woman, she shall. Woman, indeed! And I don’t deny as I’m a woman—and so was your own mother for all so fine as you are. Don’t you think as you’ll lay your clutches on this poor lamb, as long as Swayne and me’s to the fore.

I mayn't understand, and I may be a woman, but — Miss Pamela, you'll just come along home."

"Yes, yes," said Pamela ; and then she held up her hand to him entreatingly. "Don't mind what she says—don't be angry with me ; and I will never, never forget what you have said—and—good-bye," said the girl, steadily, holding out her hand to him with a wonderful glistening smile that shone through two big tears.

As for Jack, he took her hand and gave it an angry loving grasp which hurt it, and then threw it away. "I am going to see your mother," he said, deigning no other reply. And then he turned his back on her without another word, and left her standing in the twilight in the middle of the dusty road, and went away. He left the two women standing amazed, and went off with quick determined steps that far outstripped their capabilities. It was the road to the cottage—the road to Brownlows—the road anywhere or everywhere. "He's a-going home, and a blessed riddance," said Mrs Swayne, though her spirit quaked within her. But Pamela said nothing ; he was not going home. The girl stood and watched his quick firm steps and worshipped him in her heart. To her mother ! And was there anything but one thing that her mother could say ?

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### ALL FOR LOVE.

It was almost dark when Jack reached Swayne's Cottages, and there was no light in Mrs Preston's window to indicate her presence. The only bit of illumination there was in the dim dewy twilight road, was a gleam from old Betty's perennial fire, which shone out as she opened the door to watch the passage of the dogcart just then returning from Ridley, where it ought to have carried Mr John to dinner. The dogcart was just returning home, in an innocent, unconscious way ; but how much had happened in the interval ! the thought made Jack's head whirl a little, and made him half-smile ; only half-smile — for such a momentous crisis is not amusing. He had not had time to think whether or not he was rapturously happy, as a young lover ought to be : on the whole, it was a very serious business. There were a thousand things to think of,

such as take the laughter out of a man ; yet he did smile as it occurred to him in what an ordinary commonplace sort of way the dogcart and the mare and the groom had been jogging back along the dusty roads, while he had been so weightily engaged ; and how all those people had been calmly dining at Ridley—were dining now, no doubt—and mentally criticising the dishes, and making feeble dinner table-talk, while he had been settling his fate ; in less time than they could have got half through their dinner—in less time than even the bay mare could devour the way between the two houses ! Jack felt slightly giddy as he thought of it, and his face grew serious again under his smile. The cottage door stood innocently open ; there was nobody and nothing between him and his business ; he had not even to knock, to be opened to by a curious indifferent servant, as would have been the case in another kind of house. The little passage was quite dark, but there was another gleam of firelight from the kitchen, where Mr Swayne sat patient with his rheumatism, and even Mrs Preston's door was ajar. Out of the soft darkness without, into the closer darkness within, Jack stepped with a beating heart. This was not the pleasant part of it ; this was not like the sudden delight of meeting Pamela—the sudden passion of laying hold on her and

claiming her as his own. He stopped in the dark passage, where he had scarcely room to turn, and drew breath a little. He felt within himself that if Mrs Preston in her black cap and her black gown fell into his arms and saluted him as her son, that he would not be so deeply gratified as perhaps he ought to have been. Pamela was one thing, but her mother was quite another. If mothers, and fathers too for that matter, could but be done away with when their daughters are old enough to marry, what a great deal of trouble it would spare in this world! But that was not to be thought of. He had come to do it, and it had to be done. While he stood taking breath and collecting himself, Mr Swayne, feeling that the step which had crossed his threshold was not his wife's step, called out to the intruder. "Who are you?" cried the master of the house; "you wait till my missis comes and finds you there; she don't hold with no tramps; and I see her a-coming round the corner," he continued, in tones in which exultation had triumphed over fright. No tramp could have been more moved by the words than was Jack. He resisted the passing impulse he had to stride into the kitchen and strangle Mr Swayne in passing; and then, with one knock by way of preface, he went in without further introduction into the parlour where Mrs Preston was alone.

It was almost quite dark—dark with that bewildering summer darkness which is more confusing than positive night. Something got up hastily from the sofa at the sight of him, and gave a little suppressed shriek of alarm. “Don’t be alarmed—it is only I, Mrs Preston,” said Jack. He made a step forward and looked at her, as probably she too was looking at him; but they could not see each other, and it was no comfort to Pamela’s mother to be told by Jack Brownlow, that it was only I.

“Has anything happened?” she cried; “what is it? what is it? oh my child!—for God’s sake, whoever you are, tell me what it is.”

“There is nothing the matter with her,” said Jack, steadily. “I am John Brownlow, and I have come to speak to you; that it is what it is.”

“John Brownlow,” said Mrs Preston, in consternation—and then her tone changed. “I am sorry I did not know you,” she said; “but if you have any business with me, sir, I can soon get a light.”

“Indeed I have the most serious business,” said Jack—it was in his mind to say that he would prefer being without a light; but there would have been something too familiar and undignified for the occasion in such a speech as that.

“Wait a moment,” said Mrs Preston, and she hastened out, leaving him in the dark parlour by himself.

Of course he knew it was only a pretext—he knew as well as if she had told him that she had gone to establish a watch for Pamela to prevent her from coming in while he was there; and this time he laughed outright. She might have done it an hour ago, fast enough; but now to keep Pamela from him was more than all the fathers and mothers in the world could do. He laughed at the vain precaution. It was not that he had lost all sense of prudence, or that he was not aware how foolish a thing in many respects he was doing; but notwithstanding, he laughed at the idea that anything, stone walls and iron bars, or admonitions, or parental orders, could keep her from him. It might be very idiotic—and no doubt it was; but if anybody dreamt for a moment that he could be made to give her up! or that she could be wrested out of his grasp now that he had possession of her—Any deluded individual who might entertain such a notion could certainly know nothing of Jack.

Mrs Preston was absent for some minutes, and before she came back there had been a soft rustle in the passage, a subdued sound of voices, in one of which, rapidly suppressed and put a stop to, Jack could discern Mrs Swayne's voluble tones. He smiled to himself in the darkness as he stood and waited; he knew what was going on as well as if he had been outside and had seen it all. Pamela was being

smuggled into the house, being put somewhere out of his way. Probably her mother was making an attempt to conceal from her even the fact that he was there, and at this purely futile attempt Jack again laughed in his heart; then in his impatience he strode to the window, and looked out at the gates which were indistinctly visible opposite, and the gleam of Betty's fire, which was now apparent only through her window. That was the way it would have been natural for him to go, not this—there lay his home, wealthy, luxurious, pleasant, with freedom in it, and everything that ministered most at once to his comfort and his ambition; and yet it was not there he had gone, but into this shabby little dingy parlour, to put his life and all his pleasure in life, and his prospects, and everything for which he most cared, at the disposal, not of Pamela, but of her mother. He felt that it was hard. As for her, the little darling! to have taken her in his arms and carried her off and built a nest for her would not have been hard—but that it should all rest upon the decision of her mother! Jack felt at the moment that it was a hard thing that there should be mothers standing thus in the young people's way. It might be very unamiable on his part, but that was unquestionably his feeling; and, indeed, for one second, so terrible did the prospect appear to him, that the

idea of taking offence and running away did once cross his mind. If they chose to leave him alone like this, waiting, what could they expect? He put his hand upon the handle of the door, and then withdrew it as if it had burnt him. A minute after Mrs Preston came back. She carried in her hand a candle, which threw a bright light upon her worn face, with the black eyes, black hair, black cap, and black dress close round her throat which so much increased the gauntness of her general appearance. This time her eyes, though they were old, were very bright—bright with anxiety and alarm—so bright that for the moment they were like Pamela's. She came in and set down her candle on the table, where it shed a strange little pale inquisitive light, as if, like Jack, it was looking round, half dazzled by the change out of complete darkness, at the unfamiliar place; and then she drew down the blind. When she had done this she came to the table near which Jack was standing. "Mr Brownlow, you want to speak to me?" she said.

"Yes," said Jack. Though his forefathers had been Brownlows of Masterton for generations, which ought to have given him self-possession if anything could, and though he had been brought up at a public school, which was still more to the purpose, this simple question took away the power of speech from him as

completely as if he had been the merest clown. He had not felt the least difficulty about what he was going to say, but all at once to say anything at all seemed impossible.

“Then tell me what it is,” said Mrs Preston, sitting down in the black old-fashioned high-backed easy-chair. Her heart was melting to him more and more every moment, the sight of his confusion being sweet to her eyes; but of course he did not know this—neither, it is to be feared, would Jack have very much cared.

“Yes,” he said again; “the fact was—I—wanted to speak to you—about your daughter. I suppose this sort of thing is always an awkward business. I have seen her with—with my sister, you know—we couldn’t help seeing each other; and the fact is, we’ve—we’ve grown fond of each other without knowing it: that is about the state of the case.”

“Fond of each other?” said Mrs Preston, faltering. “Mr Brownlow, I don’t think that is how you ought to speak. You mean you have grown fond of Pamela. I am very very sorry; but Heaven forbid that my poor girl——”

“I mean what I say,” said Jack, sturdily—“we’ve grown fond of each other. If you ask her she will tell you the same. We were not thinking of anything of the kind—it came upon us unawares. I

tell you the whole truth, that you may not wonder at me coming so unprepared. I don't come to you as a fellow might that had planned it all out and turned it over in his mind, and could tell you how much he had a-year, and what he could settle on his wife, and all that. I tell you frankly the truth, Mrs Preston. We were not thinking of anything of the kind; but now, you see, we have both of us found it out."

"I don't understand you," said the astonished mother; "what have you found out?"

"We've found out just what I have been telling you," said Jack—"that we're fond of each other. You may say I should have told you first; but the truth was, I never had the opportunity—not that I would have been sure to have taken advantage of it if I had. We went on without knowing what we were doing, and then it came upon us all at once."

He sat down abruptly as he said this, in an abstracted way; and he sighed. *He* had found it out, there could be no doubt of that; and he did not hide from himself that this discovery was a very serious one. It filled his mind with a great many thoughts. He was no longer in a position to go on amusing himself without any thought of the future. Jack was but mortal, and it is quite possible he might have done so had it been in his power. But

it was not in his power; and his aspect, when he dropped into the chair, and looked into the vacant air before him and sighed, was rather that of a man looking anxiously into the future—a future that was certain — than of a lover waiting for the sentence which (metaphorically) is one of life or death; and Mrs Preston, little experienced in such matters, and much agitated by the information so suddenly conveyed to her, did not know what to think. She bent forward and looked at him with an eagerness which he never perceived. She clasped her hands tightly together, and gazed as if she would read his heart; and then what could she say? He was not asking anything from her—he was only intimating to her an unquestionable fact.

“But, Mr Brownlow,” she said at last, tremulously, “I think—I hope you may be mistaken. My Pamela is very young—and so are you—*very* young for a man. I hope you have made a mistake. At your age it doesn't matter so much.”

“Don't it, though?” said Jack, with a flash in his eyes. “I can't say to you that's our business, for I know, of course, that a girl ought to consult her mother. But don't let us discuss *that*, please. A fact can't be discussed, you know. It's either true or it's false—and *we* certainly are the only ones who can know.”

Then there was another pause, during which Jack strayed off again into calculations about the future—that unforeseen future which had leapt into existence for him only about an hour ago. He had sat down on the other side of the table, and was gazing into the blank hearth as if some enlightenment might have been found there. As for Mrs Preston, her amazement and agitation were such that it cost her a great effort to compose herself and not to give way.

“Is this all you have to say to me?” she said at last, with trembling lips.

Then Jack roused himself up. Suddenly it occurred to him that the poor woman whom he had been so far from admiring was behaving to him with a generosity and delicacy very different from his conduct to her; and the blood rushed to his face at the thought.

“I beg your pardon,” he said. “I have already explained to you why it is that I come in such an unprepared way. I met her to-night. Upon my life I did not lay any trap for her. I was awfully cut up about not seeing her; but we met quite by accident. And the fact was, when we met we couldn’t help showing that we understood each other. After that it was my first duty,” said Jack, with a thrill of conscious grandeur, “to come to you.”

“But do you mean to say,” said Mrs Preston, wringing her hands, “that my Pamela——? Sir, she is only a child. She could not have understood you. She may like you in a way——”

“She likes me as I like her,” said Jack, stoutly. “It’s no use struggling against it. It is no use arguing about it. You may think her a child, but she is not a child; and I can’t do without her, Mrs Preston. I hope you haven’t any dislike to me. If you have,” said Jack, warming up, “I will do anything a man can do to please you; but you couldn’t have the heart to make her unhappy, and come between her and me.”

“I make her unhappy?” said Mrs Preston, with a gasp. She who had no hope or desire in the world but Pamela’s happiness! “But I don’t even see how it came about. I—I don’t understand you. I don’t even know what you want of me.”

“What I want?” said Jack, turning round upon her with wondering eyes—“what could I want but one thing? I want Pamela—that’s very clear. Good heavens, you are not going to be ill, are you? Shall I call somebody? I know it’s *awfully* sudden,” said the young fellow, ruefully. Nobody could be more sensible of that than he was. He got up in his dismay and went to a side-table where there stood a carafe of water, and brought her some. It

was the first act of human fellowship, as it were, that had passed between the two, and somehow it brought them together. Mrs Preston took the water with that strange half-sacramental feeling with which a soul in extremity receives the refreshment which brings it back to life. Was it her friend, her son, or her enemy that thus ministered to her? Oh, if she could only have seen into his heart! She had no interest in the world but Pamela, and now the matter in hand was the decision for good or for evil of Pamela's fate.

"I am better, thank you," she said, faintly. "I am not very strong, and it startled me. Sit down, Mr Brownlow, and let us talk it over. I knew this was what it would have come to if it had gone on; but I have been talking a great deal to my child, and keeping her under my eye——"

"Yes," said Jack, with some indignation—"keeping her out of my way. I knew you were doing that."

"It was the only thing I could do," said Mrs Preston. "I did try to find another means, but it did not succeed. When I asked you what you wanted of me, I was not doubting your honour. But things are not so easy as you young people think. Your father never will consent."

"I don't think things are easy," said Jack. "I

see they are as crooked and hard as possible. I don't pretend to think it's all plain sailing. I believe he won't consent. It might have been all very well to consider that three months ago, but you see we never thought of it then. We must just do without his consent now."

"And there is more than that," said Mrs Preston. "It would not be right for him to consent, nor for me either. If you only found it out so suddenly, how can you be sure of your own mind, Mr John—and you so young? I don't say anything of my own child. I don't mean to say in my heart that I think you too grand for her. I know if ever there was a lady born it's——; but that's not the question," she continued, nervously wringing her hands again. "If she was a princess, she's been brought up different from you. I did think once there might have been a way of getting over that; but I know better now; and you're very young; and from what you say," said Pamela's mother, who, after all, was a woman, a little romantic and very proud, "I don't think you're one that would be content to give up everything for love."

Jack had been listening calmly enough, not making much in his own mind of her objections; but the last words did strike home. He started, and he felt in his heart a certain puncture, as if the

needle in Mrs Preston's work, which lay on the table, had gone into him. This at least was true. He looked at her with a certain defiance, and yet with respect. "For love—no," said Jack, half fiercely, stirred, like a mere male creature as he was, by the prick of opposition; and then a softening came over his eyes, and a gleam came into them which, even by the light of the one pale candle, made itself apparent; "but for Pamela—yes. I'll tell you one thing, Mrs Preston," he added, quickly, "I should not call it giving up. I don't mean to give up. As for my father, I don't see what he has to do with it. I can work for my wife as well as any other fellow could. If I were to say it didn't matter, you might mistrust me; but when a man knows it does matter," said Jack, again warming with his subject, "when a man sees it's serious, and not a thing to be done without thinking, you can surely rely upon him more than if he went at it blindly? I think so at least."

So saying, Jack stopped, feeling a little sore and *incompris*. If he had made a fool of himself, no doubt the woman would have believed in him; but because he saw the gravity of what he was about to do, and felt its importance, a kind of doubt was in his hearer's heart. "They not only expect a man to be foolish, but they expect him to forget his own

nature," Jack said to himself, which certainly was hard.

"I don't mistrust you," said Mrs Preston, but her voice faltered, and did not quite carry out her words; "only, you know, Mr John, you are very young. Pamela is very young, but you are even younger than she is,—I mean, you know, because you are a man; and how can you tell that you know your own mind? It was only to-day that you found it out, and to-morrow you might find something else out——"

Here she stopped half frightened, for Jack had risen up, and was looking at her over the light of the candle, looking pale and somewhat threatening. He was not in a sentimental attitude, neither was there anything about him that breathed the tender romance for which in her heart Mrs Preston sighed, and without which it cost her an effort to believe in his sincerity. He was standing with his hands thrust down to the bottom of his pockets, his brows a little knitted, his face pale, his expression worried and impatient. "What is the use of beginning over and over again?" said Jack. "Do you think I could have found out like this a thing that hadn't been in existence for months and months? Why, the first time I saw you in Hobson's cart—the time I carried her in out of the snow——" When he

had got this length, he walked away to the window and stood looking out, though the blind was down, with his back turned upon her—"with her little red cloak, and her pretty hair," said Jack, with a curious sound which would not bear classification. It might have been a laugh, or a sob, or a snort—and it was neither; anyhow, it expressed the emotion within him better than half a hundred fine speeches. "And you don't believe in me after all that!" he said, coming back again and looking at her once more over the light of the candle. Perhaps it was something in Jack's eyes, either light or moisture, it would be difficult to tell which, that overpowered Mrs Preston; for the poor woman faltered, and began to cry.

"I do believe in you," she said. "I do—and I love you for saying it; but oh, Mr John, what am I to do? I can't let you ruin yourself with your father. I can't encourage you when I know what it will cost you; and then, my own child——"

"That's it," said Jack, drawing his chair over to her side of the table, with his first attempt at diplomacy—"That's what we've got to think of. It doesn't matter for a fellow like me. If I got disappointed and cut up I should have to bear it; but as for Pamela, you know—dear little soul! You may think it strange, but," said Jack, with

a little affected laugh, full of that supreme vanity and self-satisfaction with which a man recognises such a fact, "she is fond of me; and if she were disappointed and put out, you know—why, it might make her ill—it might do her no end of harm—it might—— Seriously, you know," said Jack, looking in Mrs Preston's face, and giving another and another hitch to his chair. Though her sense of humour was not lively, she dried her eyes and looked at him with a little bewilderment, wondering was he really in earnest? did he mean it? or what did he mean?

"She is very young," said Mrs Preston; "no doubt it would do her harm; but I should be there to nurse her—and—and—she is *so* young."

"It might kill her," said Jack, impressively; "and then whom would you have to blame? Not my father, for he has nothing to do with it; but yourself, Mrs Preston—that's how it would be. Just look at what a little delicate darling she is—a little bit of a thing that one could carry away in one's arms," he went on, growing more and more animated—"a little face like a flower; and after the bad illness she had. I would not take such a responsibility for anything in the world," he added, with severe and indignant virtue. As for poor Mrs Preston, she did not know what to do. She wrung her hands; she looked at him beseech-

ingly, begging him with her eyes to cease. Every feature of the picture came home to her with a much deeper force than it did to her mentor. Jack no more believed in any danger to Pamela than he did in his own ultimate rejection; but the poor mother beheld her daughter pining, dying, breaking her heart, and trembled to her very soul.

“Oh, Mr John,” she cried, with tears, “don’t break my heart! What am I to do? If I must either ruin you with your father——”

“Or kill your child,” said Jack, looking at her solemnly till his victim shuddered. “Your child is more to you than my father; besides,” said the young man, unbending a little, “it would not ruin me with my father. He might be angry. He might make himself disagreeable; but he’s not a muff to bear malice. My father,” continued Jack, with emphasis, feeling that he owed his parent some reparation, and doing it magnificently when he was about it, “is as true a gentleman as I know. He’s not the man to ruin a fellow. You think of Pamela, and never mind me.”

But it took a long time and much reiteration to convince Mrs Preston. “If I could but see Mr Brownlow I could tell him something that would perhaps soften his heart,” she said; but this was far from being a pleasant suggestion to Jack. He put it

down summarily, not even asking in his youthful impatience what the something was. He had no desire to know. He did not want his father's heart to be softened. In short, being as yet unaccustomed to the idea, he did not feel any particular delight in the thought of presenting Pamela's mother to the world as belonging to himself. And yet this same talk had made a wonderful difference in his feeling towards Pamela's mother. The thought of the explanation he had to make to her was repugnant to him when he came in. He had all but run away from it when he was left to wait alone. And now, in less than an hour, it seemed so natural to enter into everything. Even if she had bestowed a maternal embrace upon him, Jack did not feel as if he would have resisted ; but she gave him no motherly kiss. She was still half frightened at him, half disposed to believe that to get rid of him would be the best thing ; and Jack had no mind to be got rid of. Neither of them could have told very exactly what was the understanding upon which they parted. There was an understanding, that was certain—an arrangement, tacit, inexpressible, which, however, was not hostile. He was not permitted in so many words to come again ; but neither was he sent away. When he had the assurance to ask to see Pamela before he left, Mrs Preston went nervously through the passage before him and

opened the door, opening up the house and their discussion as she did so, to the big outside world and wakeful sky, with all its stars, which seemed to stoop and look in. Poor little Pamela was in the room up-stairs, speechless, motionless, holding her breath, fixed as it were to the window, from which she must see him go out, hearing the indistinct hum of voices underneath, and wondering what her mother was saying to him. When the parlour door opened, her heart leaped up in her breast. She could hear his voice, and distinguish, as she thought, every tone of it, but she could not hear what he said. For an instant it occurred to her too that she might be called down-stairs. But then the next moment the outer door opened, a breath of fresh air stole into the house, and she knew he was dismissed. How had he been dismissed? For the moment? for the night? or for ever? The window was open to which Pamela clung in the darkness, and she could hear his step going out. And as he went he spoke out loud enough to be heard up-stairs, to be heard by anybody on the road, and almost for that matter to be heard at Betty's cottage. "If I must not see her," he said, "give her my dear love." What did it mean? Was his dear love his last message of farewell? or was it only the first public indication that she belonged to him? Pamela sank down on her knees by the window, noiseless,

with her heart beating so in her ears that she felt as if he must hear it outside. The whole room, the whole house, the whole air, seemed to her full of that throbbing. His dear love! It seemed to come in to her with the fresh air—to drop down upon her from the big stars as they leant out of heaven and looked down; and yet she could not tell if it meant death or life. And Mrs Preston was not young, and could not fly, but came so slowly, so slowly, up the creaking wooden stair!

Poor Mrs Preston went slowly, not only because of her age, but because of her burden of thoughts. She could not have told any one whether she was very happy or deadly sad. Her heart was not fluttering in her ears like Pamela, but beating out hard throbs of excitement. He was good, he was true; her heart accepted him. Perhaps he was the friend she had so much longed for, who would guard Pamela when she was gone. At present, however, she was not gone; and yet her sceptre was passing away out of her hands, and her crown from her head. Anyhow, for good or for evil, this meant change; the sweet sceptre of love, the crown of natural authority and duty, such as are the glory of a woman who is a mother, were passing away from her. She did not grudge it. She would not have grudged life, nor anything dearer than life, for

Pamela ; but she felt that there was change coming : and it made her sick—sick and cold and shivering, as if she was going to have a fever. She would have been glad to have had wings and flown to carry joy to her child ; but she could not go fast for the burden and heaviness of her thoughts.

Meanwhile Jack crossed the road briskly, and went up the avenue under the big soft lambent stars. If it was at him in his character of lover that they were looking, they might have saved themselves the trouble, for he took no notice whatever of these sentimental spectators. He went home, not in a lingering meditative way, but like a man who has made up his mind. He had no sort of doubt or disquietude for his part about the acceptance of his love. He knew that Pamela was his, though her mother would not let him see her. He knew he should see her, and that she belonged to him, and nobody on earth could come between them. He had known all this from the first moment when the simple little girl had told him that life was hard ; and as for her mother or his father, Jack did not in his mind make much account of the opposition of these venerable personages—such being his nature. What remained now was to clear a way into the future, to dig out a passage, and make it as smooth as possible for these tremulous little feet. Such

were the thoughts he was busy with as he went home—not even musing about his little love. He had mused about her often enough before. Now his practical nature resumed the sway. How a household could be kept up, when it should be established, by what means it was to be provided, was the subject of Jack's thoughts. He went straight to the point without any circumlocution. As it was to be done, it would be best to be done quickly. And he did not disguise from himself the change it would make. He knew well enough that he could not live as he had lived in his father's house. He would have to go into lodgings, or to a little house; to have one or two indifferent servants—perhaps a “child-wife”—perhaps a resident mother-in-law. All this Jack calmly faced and foresaw. It could not come on him unawares, for he considered the chances, and saw that all these things were possible. There are people who will think the worse of him for this; but it was not Jack's fault—it was his constitution. He might be foolish like his neighbours on one point, but on all other points he was sane. He did not expect that Pamela, if he translated her at once into a house of her own, would be able to govern him and it on the spot by natural intuition. He knew there would be, as he himself expressed it, many

“hitches” in the establishment, and he knew that he would have to give up a great many indulgences. This was why he took no notice of the stars, and even knitted his brows as he walked on. The romantic part of the matter was over. It was now pure reality, and that of the most serious kind, that he had in hand.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A NEW CONSPIRATOR.

“I DON’T say as you’re to take my advice,” said Mrs Swayne. “I’m not one as puts myself forward to give advice where it ain’t wanted. Ask any one as knows. You as is Church-folks, if I was you, I’d send for the Rector; or speak to your friends. There ain’t one living creature with a morsel of sense as won’t say to you just what I’m saying now.”

“Oh please go away—please go away,” said Pamela, who was standing with crimson cheeks between Mrs Preston and her would-be counsellor; “don’t you see mamma is ill?”

“She’ll be a deal worse afore all’s done, if she don’t listen in time; and you too, Miss Pamela, for all so angry as you are,” said Mrs Swayne. “It ain’t nothing to me. If you like it, it don’t do me no harm; contraryways, it’s my interest to keep

you quiet here, for you're good lodgers—I don't deny it—and ain't folks as give trouble. But I was once a pretty lass myself," she added, with a sigh, "and I knows what it is."

Pamela turned with unfeigned amazement and gazed upon the big figure that stood in the doorway. Once a pretty lass herself! Was this what pretty lasses came to? Mrs Swayne, however, did not pause to inquire what were the thoughts that were passing through the girl's mind; she took a step or two farther into the room, nearer the sofa on which Mrs Preston lay. She was possessed with that missionary zeal for other people's service, that determination to do as much as lay in her power to keep her neighbours from having their own way, or to make them very uncomfortable in the enjoyment of the luxury, which is so common a development of virtue. Her conscience was weighted with her responsibility; when she had warned them what they were coming to, then at least she would have delivered her own soul.

"I don't want to make myself disagreeable," said Mrs Swayne; "it ain't my way; but, Mrs Preston, if you go on having folks about, it's right you should hear what them as knows thinks of it. I ain't a-blaming you. You've lived in foreign parts, and you're that silly about your child that you can't

a-bear to cross her. I'm one as can make allowance for that. But I just ask you what can the likes of that young fellow want here? He don't come for no good. Poor folks has a deal of things to put up with in this world, and women-folks most of all. I don't make no doubt Miss Pamela is pleased to have a gentleman a-dancing after her. I don't know one on us as wouldn't be pleased; but them as has respect for their character and for their peace o' mind——”

“Mrs Swayne, you must not speak like this to me,” said Mrs Preston, feebly, from the sofa. “I have a bad headache, and I can't argue with you; but you may be sure, though I don't say much, that I know how to take care of my own child. No, Pamela, dear, don't cry; and you'll please not to say another word to me on this subject—not another word, or I shall have to go away.”

“To go away!” said Mrs Swayne, crimson with indignation. This sudden impulse of self-defence in so mild a creature struck her dumb. “Go away!—and welcome too!” she added; but her consternation was such that she could say no more. She stood in the middle of the little dark parlour, in a partial trance of astonishment. Public opinion itself had been defied in her person. “When it comes to what it's sure to come to, then you'll remember as I

warned you," she said, and rushed forth from the room, closing the door with a clang which made poor Mrs Preston jump on her sofa. Her visit left a sense of trouble and dismay on both their minds, for they were not superior women, nor sufficiently strong-minded to laugh at such a monitor. Pamela threw herself down on her knees by her mother's side and cried—not because of Mrs Swayne, but because the fright and the novelty overwhelmed her, not to speak of the lively anger and disgust and impatience of her youth.

"Oh mamma, if we had only some friends!" said Pamela; "everybody except us seems to have friends. Had I never any uncles nor anything? It is hard to be left just you and me in the world."

"You had brothers once," said Mrs Preston, with a sigh. Then there was a pause, for poor Pamela knew and could not help knowing that her brothers, had they been living, would not have improved her position now. She kept kneeling by her mother's side, but though there was no change in her position, her heart went away from her involuntarily—went away to think that the time perhaps had come when she would never more want a friend,—when somebody would always be at hand to advise her what to do, and when no such complications could arise. She kept the gravity, even sadness of

her aspect, with the innocent hypocrisy which is possible at her age; but her little heart went out like a bird into the sunny world outside. A passing tremor might cross her, ghosts might glide for a moment across the way, but it was only for a moment, and she knew they were only ghosts. Her mother was in a very different case. Mrs Preston had a headache, partly because of the shock of last night, partly because a headache was to her, as to so many women, a kind of little feminine chapel, into which she could retire to gain time when she had anything on her mind. The course of individual history stops when those headaches come on, and the subject of them has a blessed moment to think. Nothing could be done, nothing could be said, till Mrs Preston's head was better. It was but a small matter had it been searched to its depths, but it was enough to arrest the wheels of fate.

"Pamela," she said, after a while, "we must be doubly wise because we have no friends. I can't ask anybody's advice, as Mrs Swayne told me to do. I am not going to open up our private affairs to strangers; but we must be wise. I think we must go away."

"Go away!" said Pamela, looking up with a face of despair—"away! Mamma, you don't think of—of—*him* as she does? *You* know what he is. Go

away ! and perhaps never, never see him again. Oh mamma !”

“ I did not mean that,” said Mrs Preston ; “ but we can’t stop here, and live at his father’s very door, and have him coming under their eyes to vex them. No, my darling ; that would be cruel, and it would not be wise.”

“ Do you think they will mind so very much ? ” said Pamela, looking wistfully in her mother’s face. “ What should I do if they hated me ? Miss Brownlow, you know—Sara—she always wanted me to call her Sara—she would never turn against me. I know her too well for that.”

“ She has not been here for a long time,” said Mrs Preston ; “ you have not noticed it, but I have, Pamela. She has never come since that day her father spoke to you. There is a great difference, my darling, between the sister’s little friend and the brother’s betrothed.”

“ Mamma, you seem to know all about those wretched things,” cried Pamela, impulsively. “ Why did you never tell me before ? I never, never would have spoken to him—if I had known.”

“ How was *I* to know, Pamela ? ” said Mrs Preston. “ It appears you did not know yourselves. And then, when you told me what Mr Brownlow said, I thought I might find you a friend. I think yet, if I

could but see him ; but when I spoke last night of seeing Mr Brownlow, *he* would not hear of it. It is very hard to know what to do."

Then there ensued another pause—a long pause, during which the mother, engaged with many thoughts, did not look at her child. Pamela, too, was thinking ; she had taken her mother's long thin hand into her own, and was smoothing it softly with her soft fingers ; her head was bent over it, her eyes cast down ; now and then a sudden heaving, as of a sob about to come, moved her pretty shoulders. And her voice was very tuneless and rigid when she spoke. "Mamma," she said, "speak to me honestly, once for all. Ought I to give it all up? I don't mean to say it would be easy. I never knew a—a—any one before—never anybody was like *that* to me. You don't know—oh, you don't know how he can talk, mamma. And then it was not like anything new—it felt natural, as if we had always belonged to each other. I know it's no use talking. Tell me, mamma, once for all, would it really be better for him, and—everybody, if I were to give him quite up?"

Pamela held herself upright and rigid as she asked the question. She held her mother's hand fast, and kept stroking it in an intermittent way. When she had finished she gave her an appealing look—a look which did not ask advice. It was not advice she

wanted, poor child: she wanted to be told to do what she longed to do—to be assured that that was the best; therefore she looked not like a creature wavering between two opinions, but like a culprit at the bar, awaiting her sentence. As for Mrs Preston, she only shook her head.

“It would not do any good,” she said. “You might give him up over and over, but you would never get him to give you up, Pamela. He is that sort of a young man; he would not have taken a refusal from me. It would be of no use, my dear.”

“Are you sure?—are you quite sure?” cried Pamela, throwing her arms round her mother’s neck, and giving her a shower of kisses. “Oh you dear, dear mamma. Are you sure you are quite sure?”

“You are kissing me for his sake,” said Mrs Preston, with a little pang; and then she smiled at herself. “I never was jealous before,” she said. “I don’t mean to be jealous. No, he will never give in, Pamela; we shall have to make the best of it; and perhaps,” she continued, after a pause, “perhaps this was the friend I was always praying for to take care of my child before I die.”

“Oh, mamma,” said Pamela, “how can you talk of dying at such a time as this? when, perhaps, we’re going to have—everything we want in the world; when, perhaps, we’re going to be—as happy as the

day is long!" she said, once more kissing the worn old face which lay turned towards her, in a kind of sweet enthusiasm. The one looked so young and the other so old; the one so sure of life and happiness, the other so nearly done with both. Mrs Preston took the kiss and the clasp, and smiled at her radiant child; and then she closed her eyes, and retreated into her headache. *She* was not going to have everything she wanted in the world, or to be as happy as the day was long; so she retreated and took to her handy domestic little malady. The child could not conceive that there were still a thousand things to be thought over, and difficulties without number to be overcome.

As for Pamela, she sprang to her feet lightly, and went off to make the precious cup of tea which is good for every feminine trouble. As she went she fell into song, not knowing it. She was as near dancing as decorum would permit. She went into the kitchen where Mr Swayne was, and cheered him up more effectually than if he had been well for a week. She made him laugh, though he was in low spirits. She promised him that he should be quite well in three months. "Ready to dance if there was anything to dance at," was what Pamela said.

"At your wedding, Miss Pamela," said poor Swayne, with his shrill little chuckle. And Pamela

too laughed with a laugh that was like a song. She stood by the fire while the kettle boiled, with the firelight glimmering in her pretty eyes, and reddening her white forehead under the rings of her hair. Should she have to boil the kettle, to spread the homely table for *him*? or would he take her to Brownlows, or some other such house, and make her a great little lady like Sara? On the whole, Pamela thought she would like the first best. She made the tea before the bright fire in such perfection as it never was made at Brownlows, and poured it out hot and fragrant, like one who knew what she was about. But the tea was not so great a cordial as the sight of her own face. She had come clear out of all her perplexities. There was no longer even a call upon that anxious faculty for self-sacrifice which belongs to youth. In short, self-sacrifice would do no good—the idol would simply decline to receive the costly offering. It was in his hands, and nothing that she could do would make any difference. Perhaps, if Pamela had been a self-asserting young woman, her pride would have suffered from this thought; but she was only a little girl of seventeen, and it made her as light as a bird. No dreadful responsibility rested on her soft shoulders—no awful question of what was best remained for her to consider. What use could there be in giving up when he would not

be given up? What end would it serve to refuse a man who would not take a refusal? She had made her tragic little effort in all sincerity, and it had come to the sweetest and most complete failure. And now her part had been done, and no further perplexity could overwhelm her. So she thought, flitting out and in upon a hundred errands, and thinking tenderly in her heart that her mother's headache and serious looks and grave way of looking at everything was not so much because there was anything serious in the emergency, as because the dear mother was old—a fault of nature, not of circumstances, to be mended by love and smiles, and all manner of tender services on the part of the happy creature who was young.

When Mrs Swayne left the parlour in the manner which we have already related, she rushed out, partly to be relieved of her wrath, partly to pour her prophecies of evil into the ears of the other Cassandra on the other side of the road, old Betty of the Gates. The old woman was sitting before her fire when her neighbour went in upon her. To be sure, it was summer, but Betty's fire was eternal, and burned without intermission on the sacred hearth. She was mending one of her gowns, and had a whole bundle of bits of coloured prints—"patches," for which some of the little girls in Miss Brownlow's school would have given their ears—spread out upon the table

before her. Bits of all Betty's old gowns were there. It was a particoloured historical record of her life, from the gay calicoes of her youth down to the sober browns and olives of declining years. With such a gay centre the little room looked very bright. There was a geranium in the window, ruby and emerald. There were all manner of pretty confused cross-lights from the open door and the latticed window in the other corner and the bright fire; and the little old face in its white cap was as brown and as red as a winter apple. Mrs Swayne was a different sort of person. She came in, filling the room with shadows, and put herself away in a big elbow-chair, with blue-and-white cushions, which was Betty's winter throne, but now stood pushed into a corner out of reach of the fire. She uttered a sigh which blew away some of the patches on the table, and swayed the ruby blossoms of the big geranium. "Well," she said, "I've done my best—I can say I've done my best. If the worst comes to the worst, there's none as can blame me."

"What is it?—what is it, Mrs Swayne?" said Betty, eagerly, dropping her work; "though I've something as tells me it's about that poor child and our Mr John."

"I wash my hands of them," said the visitor, doing so in a moist and demonstrative way. "I've

done all as an honest woman can do. Speak o' mothers!—mothers is a pack o' fools. I'd think o' that child's interest if it was me. I'd think what was best for her character, and for keeping her out o' mischief. As for cryin', and that sort, they all cry—it don't do them no harm. If you or me had set our hearts on marryin' the first gentleman as ever was civil, what would ha' become of us? Oh the fools as some folks is! It's enough to send a woman with a bit of sense out o' her mind."

"Marryin'?" said Betty, with a little shriek; "you don't mean to say as they've gone as far as that."

"If they don't go further afore all's done, it'll be a wonder to me," said Mrs Swayne; "things is always like that. I don't mean to take no particular credit to myself; but if she had been mine, I'd have done my best for her—that's one thing as I can say. She'd not have got into no trouble if she had been mine. I'd have watched her night and day. I know what the gentlemen is. But that's allays the way with Providence. A woman like me as has a bit of experience has none to be the better of it; and the likes of an old stupid as don't know her right hand from her left, it's her as has the children. I'd have settled all that different if it had been me. Last night as ever was, I found the two in the open road—in the road, I give you my word. It's over all the parish

by this, as sure as sure; and after that what does my gentleman do but come to the house as bold as brass? It turns a body sick—that's what it does; but you might as well preach to a stone wall as make 'em hear reason; and that's what you call a mother! much a poor girl's the better of a mother like that."

"All mothers is not the same," said Betty, who held that rank herself. "For one as don't know her duty, there's dozens and dozens——"

"Don't speak to me," said Mrs Swayne; "I know 'em—as stuck up as if it was any virtue in them, and a-shuttin' their ears to every one as gives them good advice. Oh, if that girl was but mine! I'd keep her as snug as if she was in a box, I would. Ne'er a gentleman should get a chance of so much as a look at her. It's ten times worse when a girl is pretty; but, thank heaven, I know what the gentlemen is."

"But if he comed to the house, he must have made some excuse," said Betty. "*I* see him. He come by himself, as if it was to see your good gentleman, Mrs Swayne. Knowing as Miss Pamela was out, I don't deny as that was my thought. And he must have made some excuse."

"Oh, they find excuses ready enough—don't you be afeared," said Mrs Swayne; "they're plenty ready

with their tongues, and don't stick at what they promise neither. It's all as innocent as innocent if you was to believe them; and them as believes comes to their ruin. I tell you it's their ruin—that and no less; but I may speak till I'm hoarse," said Cassandra, with melancholy emphasis—"nobody pays no attention to me."

"You must have knowed a deal of them to be so earnest," said old Betty, with the deepest interest in her eyes.

"I was a pretty lass myself," said Mrs Swayne; and then she paused; "but you're not to think as I ever give in to them. I wasn't that sort; and I had folks as looked after me. I don't say as Swayne is much to look at, after all as was in my power; but if Miss Pamela don't mind, she'll be real thankful afore she's half my age to take up with a deal worse than Swayne; and that's my last word, if I was never to draw a breath more."

"Husht!" said Betty. "Don't take on like that. There's somebody a-coming, Husht! It's just like as if it was a child of your own."

"And so I feel," said Mrs Swayne; "worse luck for her, poor lass. If she was mine——"

"Husht!" said Betty again; and then the approaching steps which they had heard for the last minute reached the threshold, and a woman pre-

sented herself at the door. She was not a woman that either of them knew. She was old, very tall, very thin, and very dusty with walking. "I'm most dead with tiredness. May I come in and rest a bit?" she said. She had a pair of keen black eyes, which gleamed out below her poke bonnet, and took in everything, and did not look excessively tired; but her scanty black gown was white with dust. Old Betty, for her own part, did not admire the stranger's looks, but she consented to let her come in, "manners" forbidding any inhospitality, and placed her a chair as near as possible to the door.

"I come like a stranger," said the woman, "but I'm not to call a stranger neither. I'm Nancy as lives with old Mrs Fennell, them young folks' grand-mamma. I had summat to do nigh here, and I thought as I'd like to see the place. It's a fine place for one as was nothing but an attorney once. I allays wonder if they're good folks to live under, such folks as these."

"So you're Nancy!" said the old woman of the lodge. "I've heard tell of you. I heard of you along of Stevens as you recommended here. I haven't got nothing to say against the masters; they're well and well enough; Miss Sara, she's hasty, but she's a good heart."

"She don't show it to her own flesh and blood,"

said Nancy, significantly. "Is this lady one as lives about here?"

Then it was explained to the stranger who Mrs Swayne was. "Mr Swayne built them cottages," said Betty; "they're his own, and as nice a well-furnished house and as comfortable; and his good lady ain't one of them that wastes or wants. She has a lodger in the front parlour, and keeps 'em as nice as it's a picture to see, and as respected in the whole parish——"

"Don't you go on a-praising me before my face," said Mrs Swayne, modestly; "we're folks as are neither rich nor poor, and can give our neighbours a hand by times and times. You're a stranger as is well seen, or you wouldn't be cur'ous about Swayne and me."

"I'm a stranger sure enough," said Nancy. "We're poor relations, that's what we are; and the likes of us is not wanted here. If I was them I'd take more notice o' my own flesh and blood, and one as can serve them yet, like *she* can. It ain't what you call a desirable place," said Nancy; "she's awful aggravating sometimes, like the most of old women; but all the same they're her children's children, and I'd allays let that count if it was me."

"That's old Mrs Fennell?" said Betty; "she never was here as I can think on but once. Miss Sara isn't

one that can stand being interfered with; but they sends her an immensity of game, and vegetables, and flowers, and such things, and I've always heard as the master gives her an allowance. I don't see as she's any reason to complain."

"A woman as knows as much as she does," said Nancy, solemnly, "she ought to be better looked to;" and then she changed her tone. "I've walked all this long way, and I have got to get back again, and she'll be as cross as cross if I'm long. And I don't suppose there's no omnibus or nothing going my way. If it was but a cart——"

"There's a carrier's cart," said Betty; "but Mrs Sawyne could tell you most about that. Her two lodgers come in it, and Mrs Preston, that time she had something to do in Masterton——"

"Who is Mrs Preston?" said Nancy, quickly. "I've heard o' that name. And I've heard in Masterton of some one as came in the carrier's cart. If I might make so bold, who is she? Is she your lodger? I once knew some folks of that name in my young days, and I'd like to hear."

"Oh yes, she's my lodger," said Mrs Swayne, "and a terrible trouble to me. I'd just been a-grumbling to Betty when you came in. She and that poor thing Pamela, they lay on my mind so heavy, I don't know what to do. You might give old Mrs Fennell a hint

to speak to Mr John. He's a-running after that girl, he is, till it turns one sick ; and a poor silly woman of a mother as won't see no harm in it. If the old lady was to hear in a sort of a side way like, she might give Mr John a talking to. Not as I have much confidence in his mending. Gentlemen never does."

"Oh," said Nancy, with a strange gleam of her dark eyes, "so she's got a daughter! and it was her as came into Masterton in the carrier's cart? I just wanted to know. Maybe you could tell me what kind of a looking woman she was. There was one as I knew once in my young days——"

"She ain't unlike yourself," said Mrs Swayne, with greater brevity than usual; and she turned and began to investigate Nancy with a closeness for which she was not prepared. Another gleam shot from the stranger's black eyes as she listened. It even brought a tinge of colour to her grey cheek, and though she restrained herself with the utmost care, there was unquestionably a certain excitement in her. Mrs Swayne's eyes were keen, but they were not used to read mysteries. A certain sense of something to find out oppressed her senses; but, notwithstanding her curiosity, she had not an idea what secret there could be.

"If it's the same person, it's years and years since

I saw her last," said Nancy. "And so she's got a daughter! I shouldn't think it could be a very young daughter if it's hers; she should be as old as me. And it was her as came in to Masterton in the carrier's cart! Well, well! what droll things does happen to be sure."

"I don't know what's droll about that," said Mrs Swayne; "but I don't know nought about her. She's always been quiet and genteel as a lodger—always till this business came on about Mr John. But I'd be glad to know where her friends was, if she's got any friends. She's as old as you, or older, and, not to say anything as is unpleasant—it's an awful thing to think of—what if folks should go and die in your house, and you not know their friends?"

"If it's that you're thinking of, she's got no friends," said Nancy, with a vehemence that seemed unnatural and uncalled-for to her companions—"none as I know of nowheres—but maybe me. And it isn't much as I could do. She's a woman as has been awful plundered and wronged in her time. Mr John! oh, I'd just like to hear what it is about Mr John. If that was to come after all, I tell you it would call down fire from heaven."

"Goodness gracious me!" said Mrs Swayne, "what does the woman mean?" And Betty too uttered a quavering exclamation, and they both drew their

chairs closer to the separated seat, quite apart from the dais of intimacy and friendship, upon which the dusty stranger had been permitted to rest.

Nancy, however, had recollected herself. "Mean?" she said, with a look of innocence; "oh, I didn't mean nothing; but that I've a kind of spite—I don't deny it—at them grand Brownlows, that don't take no notice to speak of of their own flesh and blood. That's all as I mean. I ain't got no time to-day, but if you'll say as Nancy Christian sends her compliments and wants badly to see Mrs Preston, and is coming soon again, I'll be as obliged as ever I can be. If it's her, she'll think on who Nancy Christian was; and if it ain't her, it don't make much matter," she continued with a sigh. She said these last words very slowly, looking at neither of her companions, fixing her eyes upon the door of Swayne's cottage, at which Pamela had appeared. The sun came in at Betty's door and dazzled the stranger's eyes, and it was not easy for her at first to see Pamela, who stood in the shade. The girl had looked out for no particular reason, only because she was passing that way; and as she stood giving a glance up and a glance down the road—a glance which was not wistful, but full of a sweet confidence—Nancy kept staring at her, blinking her eyes to escape the sunshine. "Is that the girl?" she said, a little hoarsely.

And then all the three looked out and gazed at Pamela in her tender beauty. Pamela saw them also. It did not occur to her whose the third head might be, nor did she care very much. She felt sure they were discussing her, shaking their heads over her imprudence ; but Pamela at the moment was too happy to be angry. She said, " Poor old things," to herself. They were poor old things ; they had not the blood dancing in their veins as she had ; they had not light little feet that flew over the paths, nor light hearts that leaped in their breasts, poor old souls. She waved her hand to them, half kindly, half saucily, and disappeared again like a living bit of sunshine into the house which lay so obstinately in the shade. As for Nancy, she was moved in some wonderful way by this sight. She trembled when the girl made that half-mocking half-sweet salutation ; the tears came to her eyes. " She could never have a child so young," she muttered half to herself, and then gazed and gazed as if she had seen a ghost. When Pamela disappeared she rose up and shook the dust, not from her feet, but from her skirts, outside old Betty's door. " I've only a minute," said Nancy, " but if I could once set eyes on the mother I could tell if it was her I used to know."

" I left her lyin' down wi' a bad headache," said Mrs Swayne. " If you like you can go and take a

look through the parlour window ; or I'll ask if she's better. Them sort of folks that have little to do gets headaches terrible easy. Of an afternoon when their dinner's over, what has the likes of them to take up their time ? They takes a sleep on my sofa, or they takes a walk, and a headache comes natural-like when folks has all that time on their hands. Come across and look in at the window. It's low, and if your eyes are good you can just see her where she lays."

Nancy followed her new companion across the road. As she went out of the gates, she gave a glance up through the avenue, and made as though she would have shaken her fist at the great house. "If you but knew!" Nancy said to herself. But they did not know, and the sunshine lay as peacefully across the pretty stretch of road as if there had been no dangers there. The old woman crossed over to Mrs Swayne's cottage, and went into the little square of garden where Pamela sometimes watered the flowers. Nancy stooped over the one monthly rose and plucked a bit of the homely lads'-love in the corner which flourished best of all, and then she drew very close to the window and looked in. It was an alarming sight to the people there. Mrs Preston had got a second cup of tea, and raised herself up on her pillow to swallow it, when all at once

this grey visage, not unlike her own, surrounded with black much like her own dress, looked in upon her—a stranger, and yet somehow wearing a half-familiar aspect. As for Pamela, there was something awful to her in the vision. She turned round to her mother in a fright to compare the two faces. She was not consciously superstitious, but yet dim thoughts of a wraith, a double, a solemn messenger of doom, were in her mind. She had heard of such things. “Go and see who it is,” said Mrs Preston ; and Pamela rushed out, not feeling sure that the strange apparition might not have vanished. But it had not vanished. Nancy stood at the door, and when she was looked into in the open daylight she was not so dreadfully like Mrs Preston’s wraith.

“Good day, Miss,” said Nancy ; “I thought as maybe I might have had a few words with your mother. If she’s the person I take her for, I used to know her long long ago ; and I’ve a deal that’s very serious to say.”

“You frightened us dreadfully looking in at the window,” said Pamela. “And mamma has such a bad headache ; she has been a good deal—worried. Would you mind coming back another time ?—or is it anything I can say ?”

“There’s something coming down the road,” said Nancy ; “and I am tired and can’t walk back. If it’s

the carrier I'll have to go, Miss. And I can't say the half nor the quarter to you. Is it the carrier? Then I'll have to go. Tell her it was one as knew her when we was both young—knew her right well, and all her ways—knew her mother. And I've a deal to say; and my name's Nancy Christian, if she should ask. If she's the woman I take her for, she'll know my name."

"And you'll come back?—will you be sure to come back?" asked Pamela, carelessly, yet with a girl's eagerness for everything like change and news. The cart had stopped by this time, and Mrs Swayne had brought forth a chair to aid the stranger in her ascent. The place was roused by the event. Old Betty stood at her cottage, and Swayne had hobbled out from the kitchen, and even Mrs Preston, forgetting the headache, had stolen to the window, and peeped out through the small venetian blind which covered the lower part of it to look at and wonder who the figure belonged to which had so strange a likeness to herself. Amid all these spectators Nancy mounted, slowly shaking out once more the dust from her skirts.

"I'll be late, and she'll give me an awful talking to," she said. "No; I can't stop to-day. But I'll come again—oh yes, I'll come again." She kept looking back as long as she was in sight, peeping

round the hood of the waggon, searching them through and through with her anxious gaze ; whilst all the bystanders looked on surprised. What had she to do with them ? And then her looks, and her dress, and her black eager eyes, were so like Mrs Preston's. Her face bore a very doubtful, uncertain look as she was thus borne solemnly away. "I couldn't know her after such a long time ; and I don't see as she could have had a child so young," was what Nancy was saying to herself, shaking her head, and then reassuring herself. This visit made a sensation which almost diverted public attention from Mr John ; and when Nancy's message was repeated to Mrs Preston, it was received with an immediate recognition which increased the excitement. "Nancy Christian !" Mrs Preston repeated all the evening long. She could think of nothing else. It made her head so much worse that she had to go to bed, where Pamela watched her to the exclusion of every other interest. This was Nancy's first visit. She did not mean, even had she had time, to proceed to anything more important that day.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### HOW SARA REGARDED THE MOTE IN HER BROTHER'S EYE.

A FEW days after these events, caprice or curiosity led Sara to Swayne's cottage. She had very much given up going there—why, she could scarcely have explained. In reality she knew nothing about the relationship between her brother and her friend; but either that, unknown to herself, had exercised some kind of magnetic repulsion upon her, or her own preoccupation had withdrawn Sara from any special approach to her little favourite. She would have said she was as fond of her as ever; but in fact she did not want Pamela as she had wanted her. And the consequence was that they had been much longer apart than either of them, occupied with their own concerns, had been aware. The motive which drew Sara thither after so long an interval was about as mysterious as that which kept her

away. She went, but did not know why; perhaps from some impulse of those secret threads of fate which are ever being drawn unconsciously to us into another and another combination; perhaps simply from a girlish yearning towards the pleasant companion of whom for a time she had made so much. Mrs Preston had not recovered when Sara went to see her daughter—she was still lying on the sofa with one of her nervous attacks, Pamela said—though the fact was that neither mother nor daughter understood what kind of attack it was. Anxiety and excitement and uncertainty had worn poor Mrs Preston out; and then her headache was so handy—it saved her from making any decision—it excused her to herself for not settling immediately what she ought to do. She was not able to move, and she was thankful for it. She could not undergo the fatigue of finding some other place to live in, of giving Mr John his final answer. To be sure he knew and she knew that his final answer had been given—that there could be no doubt about it; but still every practical conclusion was postponed by the attack, and in this point of view it was the most fortunate thing which could have occurred.

Things were thus with them when Sara, after a long absence, one day suddenly lighted down upon the shady house in the glory of her summer attire,

like a white dove flying into the bosom of the clouds. Perhaps it would be wrong to say that Pamela in her black frock stood no chance in the presence of her visitor; but it is certain that when Miss Brownlow came floating in with her light dress, and her bright ribbons and her shining hair, everything about her gleaming with a certain reflection from the sunshine, Pamela and her mother could neither of them look at anything else. She dazzled them, and yet drew their eyes to her, as light itself draws everybody's eyes. Pamela shrank a little from her friend's side with a painful humility, asking herself whether it was possible that this bright creature should ever be her sister; while even Mrs Preston, though she had all a mother's admiration for her own child, could not but feel her heart sink as she thought how this splendid princess would ever tolerate so inferior an alliance. This consciousness in their minds made an immediate estrangement between them. Sara was condescending, and she felt she was condescending, and hated herself; and as for the mother and daughter, they were constrained and stricken dumb by the secret in their hearts. And thus there rose a silent offence on both sides. On hers, because they were so cold and distant; on theirs, because it seemed to them that she had come with the intention of being

affable and kind to them, though they could no longer accept patronage. The mother lay on the sofa in the dark corner, and Sara sat on the chair in the window, and between the two points Pamela went straying, ashamed of herself, trying to smooth over her own secret irritation and discontent, trying to keep the peace between the others, and yet at the same time wishing and longing that her once welcome friend would leave them to themselves. The circumstances of their intercourse were changed, and the intercourse itself had to be organised anew. Thus the visit might have passed over, leaving only an impression of pain on their minds, but for an accident which set the matter in a clearer light.

Pamela had been seated at the window with her work before Sara entered, and underneath the linen she had been stitching lay an envelope directed to her by Jack Brownlow. Jack had not seen his little love for one entire day, and naturally he had written her a little letter, which was as foolish as if he had not been so sensible a young man. It was only the envelope which lay thus on the table under Pamela's work. Its enclosure was laid up in quite another sanctuary, but the address was there, unquestionably in Jack's hand. It lay the other way from Sara's eyes, tantalising her with the well-known writing. She tried hard, without betraying herself, in the in-

tervals of the conversation, to read the name on it upside down, and her suspicion had not, as may be supposed, an enlivening effect upon the conversation. Then she stooped and pretended to look at Pamela's work; then she gave the provoking envelope a little stealthy touch with the end of her parasol. Perhaps scrupulous honour would have forbidden these little attempts to discover the secret; but when a sister perceives her brother's handwriting on the work-table of her friend, it is hard to resist the inclination to make sure in the first place that it *is* his, in the second place to whom it is addressed. This was all that Sara was guilty of. She would not have peeped into the note for a kingdom, but she did want to know whom it was written to. Perhaps it was only some old scrap of paper, some passing word about mendings or fittings to Mr Swayne. Perhaps—and then Sara gave the envelope stealthily that little poke with her parasol.

A few minutes after she got up to go: her complexion had heightened suddenly in the strangest way, her eyes had taken a certain rigid look, which meant excitement and wrath. "Will you come out with me a little way? I want to speak to you," she said, as Pamela went with her to the door. It was very different from those old beseeching, tender, undeniable invitations which the one had been in the

habit of giving to the other; but there was something in it which constrained Pamela, though she trembled to her very heart, to obey. She did not know anything about the envelope; she had forgotten it, and had not perceived Sara's stealthy exertions to secure a sight of it. But nevertheless she knew there was something coming. She took down her little black hat, trembling, and stole out, a dark little figure, beside Sara, stately in her light flowing draperies. They did not say a word to each other as they crossed the road and entered at the gates and passed Betty's cottage. Betty came to the door and looked after them with a curiosity so great that she was tempted to follow and creep under the bushes, and listen; but Sara said nothing to betray herself as long as they were within the range of old Betty's eye. When they had got to the chestnut-trees, to that spot where Mr Brownlow had come upon his son and his son's love, and where there was a possibility of escaping from the observation of spectators at the gate, Sara's composure gave way. All at once she seized Pamela's arm, who turned round to her with her lips apart and her heart struggling up into her mouth with terror. "Jack has been writing to you," said Sara; "tell me what it has been about."

"What it has been about!" said Pamela, with a

cry. The poor little girl was so taken by surprise that all her self-possession forsook her. Her knees trembled, her heart beat, fluttering wildly in her ears; she sank down on the grass in her confusion, and covered her face with her hands. "Oh, Miss Brownlow!" was all that she was able to say.

"That is no answer," said Sara, with all her natural vehemence. "Pamela, get up, and answer me like a sensible creature. I don't mean to say it is your fault. A man might write to you and you might not be to blame. Tell me only what it means. What did he write to you about?"

Then Pamela bethought herself that she too had a certain dignity to preserve; not her own so much as that which belonged to her in right of her betrothed. She got up hastily, blushing scarlet, and though she did not meet Sara's angry questioning eyes, she turned her downcast face towards her with a certain steadfastness. "It is not any harm," she said, softly; "and Miss Brownlow, you are no—no—older than me."

"I am two years older than you," said Sara, "and I know the world, and you don't; and I am his sister. Oh, you foolish little thing! don't you know it is wicked? If you had told me, I never never would have let him trouble you. I never thought Jack would have done anything so dreadful. It's because you don't know."

“Mamma knows,” said Pamela, with a certain self-assertion; and then her courage once more failed her. “I tried to stop him,” she said, with the tears coming to her eyes, “and so did mamma. But I could not force him; not when he—would not. What I think of,” cried Pamela, “is him, not myself; but if he won’t, what *can* I do?”

“If he won’t what?” said Sara, in her amazement and wrath.

But Pamela could make no answer; half with the bitterness of it, half with the sweetness of it, her heart was full. It was hard to be questioned and taken to task thus by her own friend; but it was sweet to know that what she could do was nothing, that her efforts had been vain, that *he* would not give up. All this produced such a confusion in her that she could not say another word. She turned away, and once more covered her face with her hand; not that she was at all miserable—or if indeed it was a kind of misery, misery itself is sometimes sweet.

As for Sara, she blazed upon her little companion with an indignation which was splendid to behold. “Your mamma knows,” she said, “and permits it! Oh, Pamela! that I should have been so fond of you, and that you should treat me like this!”

“I am not treating you badly—it is you,” said

Pamela, with a sob which she could not restrain, "who are cruel to me."

"If you think so, we had better part," said Sara, with tragic grandeur. "We had better part, and forget that we ever knew each other. I could have borne anything from you but being false. Oh, Pamela! how could you do it? To be treacherous to me who have always loved you, and to correspond with Jack!"

"I—don't—correspond—with Jack," cried Pamela, the words being wrung out of her; and then she stopped short, and dried her eyes, and grew red, and looked Sara in the face. It was true, and yet it was false; and the consciousness of this falsehood in the spirit made her cheeks burn, and yet startled her into composure. She stood upright for the first time, and eyed her questioner, but it was with the self-possession not of innocence but of guilt.

"I am very glad to hear it," said Sara—"very glad; but you let him write to you. And when I see his handwriting on your table what am I to think? I will speak to him about it to-night; I will not have him tease you. Pamela, if you will trust in me, I will bring you through it safe. Surely it would be better for you to have me for a friend than Jack?"

Poor Pamela's eyes sank to the ground as this question was addressed to her. Her blush, which

had begun to fade, returned with double violence. Such a torrent of crimson rushed to her face and throat that even Sara took note of it. Pamela could not tell a lie—not another lie, as she said to herself in her heart; for the fact was she did prefer Jack—preferred him infinitely and beyond all question; and such being the case, could not so much as look at her questioner, much less breathe a word of assent. Sara marked the silence, the overwhelming blush, the look which suddenly fell beneath her own, with the consternation of utter astonishment. In that moment a renewed storm of indignation swept over her. She stamped her foot upon the grass in the impatience of her thoughts.

“You prefer Jack,” she cried, in horror—“you prefer Jack! Oh, Pamela! but in that case,” she added, gathering up her long dress in her arms, and turning away with a grandeur of disdain which made an end of the culprit, “it is evident that we had better part. I do not know that there is anything more I can say. I have thought more of you than I ought to have done,” said Sara, making a few steps forward and then turning half round with the air of an injured princess, “but now it is better that we should part.”

With this she waved her hand and turned away. It was in her heart to have turned and gone back five-and-twenty times before she reached the straight

line of the avenue from which they had strayed. Before she got to the first laurel in the shrubberies her heart had given her fifty pricks on the subject of her cruelty; but Sara was not actually so moved by these admonitions as to go back. As for Pamela, she stood for a long time where her friend had left her, motionless under the chestnut-trees, with tears dropping slowly from her downcast eyes, and a speechless yet sweet anguish in her heart. Her mother had been right. The sister's little friend, and the brother's betrothed, were two different things. This was how she was to be received by those who were nearest in the world to him; and yet he was a man, and his own master; all she could do was in vain, and he could not be forced to give up. Pamela stood still until his sister's light steps began to sound on the gravel; and when it was evident the parting had been final, and that Sara did not mean to come back, the poor child relieved her bosom by a long sob, and then went home very humbly by the broad sunny avenue. She went and poured her troubles into her mother's bosom, which naturally was so much the worse for Mrs Preston's headache. It was very hard to bear, and yet there was one thing which gave a little comfort; Jack was his own master, and giving him up, as everybody else adjured her to do, would be a thing entirely without effect.

The dinner-table at Brownlows was very grave that night. Mr Brownlow, it is true, was much as usual, and so was Jack; they were very much as they always were, notwithstanding that very grave complications surrounded the footsteps of both. But as for Sara, her aspect was solemnity itself; she spoke in monosyllables only; she ate little, and that little in a pathetic way; when her father or her brother addressed her she took out her finest manners and extinguished them. Altogether she was a very imposing and majestic sight; and after a few attempts at ordinary conversation, the two gentlemen, feeling themselves very trifling and insignificant personages indeed, gave in, and struggled no longer against an influence which was too much for them. There was something, too, in her manner—something imperceptible to Mr Brownlow, perceptible only to Jack—which made it clear to the latter that it was on his account his sister was so profoundly disturbed. He said “Pshaw!” to himself at first, and tried to think himself quite indifferent; but the fact was he was not indifferent. When she left the room at last, Jack had no heart for a chat with his father over the claret. He too felt his secret on his mind, and became uncomfortable when he was drawn at all into a confidential attitude; and to-day, in addition to this, there was in his heart a prick of alarm. Did Sara

know ? was that what she meant ? Jack knew very well that sooner or later everybody must know ; but at the present moment a mingled sense of shame and pride and independence kept him silent. Even supposing it was the most prudent marriage he could make, why should a fellow go and tell everybody like a girl ? It might be well enough for a girl to do it—a girl had to get everybody's consent, and ask everybody's advice, whereas he required neither advice nor consent. And so he had not felt himself called upon to say anything about it ; but it is nervous work, when you have a secret on your mind, to be left alone with your nearest relative, the person who has the best right to know, and who in a way possesses your natural confidence, and has done nothing to forfeit it. So Jack escaped five minutes after Sara, and hastened to the drawing-room, looking for her. Perhaps she had expected it—at all events she was there waiting for him still as solemn, pathetic, and important as it is possible to conceive. She had some work in her hands, which of itself was highly significant. Jack went up to her, and she looked at him, but took no further notice. After that one glance she looked down again, and went on with her work—things were too serious for speech.

“What's the matter ?” said Jack. “Why are you making such a tragedy-queen of yourself ? What

has everybody done? My opinion is you have frightened my father to death."

"I should be very sorry if I had frightened papa," said Sara, meekly; and then she broke forth with vehemence, "Oh, how can you, Jack? Don't you feel ashamed to look me in the face?"

"I ashamed to look you in the face?" cried Jack, in utter bewilderment; and he retired a step, but yet stared at her with the most straightforward stare. His eyes did not fall under the scrutiny of hers, but gradually as he looked there began to steal up among his whiskers an increasing heat. He grew red though there was no visible cause for it. "I should like to know what I have done," he said, with an affected laugh. "Anyhow, you take high ground."

"I couldn't take too high ground," said Sara, solemnly. "Oh, Jack! how could you think of meddling with that innocent little thing? To see her about so pretty and sweet as she was, and then to go and worry her and tease her to death!"

"Worry and tease—whom?" cried Jack, in amaze. This was certainly not the accusation he expected to hear.

"As if you did not know whom I mean!" said his sister. "Wasn't it throwing themselves on our kindness when they came here? And to make her that she dares not walk about or come out anywhere

—to tease her with letters even! I think you are the last man in the world from whom I should have expected that.”

Jack had taken to bite his nails, not well knowing what else to do. And he made no direct reply even to the solemnity of this appeal. A flush of anger sprang up over his face, and yet he was amused. “Has she been complaining to you?” he said.

“Complaining!” said Sara. “Poor little thing! No, indeed. She never said a word. I found it out all by myself.”

“Then I advise you to keep it all to yourself,” said her brother. “She don’t want you to interfere, nor I either. We can manage our own affairs; and I think, Sara,” he added, with an almost equal grandeur, “if I were you I would not notice the mote in my brother’s eye till I had looked after the beam in my own.”

The beam in her own! what did he mean? But Jack went off in a lofty way, contenting himself with this Parthian arrow, and declining to explain. The insinuation, however, disturbed Sara. What was the beam in her own? Somehow, while she was puzzling about it, a vision of young Powys crossed her mind, papa’s friend, who began to come so often. When she thought of that, she smiled at her brother’s delusion. Poor Jack! he did not know that it was

in discharge of her most sacred duty that she was civil to Powys. She had been very civil to him. She had taken his part against Jack's own refined rudeness, and delivered him even from the perplexed affabilities of her father, though he was her father's friend. Both Mr Brownlow and Jack were preoccupied, and Sara had been the only one to entertain the stranger. And she had done it so as to make the entertainment very amusing and pleasant to herself. But what had that to do with a beam in her eye? She had made a vow, and she was performing her vow. And he was her father's friend; and if all other arguments should be exhausted, still the case was no parallel to that of Pamela. He was not a poor man dwelling at the gate. He was a fairy prince, whom some enchantment had transformed into his present shape. The case was utterly different. Thus it was with a certain magnificent superiority over her brother's weakness that Sara smiled to herself at his delusion. And yet she was grieved to think that he should take refuge in such a delusion, and did not show any symptom of real sorrow for his own sin.

Jack had hardly gone when Mr Brownlow came up-stairs. And he too asked Sara why it was that she sat apart in such melancholy majesty. When he had heard the cause, he was more disturbed than

either of his children had been. Sara had supposed that Jack might be trifling with her poor little friend—she thought that he might carry the flirtation so far as to break poor Pamela's heart, perhaps. But Mr Brownlow knew that there were sometimes consequences more serious than even the breaking of hearts. To be sure he judged, not with the awful severity of a woman, but with the leniency of a man of the world; but yet it seemed to him that worse things might happen to poor Pamela than an innocent heartbreak, and his soul was disturbed within him by the thought. He had warned his son, with all the gravity which the occasion required; but Jack was young, and no doubt the warning had been ineffectual. Mr Brownlow was grieved to his soul; and, what was strange enough, it never occurred to him that his son could have behaved as he had done, like a Paladin. Jack's philosophy, which had so little effect upon himself, had deceived his father. Mr Brownlow felt that Jack was not the man to sacrifice his position and prospects and ambitions to an early marriage, and the only alternative was one at which he shuddered. For the truth was, his eye had been much attracted by the bright little face at the gate. It recalled some other face to him—he could not recall whose face. He had thought she was like Sara at first, but it was not Sara. And to

think of that fresh sweet blossoming creature all trodden down into dust and ruin ! The thought made Mr Brownlow's heart contract with positive pain. He went down into the avenue, and walked about there for hours waiting for his son. It must not be, he said to himself—it must not be ! And all this time Jack, not knowing what was in store for him, was hearing over and over again, with much repetition, the story of the envelope and Sara's visit, and was drying Pamela's tears, and laughing at her fright, and asking her gloriously what anybody could do to separate them ?—what could anybody do ? A girl might be subject to her parents ; but who was there who could take away his free-will from a Man ? This was the scope of Jack's conversation, and it was very charming to his hearer. What could any one do against that magnificent force of resolution ? Of course his allowance might be taken from him ; but he could work. They had it all their own way in Mrs Swayne's parlour, though Mrs Swayne herself did not hesitate to express her disapproval ; but as yet Mr John knew nothing about the anxious parent who walked up and down waiting for him on the other side of the gate.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### A DOUBLE HUMILIATION.

JACK entered the avenue that evening in a frame of mind very different from his feelings on his last recorded visit to Swayne's cottage. He had been sitting with Pamela all the evening. Mrs Preston had retired up-stairs with her headache, and, with an amount of good sense for which Jack respected her, did not come down again; and the young fellow sat with Pamela, and the minutes flew on angels' wings. When he came away his feelings were as different as can be conceived from those with which he marched home, resolute but rueful, after his first interview with Mrs Preston. Pamela and her mother were two very different things—the one was duty, and had to be got through with; but the other— Jack went slowly, and took a little notice of the stars, and felt that the evening air was very sweet. He had put his hands lightly in his pockets, not thrust down with savage

force to the depths of those receptacles ; and there was a kind of half smile, the reflection of a smile, about his mouth. Fumes were hanging about the youth of that intoxication which is of all kinds of intoxication the most ethereal. He was softly dazzled and bewildered by a subdued sweetness in the air, and in the trees, and in the sky—something that was nothing perceptible, and yet that kept breathing round him, a new influence in the air. This was the sort of way in which his evenings, perhaps, were always to be spent. It gave a different view altogether of the subject from that which was in Jack's mind on the first dawning of the new life before him. Then he had been able to realise that it would make a wonderful difference in all his plans and prospects, and even in his comforts. Now, the difference looked all the other way. Yes, it would indeed be a difference ! To go in every night, not to Brownlows with his father's intermitting talk and Sara's "tantrums" (this was his brotherly way of putting it), and the monotony of a grave long-established wealthy existence, but into a poor little house full of novelty and freshness, and quaint poverty, and amusing straits, and—Pamela. To be sure that last was the great point. They had been speculating about this wonderful new little house, as was natural, and she had laughed till the tears glistened in her pretty eyes at

thought of all the mistakes she would make—celestial blunders, which even to Jack, sensible as he was, looked (to-night) as if they must be pleasanter and better and every way more fitting than the wisest actions of the other people. In this kind of sweet insanity the young fellow had left his little love. Life somehow seemed to have taken a different aspect to him since that other evening. No doubt it was a serious business ; but then when there are two young creatures, you understand, setting out together, and a hundred chances before them, such as nobody could divine—one to help the other if either should stumble, and two to laugh over everything, and a hundred devices to be contrived, and Crusoe-like experiments in the art of living, and droll little mishaps, and a perpetual sweet variety—the prospect changes. This is why there had come, in the starlight, a sort of reflection of a smile upon Jack's mouth. It was, on the whole, so very considerate and sensible of Mrs Preston to have that headache and stay up-stairs. And Pamela, altogether apart from the fact that she was Pamela, was such charming company—so fresh, so quick, so ready to take up anything that looked like fun, so full of pleasant changes, catching the light upon her at so many points. This bright, rippling, sparkling, limpid stream was to go singing through all his life. He was

thinking of this when he suddenly saw the shadow under the chestnuts, and found that his father had come out to meet him. It was rather a startling interruption to so pleasant a dream.

Jack was very much taken aback, but he did not lose his self-possession; he made a brave attempt to stave off all discussion, and make the encounter appear the most natural thing in the world, as was the instinct of a man up to the requirements of his century. "It's a lovely night," said Jack; "I don't wonder you came out. I've been myself—for a walk. It does a fellow more good than sitting shut up in these stuffy rooms all night."

Now the fact was Jack had been shut up in a very stuffy room, a room smaller than the smallest chamber into which he had ever entered at Brownlows; but there are matters, it is well known, in which young men do not feel themselves bound by the strict limits of fact.

"I was not thinking about the night," said Mr Brownlow; "there are times when a man is glad to move about to keep troublesome things out of his mind; but luckily you don't know much about that."

"I know as much about it as most people, I suppose, sir," said Jack, with a little natural indignation; "but I hope there is nothing particular to put you out—that Wardell case——"

“I was not thinking of the Wardell case either,” said Mr Brownlow, with an impatient momentary smile. “My clients’ miseries don’t impress me so much as they ought to do, perhaps. I was thinking of things nearer home——”

Upon which there was a moment’s pause. If Jack had followed his first impulse, he would have asked, with a little defiance, if it was anything in his conduct to which his father particularly objected. But he was prudent, and refrained; and they took a few steps on together in silence towards the house, which shone in front of them with all its friendly lights.

“No,” said Mr Brownlow, in that reflective way that men think it competent and proper to use when their interlocutor is young, and cannot by any means deny the fact. “You don’t know much about it; the hardest thing that ever came in your way was to persuade yourself to give up a personal indulgence; and even that you have not always done. You don’t understand what *care* means. How should you? Youth is never really occupied with anything but itself.”

“You speak very positively, sir,” said Jack, affronted. “I suppose it’s no use for a man in that selfish condition to say a word in his own defence.”

“I don’t know that it’s selfish—it’s natural,” said

Mr Brownlow ; and then he sighed. " Jack, I have something to say to you. We had a talk on a serious subject some time ago——"

" Yes," said Jack. He saw now what was coming, and set himself to face it. He thrust his hands deep down into his pockets and set up his shoulders to his ears, which was a good warning, had Mr Brownlow perceived it, that, come right or wrong, come rhyme or reason, this rock should fly from its firm base as soon as Jack would—and that any remonstrance on the subject was purely futile. But Mr Brownlow did not perceive.

" I thought you had been convinced," his father continued. " It might be folly on my part to think any sort of reason would induce a young fellow, brought up as you have been, to forego his pleasure ; but I suppose I had a prejudice in favour of my own son, and I thought you saw it in the right point of view. I hear from Sara to-night——"

" I should like to know what Sara has to do with it," said Jack, with an explosion of indignation. " Of course, sir, all you may have to say on this or any other subject I am bound to listen to with respect ; but as for Sara and her interference——"

" Don't be a fool, Jack," said Mr Brownlow, sharply. " Sara has told me nothing that I could not have found out for myself. I warned you, but

it does not appear to have been of any use ; and now I have a word more to say. Look here. I take an interest in this little girl at the gate. There is something in her face that reminds me—but never mind that. I feel sure she's a good girl, and I won't have her harmed. Understand me once for all. You may think it a small matter enough, but it's not a small matter. I won't have that child harmed. If she should come to evil through you, you shall have me to answer to. It is not only her poor mother or any poor friend she may have——”

“Sir,” cried Jack, boiling over, “do you know you are insulting me?”

“Listen to what I am saying,” said his father. “Don't answer. I am in earnest. She is an innocent child, and I won't have her harmed. If you can't keep away from her, have the honesty to tell me so, and I'll find means to get you away. Good Lord, sir! is every instinct of manhood so dead in you that you cannot overcome a vicious inclination, though it should ruin that poor innocent child?”

A perfect flood of fury and resentment swept through Jack's mind ; but he was not going to be angry and lose his advantage. He was white with suppressed passion, but his voice did not swell with anger as his father's had done. It was thus his self-possession that carried the day.

“When you have done, sir,” he said, taking off his hat with a quietness which cost him an immense effort, “perhaps you will hear what I have got to say.”

Mr Brownlow for the moment had lost his temper, which was very foolish. Probably it was because other things too were going wrong, and his sense of justice did not permit him to avenge their contrariety upon the purely innocent. Now Jack was not purely innocent, and here was an outlet. And then he had been walking about in the avenue for more than an hour waiting, and was naturally sick of it. And finally, having lost his own temper, he was furious with Jack for not losing his.

“Speak out, sir,” he cried; “I have done. Not that your speaking can make much difference. I repeat, if you hurt a hair of that child’s head——”

“I will thank you to speak of her in a different way,” said Jack, losing patience also. “You may think me a villain if you please; but how dare you venture to suppose that I *could* bring her to harm? Is *she* nobody? is that all you think of her? By Jove! the young lady you are speaking of, without knowing her,” said Jack, suddenly stopping himself, staring at his father with calm fury, and speaking with deadly emphasis, “is going to be—my wife.”

Mr Brownlow was so utterly confounded that he stood still and stared in his turn at his audacious

son. He gave a start as if some one had shot him ; and then he stood speechless and stared, wondering blankly if some transformation had occurred, or if this was actually Jack that stood before him. It ought to have been a relief to his mind—no doubt if he had been as good a man as he ought to have been, he would have gone down on his knees and given thanks that his son's intentions were so virtuous ; but in the mean time amaze swallowed up every other sentiment. "Your wife !" he said, with the utmost wonder which the human voice is capable of expressing in his voice. The wildest effort of imagination could never have brought him to such an idea—Jack's wife ! His consternation was such that it took the strength out of him. If any one had pushed rudely against him he might have dropped on the ground in the weakness of his amaze. "You might have knocked him down with a feather," was the description old Betty would have given ; and she would have been right.

"Yes," said Jack, with a certain magnificence ; "and as for my power, or any man's power, of *harming*—her. By Jove!—though of course you didn't know——"

This he said magnanimously, being not without pity for the utter downfall which had overtaken his father. Their positions, in fact, had totally changed.

It was Mr Brownlow who was struck dumb. Instead of carrying things with a high hand as he had begun to do, it was he who was reduced into the false position. And Jack was on the whole sorry for his father. He took his hands out of the depths of his pockets, and put down his shoulders into their natural position. And he was willing "to let down easy," as he himself expressed it, the unlucky father who had made such an astounding mistake.

As for Mr Brownlow, it took him some time to recover himself. It was not quite easy to realise the position, especially after the warm, not to say violent, way in which he had been beguiled into taking Pamela's part. He had meant every word of what he said. Her sweet little face had attracted him more than he knew how to explain ; it had reminded him, he could not exactly tell of what, of something that belonged to his youth and made his heart soft. And the thought of pain or shame coming to her through his son had been very bitter to him. But he was not quite ready all the same to say, Bless you, my children. Such a notion, indeed, had never occurred to him. Mr Brownlow had never for a moment supposed that his son Jack, the wise and prudent, could have been led to entertain such an idea ; and he was so much startled that he did not know what to think. After the first pause of amaze-

ment he had gone on again slowly, feeling as if by walking on some kind of mental progress might also be practicable ; and Jack had accompanied him in a slightly jaunty, magnanimous, and forgiving way. Indeed, circumstances altogether had conspired, as it were, in Jack's favour. He could not have hoped for so good an opportunity of telling his story—an opportunity which not only took all that was formidable from the disclosure, but actually presented it in the character of a relief and standing evidence of unthought-of virtue. And Jack was so simple-minded in the midst of his wisdom that it seemed to him as if his father's anticipated opposition were summarily disposed of, to be heard of no more—a thing which he did not quite know whether to be sorry for or glad.

Perhaps it staggered him a little in this idea when Mr Brownlow, after going on, very slowly and thoughtfully, almost to the very door of the house, turned back again, and began to retrace his steps, still as gravely and quietly as ever. Then a certain thrill of anticipation came over Jack. One fytte was ended, but another was for to say. Feeling had been running very high between them when they last spoke ; now there was a certain hushed tone about the talk, as if a cloud had suddenly rolled over them. Mr Brownlow spoke, but he did not look at Jack, nor even look up, but went on moodily, with his eyes

fixed on the ground, now and then stopping to kick away a little stone among the gravel, a pause which became almost tragic by repetition. "Is it long since this happened?" he said, speaking in a very subdued tone of voice.

"No," said Jack, feeling once more the high colour rushing up into his face, though in the darkness there was nobody who could see—"no, only a few days."

"And you said your wife," Mr Brownlow added—"your wife. Whom does she belong to? People don't go so far without knowing a few preliminaries, I suppose?"

"I don't know who she belongs to, except her mother," said Jack, growing very hot; and then he added, on the spur of the moment, "I daresay you think it's not very wise—I don't pretend it's wise—I never supposed it was; but as for the difficulties, I am ready to face them. I don't see that I can say any more."

"I did not express any opinion," said Mr Brownlow, coldly; "no—I don't suppose wisdom has very much to do with it. But I should like to understand. Do you mean to say that everything is settled? or do you only speak in hope?"

"Yes, it is quite settled," said Jack: in spite of himself this cold questioning had made a difference

even in the sound of his voice. It all came before him again in its darker colours. The light seemed to steal out of the prospect before him moment by moment. His face burned in the dark ; he was disgusted with himself for not having something to say ; and gradually he was roused into a state of feverish irritation at the stones which his father took the trouble to kick away, and the crunching of the gravel under his feet.

“ And you have not a penny in the world,” said Mr Brownlow, in his dispassionate voice.

“ No,” said Jack, “ I have not a penny in the world.”

And then there was another pause. The very stars seemed to have gone in, not to look at his discomfiture, poor fellow ! A cold little wind had sprung up, and went moaning out and in eerily among the trees ; even old Betty at the lodge had gone to bed, and there was no light to be seen from her windows. The prospect was black, dreary, very chilling—nothing to be seen but the sky, over which clouds were stealing, and the tree-tops swaying wildly against them ; and the sound of the steps on the gravel. Jack had uttered his last words with great firmness and even a touch of indignation ; but there can be no doubt that heaviness was stealing over his heart.

“ If it had been any one but yourself who told me,

Jack," said his father, "I should not have believed it,—you, of all men in the world. I ought to beg your pardon for misjudging you. I thought you would think of your own pleasure rather than of anybody's comfort, and I was mistaken. I beg your pardon. I am glad to have to make you an apology like this."

"Thanks," said Jack, curtly. It was complimentary, no doubt; but the compliment itself was not complimentary. I beg your pardon for thinking you a villain—that was how it sounded to his ears; and he was not flattered even by his escape.

"But I can't rejoice over the rest," said Mr Brownlow—"it is going against all your own principles, for one thing. You are very young—you have no call to marry for ten years at least—and of course if you wait ten years you will change your mind."

"I have not the least intention of waiting ten years," said Jack.

"Then perhaps you will be so good as to inform me what your intentions are," said his father, with a little irony; "if you have thought at all on the subject, it may be the easier way."

"Of course I have thought on the subject," said Jack; "I hope I am not a fellow to do things without thinking. I don't pretend it is prudent. Prudence is very good, but there are some things that are

better. I mean to get married with the least possible delay."

"And then?" said Mr Brownlow.

"Then, sir, I suppose," said Jack, not without a touch of bitterness, "you will let me remain in the office, and keep my clerkship; seeing that, as you say, I have not a penny in the world."

Then they walked on together again for several minutes in the darkness. It was not wonderful that Jack's heart should be swelling with a sense of injury. Here was he, a rich man's son, with the great park breathing round him in the darkness, and the great house shining behind, with its many lights, and many servants, and much luxury. All was his father's—all, and a great deal more than that; and yet he, his father's only son, had "not a penny in the world." No wonder Jack's heart was very bitter within him; but he was too proud to make a word of complaint.

"You think it cruel of me to say so," Mr Brownlow said, after that long pause; "and so it looks, I don't doubt. But if you knew as much as I do, it would not appear to you so wonderful. I am neither so rich nor so assured in my wealth as people think."

"Do you mean that you have been losing money?" said Jack, who was half touched, in the midst of his discontent, by his father's tone.

"I have been losing—not exactly money," said Mr Brownlow, with a sigh; "but never mind: I can't hide from you, Jack, that you have disappointed me. I feel humbled about it altogether. Not that I am a man to care for worldly advantages that are won by marriage; but yet—— and you did not seem the sort of boy to throw yourself away."

"Look here, father," said Jack; "you may be angry, but I must say one word. I think a man, when he can work for his wife, has a right to marry as he likes—at least *if* he likes," added the young philosopher, hastily, with a desperate thought of his consistency; "but I do think a girl's friends have something to do with it. Yet you set your face against me, and let *that* fellow see Sara constantly—see her alone—talk with her,—I found them in the flower-garden the other day,—and then, by Jove! you pitch into me."

"You are speaking of young Powys," said Mr Brownlow, with sudden dignity; "Powys is a totally different thing—I have told you so before."

"And I have told you, sir, that you are mistaken," said Jack; "How is Powys different? except that he's a young—cad—and never had any breeding. As for any idea you may have in your head about his family—have you ever seen his mother?"

"Have you?" said Mr Brownlow; and his heart,

too, began to beat heavily, as if there could be any sentimental power in that good woman's name.

"Yes," said Jack, in his ignorance; "she is a homely sort of sensible woman, that never could have been anything beyond what she is; and one look at her would prove that to you. I don't mean to say I like people that have seen better days; but you would never suppose she had been anything more than what she is now; she might have been a Masterton shopkeeper's daughter from Chester-gate or Dove Street," Jack continued, "and she would have looked just as she looks now."

Mr Brownlow, in spite of himself, gave a long shuddering sigh. He drew a step apart from his son, and stumbled over a stone in the gravel, not having the heart even to kick it away. Jack's words, though they were so careless and so ignorant, went to his father's heart. As it happened, by some curious coincidence, he had chosen the very locality from which Phoebe Thomson would have come. And it rang into the very centre of that unsuspected target which Mr Brownlow had set up to receive chance shots, in his heart.

"I don't know where she has come from," he said; "but yet I tell you Powys is different; and some day you will know better. But whatever may be done about that has nothing to do with

your own case. I repeat to you, Jack, it is very humbling to me."

Here he stopped short, and Jack was doggedly silent, and had not a word of sympathy to give him. It was true, this second *mésalliance* was a great blow to Mr Brownlow—a greater blow to his pride and sense of family importance than anybody could have supposed. He had made up his mind to it that Sara must marry Powys; that her grandeur and her pretty state could only be secured to her by these means, and that she must pay the price for them—a price which, fortunately, she did not seem to have any great difficulty about. But that Jack should make an ignoble marriage too, that people should be able to say that the attorney's children had gone back to their natural grade, and that all his wealth, and their admittance into higher circles, and Jack's education, and Sara's sovereignty, should end in their marrying, the one her father's clerk, the other the little girl in the cottage at the gate, was a very bitter pill to their father. He had never schemed for great marriages for them, never attempted to bring heirs and heiresses under their notice; but still it was a downfall. Even the Brownlows of Masterton had made very different alliances. It was perhaps a curious sort of thing to strike a man, and a man of business, but never-

theless it was very hard upon him. In Sara's case—if it did come to anything in Sara's case—there was an evident necessity, and there was an equivalent; yet even there Mr Brownlow knew that when the time came to avow the arrangement, it would not be a pleasant office. He knew how people would open their eyes, how the thing would be spoken of, how his motives and *her* motives would be questioned. And to think of Jack adding another story to the wonder of the county! Mr Brownlow did not care much for old Lady Motherwell, but he knew what she would say. She would clasp her old hands together in their brown gloves (if it was morning), and she would say, "They were always very good sort of people, but they were never much in our way—and it is far better they should settle in their own condition of life. I am glad to hear the young people have had so much sense." So the county people would be sure to say, and the thought of it galled Mr Brownlow. He would not have felt it so much had Jack alone been the culprit, and Sara free to marry Sir Charles Motherwell, or any other county potentate; but to think of both!—and of all the spectators that were looking on, and all their comments! It was mere pride and personal feeling, he knew—even feeling that was a little paltry and scarcely

worthy of him—but he could not help feeling the sting and humiliation ; and this perhaps, though it was merely fanciful, was the one thing which galled him most about Jack.

Jack, for his part, had nothing to say in opposition. He opened his eyes a little in the dark to think of this unsuspected susceptibility on his father's part, but he did not think it unjust. It seemed to him on the whole natural enough. It *was* hard upon him, after he had worked and struggled to bring his children into this position. Jack did not understand his father's infatuation in respect to Powys. But he could well enough understand how it might be very painful to him to see his only son make an obscure marriage. He was not offended. He felt for his father, and even he felt for himself, who had the thing to do. It was not a thing he would have approved of for any of his friends, and he did not approve of it in his own case. But he knew it was the only thing he could do ; and after an evening such as that he had passed with little Pamela, he forgot that there was anything in it but delight and sweetness. That, however, was a forgetfulness which could not last long. He had felt it could not last long even while he was taking his brief enjoyment of it ; and he began again fully to realise the other side of the question as he walked

slowly along in the dark by his father's side. The silence lasted a long time, for Mr Brownlow had a great deal to think about. He walked on mechanically almost as far as Betty's cottage, forgetting almost his son's presence, at least forgetting that there was any necessity for keeping up a conversation. At last, however, it was he who spoke.

"Jack," he said, "I wish you would reconsider all this. Don't interrupt me, please. I wish you'd think it all over again. I don't say that I think you very much to blame. She has a sweet face," said Mr Brownlow, with a certain melting of tone, "and I don't say that she may not be as sweet as her face; but still, Jack, you are very young, and it's a very unsuitable match. You are too sensible not to acknowledge that; and it may injure your prospects and cramp you for all your life. In justice both to yourself and your family, you ought to consider all this——"

"As it happens, sir, it is too late to consider," said Jack, "even if I ever could have balanced secondary motives against——"

"Bah!" said Mr Brownlow; and then he added, with a certain impatience, "Don't tell me that you have not balanced—I know you too well for that. I know you have too much sense for that. Of course

you have balanced all the motives. And do you tell me that you are ready to resign all your advantages, your pleasant life here, your position, your prospects, and go and live on a clerk's income in Masterton—all for love?" said Mr Brownlow. He did not mean to sneer, but his voice, as he spoke, took a certain inflection of sarcasm, as perhaps comes natural to a man beyond middle age, when he has such questions to put.

Jack once more thrust his hands into the depths of his pockets, and gloom and darkness came into his heart. Was it the voice of the tempter that was addressing him? But then, had he not already gone over all that ground?—the loss of all comforts and advantages, the clerk's income, the little house at Masterton. "I have already thought of all that," he said, "as you suggest; but it does not make any difference to me." Then he stopped and made a long pause. "If this is all you have to say to me, sir, perhaps it will be best to stop here," said Jack; and he made a pause and turned back again with a certain determination towards the house.

"It is all I have to say," said Mr Brownlow, gravely; and he too turned round, and the two made a solemn march homewards, with scarcely any

talk. This is how Jack's story was told. He had not thought of doing it, and he had found little comfort and encouragement in the disclosure; but still it was made, and that was so much gained. The lights were beginning to be extinguished in the windows, so late and long had been their discussion. But as they came up, Sara became visible at the window of her own room, which opened upon a balcony. She had come to look for them in her pretty white dressing-gown, with all her wealth of hair streaming over her shoulders. It was a very familiar sort of apparel, but still, to be sure, it was only her father and her brother who were witnesses of her little exhibition. "Papa, I could not wait for you," she cried, leaning over the balcony, "I couldn't keep Angelique sitting up. Come and say good-night." When Mr Brownlow went in to obey her, Jack stood still and pondered. There was a difference. Sara would be permitted to make any marriage she pleased—even with a clerk in his father's office; whereas her brother, who ought to have been the principal— However, to do him justice, there was no grudge in Jack's heart. He scorned to be envious of his sister. "Sara will have it all her own way," he said to himself a little ruefully, as he lighted his candle and went up the

great staircase ; and then it occurred to him to wonder what she would do about Pamela. Already he felt himself superseded. It was his to take the clerk's income and subside into inferiority, and Sara was to be the Queen of Brownlows—as indeed she had always been.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### SARA'S OWN AFFAIRS.

SARA'S affairs were perhaps not so interesting, as indeed they were far from being so advanced, as those of Jack; but still all this time they were making progress. It was not without cause that the image of Powys stole across her mental vision when Jack warned her to look at the beam in her own eye. There could be little doubt that Mr Brownlow had encouraged Powys. He had asked him to come generally, and he had added to this many special invitations, and sometimes, indeed, when Jack was not there, had given the young man a seat in the dog-cart, and brought him out. All this was very confusing, not to Sara, who, as she thought, saw into the motives of her father's conduct, and knew how it was; but to the clerk in Mr Brownlow's office, who felt himself thus singled out, and could not but perceive that no one else had the same privilege. It

filled him with many wondering and even bewildered thoughts. Perhaps at the beginning it did not strike him so much, semi-republican as he was; but he was quick-witted, and when he looked about him, and saw that his neighbours did not get the same advantages, the young Canadian felt that there must be something in it. He was taken in, as it were, to Mr Brownlow's heart and home, and that not without a purpose, as was told him by the angry lines in Jack's forehead. He was taken in and admitted into habits of intimacy, and had Sara, as it were, given over to him; and what did it mean? for that it must mean something he could not fail to see.

Thus young Powys's position was very different from that of Jack. Jack had been led into his scrape unwittingly, having meant nothing. But it would have been impossible for Powys to act in the same way. To him unconsciousness was out of the question. He might make it clear to himself, in a dazzled self-conscious way, that his own excellence could have nothing to do with it; that it must be accident, or good fortune, or something perfectly fortuitous; but yet withal the sense remained that he and no other had been chosen for this privilege, and that it could not be for nothing. He was modest and he had good sense, more than could have been expected from his age and circumstances; but yet everything

conspired to make him forget these sober qualities. He had not permitted himself so much as to think at his first appearance that Miss Brownlow, too, was a young human creature like himself. He had said to himself, on the contrary, that she was of a different species, that she was as much out of his reach as the moon or the stars, and that if he suffered any folly to get into his head, of course he would have to suffer for it. But the folly had got into his head, and he had not suffered. He had been left with her, and she had talked to him, and made everything very sweet to his soul. She had dropped the magic drop into his cup, which makes the mildest draught intoxicating, and the poor young fellow had felt the subtle charm stealing over him, and had gone on bewildered, justifying himself by the tacit encouragement given him, and not knowing what to think or what to do. He knew that between her and him there was a gulf fixed. He knew that of all men in the world he was the last to conceive any hopes in which such a brilliant little princess as Sara could be involved. It was doubly and trebly out of the question. He was not only a poor clerk, but he was a poor clerk with a family to support. It was all mere madness and irredeemable folly; but still Mr Brownlow took him out to his house, and still he saw, and was led into intimate companionship with, his master's

daughter. And what could it mean, or how could it end?

Powys fell into such a maze at last, that he went and came unconsciously in a kind of insanity. Something must come of it one of these days. Something;—a volcanic eruption and wild blazing up of earth and heaven—a sudden plunge into madness or into darkness. It was strange, very strange to him, to think what Mr Brownlow could mean by it; he was very kind to him—almost paternal—and yet he was exposing him to this trial, which he could neither fly from nor resist. Thus poor Powys pondered to himself many a time, while, with a beating heart, he went along the road to Brownlows. He could have delivered himself, no doubt, if he would, but he did not want to deliver himself. He had let all go in a kind of desperation. It must end, no doubt, in some dreadful sudden downfall of all his hopes. But indeed he had no hopes; he knew it was madness; yet it was a madness he was permitted, even encouraged in; and he gave himself up to it, and let himself float down the stream, and said to himself that he would shut his eyes, and take what happiness he could get in the present moment, and shut out all thoughts of the future. This he was doing with a kind of thrill of prodigal delight, selling his birth-right for a mess of pottage, giving up all the fresh-

ness of his heart, and all its force of early passion, for what?—for nothing. To throw another flower in the path of a girl who trod upon nothing but flowers; this was what he felt it to be in his saner moments. But the influence of that sanity never stopped him in what he was doing. He had never in his life met with anything like her, and if she chose to have this supreme luxury of a man's heart and life offered up to her all for nothing—what then? He was not the man to grudge her that richest and most useless gift. It was not often he went so deep as this, or realised what a wild course he was embarked on: but when he did, he saw the matter clearly enough, and knew how it must be.

As for Sara, she was very innocent of any such thoughts. She was not the girl to accept such a holocaust. If she had known what was in his heart possibly she might have scorned him for it; but she never suspected what was passing in his heart. She did not know of that gulf fixed. His real position, that position which was so very true and unquestionable to him, was not real at all to Sara. He was a fairy prince, masquerading under that form for some reason known to himself and Mr Brownlow; or if not that, then he was the man to whom, according to her father's will, she was to give herself blindly out of pure filial devotion. Anyhow something secret,

mysterious, beyond ordinary ken, was in it ; something that gave piquancy to the whole transaction. She was not receiving a lover in a commonplace sort of way when she entertained young Powys, but was instead a party to an important transaction, fulfilling a grand duty, either to her father menaced by some danger, or to a hero transformed whom only the touch of a true maiden could win back to his rightful shape. As it happened, this fine devotion was not disagreeable to her ; but Sara felt, no doubt, that she would have done her duty quite as unswervingly had the fairy prince been bewitched into the person of the true Beast of the story instead of that of her father's clerk.

It was a curious sort of process to note, had there been any spectator by sufficiently at ease to note it ; but there was not, unless indeed Mr Harcastle and Fanny might have stood in that capacity. As for the Rector, he washed his hands of it. He had delivered his own soul just as Mrs Swayne had delivered hers in respect to the other parties. He had told Mr Brownlow very plainly what his opinion was, as they sat together after dinner ; and Fanny, at the same time, delivered her little lecture to Sara. They had been dining at Brownlows, and there were no other guests, and the two girls were alone in the drawing-room, in that little half-hour which the gen-

tlemen spent over their temperate glass of claret. It is an hour much bemoaned by fast young women, but, as the silent majority are aware, it is not an unpleasant hour. Fanny Hardcastle and Sara Brownlow were great friends in their way. They were in the habit of seeing each other continually, of going to the same places, of meeting the same people. It was not exactly a friendship of natural affinity, but rather of proximity, which answers very well in many cases. Probably Fanny, for her part, was not capable of anything more enthusiastic. They told each other everything—that is, they each told the other as much as that other could understand. Fanny, by instinct, refrained from putting before Sara all the prudences and sensible restrictions that existed in her own thoughts; and Sara, equally by instinct, was dumb about her own personal feelings and fancies, except now and then when carried away by their vehemence. “She would not understand me, you know,” both of them would have said. But to-night Fanny had taken upon herself the prophetic office. She, too, had her burden of warning to deliver, and to free her own soul from all responsibility in her neighbour’s fate.

“Sara,” she said, “I saw you the other day when you did not see me. You were in the park—down there, look, under that tree; and *that* Mr

Powys was with you. You know I once saw him here."

"I do not call that the park—I call that the avenue," said Sara; but she saw that her companion spoke with *intention*, and a certain quickening of colour came to her face.

"You may call it anything you please, but I am sure it *is* the park," said Fanny, "and I want to speak to you about it. I am sure I don't know who Mr Powys is; I daresay he is very nice; but *do* you think it is quite right walking about with him like that? You told me yourself he was in your papa's office. You know, Sara dear, I wouldn't say a word to you if it wasn't for your good."

"What is for my good?" said Sara—"walking in the park? or having you to speak to me? As for Mr Powys, I don't suppose you know anything about him, so of course you can't have anything to say."

"I wish you would not gallop on like that and take away one's breath," said Fanny. "Of course I don't know anything about him. He may be very nice—I am sure I can't say; or he may be very amusing—they often are," Fanny added, with a sigh, "when they are no good. But don't go walking and talking with him, Sara; don't, there's a dear; people will talk; you *know* how they talk. And if he is only in your papa's office——"

"I don't see what difference that can possibly make," said Sara, with a little vehemence.

"But it does make a difference," said Fanny, once more with a sigh. "If he were ever so nice, it could be *no good*. Mr Brownlow may be very kind to him, but he would never let you marry him, Sara. Yes, of course, that is what it must come to. A girl should not stray about in the park with a man unless he was a man that she could marry if he asked her,—I don't mean to say that she *would* marry, but at least that she could. And, besides, a girl owes a duty to herself even if her father would consent. You, in your position, ought to make a very different match."

"You little worldly-minded wretch," cried Sara, "have you nearly done?"

"Anybody would tell you so as well as me," said Fanny. "You might have had that big Sir Charles if you had liked. Papa is only a poor clergyman, and we have not the place in society we might have; but you can go everywhere, you who are so rich. And then the gentlemen always like you. If you were to make a poor marriage it would be a shame."

"When did you learn all that?" said Fanny's hearer, aghast. "As if I would marry a man because it would be a good marriage! I wonder what you take me for, that you speak so to me!"

“Then what should you marry for?” said little Fanny, with a toss of her pretty head.

“For!” cried Sara, “not for anything! for nothing at all! I hate marrying. To think a girl cannot live in this world without having *that* thrust into her face! What should I marry anybody for? But I shall do what I like, and walk when I like, and talk to anybody that pleases me,” cried the impetuous young woman. Her vehemence brought a flush to her face and something like tears into her eyes; and Fanny, for her part, looked on very gravely at an appearance of feeling of which she entirely disapproved.

“I daresay you will take your own way,” she said —“you always did take your own way; but at least you can’t say I did not warn you; and I hope you will never be sorry for not having listened to me, Sara. I love you all the same,” said Fanny, giving her friend a soft little kiss. Sara did not return this salutation with the warmth it deserved. She was flushed and angry and impatient, and yet disposed to laugh.

“You don’t hope anything of the sort,” she said; “you hope I shall live to be very sorry.” This was how the warning ended in the drawing-room. It was more elegantly expressed than it had been by Mrs Swayne and old Betty; but yet the burden of the prophecy was in some respects the same.

When Sara thought over it at a later period of the night, she laughed a little in her own mind at poor Fanny's ignorance. Could she but know that the poor clerk was an enchanted prince! Could she but guess that it was in pure obedience to her father's wishes that she had given him such a reception! When he appeared in his true shape, whatever that might be, how uncomfortable little Fanny would feel at the recollection of what she had said! And then Sara took to guessing and wondering what his true shape might be. She was not romantic to speak of in general. She was only romantic in her own special case; and when she came to think of it seriously, her good sense came to her aid,—or rather not to her aid—to her hindrance and confusion and bewilderment. Sara knew very well that in those days people were not often found out to be princes in disguise. She knew even that for a clerk in her father's office to turn out the heir to a peerage or even somebody's son would be so unusual as to be almost incredible. And what, then, could her father mean? Neither was Mr Brownlow the sort of man to pledge his soul on his daughter in any personal emergency. Yet some cause there must be. When she had come this length, a new sense seemed suddenly to wake up in Sara's bosom, perhaps only the result of her own thoughts, perhaps suggested, though

she would not have allowed that, by Fanny Hardcastle's advice—a sudden sense that she had been coming down from her natural sphere, and that her father's clerk was not a fit mate for her. She was very generous, and hasty, and highflown, and fond of her father, and fond of amusement—and moved by all these qualities and affections together she had jumped at the suggestion of Mr Brownlow's plan; but perhaps she had never once thought seriously of it as it affected herself until that night. Now it suddenly occurred to her how people might talk. Strangely enough, the same thought which had been bitterness to her father, stung her also, as soon as her eyes were opened. Miss Brownlow of Brownlows, who had refused, or the same thing as refused, Sir Charles Motherwell—whom young Keppel had regarded afar off as utterly beyond his reach—the daughter of the richest man, and herself one of the most popular (Sara did not even to herself say the prettiest; she might have had an inkling of that too, but certainly she did not put it into articulate thought) girls in the county—she bending from her high estate to the level of a lawyer's clerk; she going back to the hereditary position, reminding everybody that she was the daughter of the Master-ton attorney, showing the low tastes which one generation of higher culture could not be supposed

to have effaced! How could she do it? If she had been a duke's daughter it would not have mattered. In such a case nobody could have thought of hereditary low tastes; but now——

As Sara mused, the colour grew hotter and hotter in her cheeks. To think that it was only now, so late in the day, that this occurred to her, after she had gone so far in the way of carrying out her father's wishes! To think that he could have imposed such a sacrifice upon her! Sara's heart smarted and stung her in her breast as she thought of it. And then there suddenly came up a big indignant blob of warm dew in either eye, which was not for her father nor for her own dignity, but for something else about which she could not parley with herself. And then she rushed at her candles and put them out, and threw herself down on her bed. The fact was that she did sleep in half an hour at the farthest, though she did not mean to, and thus escaped from her thoughts; but that was not what she calculated upon. She calculated on lying awake all night, and saying many very pointed and grievous things to her father when in the morning he should ask her the meaning of her pale face and heavy eyes; but unfortunately her cheeks were as fresh as the morning when the morning duly came, and her eyes as bright, and Mr Brownlow,

seeing no occasion for it, asked no questions, but had himself to submit to inquiries and condolences touching a bad night and a pale face. He too had been moved by Mr Hardcastle's warning—moved, not of course to any sort of acceptance of the Rector's advice, but only to the length of being uncomfortable, while taking his own way, which is at all times the only one certain result of good advice.

All this made no difference in the progress of affairs. As it happened, this was one of the days on which Powys was invited to Brownlaws; and he came as if nothing had happened. Sara received him with a stateliness that chilled the poor young fellow to his heart. He too had many thoughts, and just at that moment was wondering with an intensity which put all the others to shame how it could possibly end, and what his honour required of him, and what sort of a grey and weary desert life would be after this dream was over. It seemed to him absolutely as if the dream was coming to an end that night. Jack, who was never very courteous to the visitor, left them immediately after dinner, and Mr Brownlow retired to the library for some time, and Powys had no choice but to go where his heart had gone before him, up to the drawing-room where Sara sat alone. Of course she ought to have had a

chaperone; but then this young man, being only a clerk from the office, did not count.

She was seated in the window, close to the Claude, which had been the first thing that brought these two together; but to-night she was in no meditative mood. She had provided herself with work, and was labouring at it fiercely in a way which Powys had never seen before. And he did not know that her heart too was beating very fast, and that she had been wondering and wondering whether he would have the courage to come up-stairs. He had taken courage to do so, but now that he was there, he did not know what to say. He came up to her at first, but she kept on working and did not take any notice of him, she who up to this moment had always been so sweet. The poor young fellow was cast down to the very depths; he thought they had but taken him up and played upon him for their amusement, and that now the end had come. And he tried, but ineffectually, to comfort himself with the thought that he had always known it must come to an end. Almost, when he saw her silence, her absorbed looks, the constrained little glance she gave him as he came into the room, he expected that Sara herself would say something to bring the dream to a distinct conclusion. If she had told him that she divined his presumption, and that he was never more to enter

that room again, he would not have been surprised. It had been a false position throughout—he knew that, and he knew that it must come to an end.

But, in the mean time, a fair face must be put upon it. Powys, though he was a backwoodsman, knew enough of life, or had sufficient instinct of its requirements, to know that. So he went up to the Claude, and looked at it sadly, with a melancholy he could not restrain.

“It is as you once said, Miss Brownlow,” said Powys—“always the same gleam and the same ripples. I can understand your objections to it now.”

“The Claude?” said Sara, with unnecessary vehemence, “I hate it. I think I hate all pictures; they are so everlastingly the same thing. Did Jack go out, Mr Powys, as you came up-stairs?”

“Yes; he went out just after you had left us,” said Powys, glad to find something less suggestive on which to speak.

“Again?” said Sara, plunging at the new subject with an energy which proved it to be a relief to her also. “He is so strange. I don’t know if papa told you; he is giving us a great deal of trouble just now. I am afraid he has got fond of somebody very, very much below him. It will be a dreadful thing for us if it turns out to be true.”

Poor Powys's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He gave a wistful look at his tormentor, full of a kind of dumb entreaty. What did she say it for? was it for him, without even the satisfaction of plain speaking, to send him away for ever?

"Of course, you don't know the circumstances," said Sara; "but you can fancy when he is the only son—— I don't think you ever took to Jack; but of course he is a great deal to papa and me."

"I think it was your brother who never took to me," said Powys; "he thought I had no business here."

"He had no right to think so, when papa thought differently," said Sara; "he was always very disagreeable; and now to think he should be as foolish as any of us." When she had said this, Sara suddenly recollected herself, and gave a glance up at her companion to see if he had observed her indiscretion. Then she went on hastily, with a rising colour, "I wish you would tell me, Mr Powys, how it was that you first came to know papa."

"It is very easy," said Powys; but there he too paused, and grew red, and stopped short in his story with a reluctance that had nothing to do with pride. "I went to him seeking employment," he continued, making an effort, and smiling a sickly smile. He knew she must know that, but yet it cost him a

struggle; and somehow everything seemed to have changed so entirely since those long-distant days.

“And you never knew him before?” said Sara—  
“nor your father?—nor anybody belonging to you?  
—I do so want to know.”

“You are surprised that he has been so kind to me,” said Powys, with a pang; “and it is natural you should. No, there is no reason for it that I know of, except his own goodness. He meant to be very, very kind to me,” the young fellow added, with a certain pathos. It seemed to him as he spoke that Mr Brownlow had in reality been very cruel to him, but he did not say it in words. Sara, for her part, gave him a little quick fugitive glance; and it is possible, though no explanation was given, that she understood what he did not speak.

“That was not what I meant,” she said, quickly; “only I thought there was something—and then about your family, Mr Powys?” she said, looking up into his face with a curiosity she could not restrain. Certainly, the more she thought it over the more it amazed her. What could her father mean?

“I have no family that I know of,” said Powys, with a momentary smile, “except my mother and my little sisters. I am poor, Miss Brownlow, and of

no account whatever. I never saved Mr Brownlow's life, nor did anything he could be grateful to me for. And I did not know you nor this house," he went on, "when your father brought me here. I did not know, and I could live without—— Don't ask me any more questions, please; for I fear I don't know what I am saying to-day."

Here there was a pause, for Sara, though fearless enough in most cases, was a little alarmed by his suppressed vehemence. She was alarmed, and at the same time she was softened, and her inquisitiveness was stronger than her prudence. His very prayer that she would ask him no more questions quickened her curiosity; and it was not in her to refrain for fear of the danger—in that, as in most other amusements, "the danger's self was lure alone."

"But I hope you don't regret having been brought here," she said softly, looking up at him. It was a cruel speech, and the look and the tone were more cruel still. If she had meant to bring him to her feet, she could not have done anything better adapted to her purpose; and she did not mean to bring him to her feet. She did it only out of a little personal feeling and a little sympathy, and the perversity of her heart.

Powys started violently, and gave her a look under which Sara, courageous as she was, actually

trembled ; and the next thing he did was to turn his back upon her, and look long and intently at the nearest picture. It was not the Claude this time. It was a picture of a woman holding out a piece of bread to a beggar at her door. The wretch, in his misery, was crouching by the wall and holding out his hand for it, and within were the rosy children, well-fed and comfortable, looking large-eyed upon the want without. The young man thought it was symbolical, as he stood looking at it, quivering all over with emotion which he was labouring to shut up in his own breast. She was holding out the bread of life to him, but it would never reach his lips. He stood struggling to command himself, forgetting everything but the desperation of that struggle, betraying himself more than any words could have done—fighting his fight of honour and truth against temptation. Sara saw all this, and the little temptress was not satisfied. It would be difficult to tell what impulse possessed her. She had driven him very far, but not yet to the furthest point ; and she could not give up her experiment at its very height.

“ But you do not answer my question,” she said, very softly. The words were scarcely out of her lips, the tingle of compunction had not begun in her heart, when her victim’s strength gave way. He

turned round upon her with a wild breathlessness that struck Sara dumb. She had seen more than one man who supposed he was "in love" with her; but she had never seen passion before.

"I would regret it," he said, "if I had any sense or spirit left; but I have not, and I don't regret. Take it all—take it!—and then scorn it. I know you will. What could you do but scorn it? It is only my heart and my life; and I am young and shall have to live on hundreds of years, and never see your face again."

"Mr Powys?" said Sara in consternation, turning very pale.

"Yes," he said, melting out of the momentary swell of excitement, "I think I am mad to say so. I don't grudge it. It is no better than a flower that you will put your foot on; and now that I have told you, I know it is all over. But I don't grudge it. It was not your doing; and I would rather give it to you to be flung away than to any other woman. Don't be angry with me—I shall never see you again."

"Why?" said Sara, not knowing what she said—"what is it?—what have I done? Mr Powys, I don't think you—either of us—know what you mean. Let us forget all about it. You said you did not know what you were saying to-day."

“ But I have said it,” said the young man in his excitement. I did not mean to betray myself, but now it is all over. I can never come here again. I can never dare look at you again. And it is best so ; every day was making it worse. God bless you, though you have made me miserable. I shall never see your face again.”

“ Mr Powys !” cried Sara, faintly.

But he was gone beyond hearing of her voice. He had not sought even to kiss her hand, as a despairing lover has a prescriptive right to do, much less the hem of her robe, as they do in romances. He was gone in a whirlwind of wild haste, and misery, and passion. She sat still, with her lips apart, her eyes very wide open, her face very white, and listened to his hasty steps going away into the outside world. He was gone—quite gone, and Sara sat aghast. She could not cry ; she could not speak ; she could but listen to his departing steps, which echoed upon her heart as it seemed. Was it all over ? Would he never see her face again, as he said ? Had she made him miserable ? Sara’s face grew whiter and whiter as she asked herself these questions. Of one thing there could be no doubt, that it was she who had drawn this explanation from him. He had not wished to speak, and she had made him speak. And this was the end. If a sudden thunderbolt had fallen before

her, she could not have been more startled and dismayed. She never stirred for an hour or more after he had left her. She let the evening darken round her, and never asked for lights. Everything was perfectly still, yet she was deafened by the noises in her ears, her heart beating, and voices rising and contending in it which she had never heard before. And was this the end? She was sitting still in the window like a thing in white marble when the servant came in with the lamp, and he had almost stumbled against her as he went to shut the window and yelled with terror, thinking it was a ghost. It was only then that Sara regained command of herself. Was it all over from to-night?

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### DESPAIR.

It was nearly two hours after this when Jack Brownlow met Powys at the gate. It was a moonlight night, and the white illumination which fell upon the departing visitor perhaps increased the look of excitement and desperation which might have been apparent even to the most indifferent passer-by. He had been walking very quickly down the avenue; his boots and his dress gleamed in the moonlight as if he had been burying himself among the wet grass and bushes in the park. His hat was over his brows, his face haggard and ghastly. No doubt it was partly the effect of the wan and ghostly moonlight, but still there must have been something more in it, or Jack, who loved him little, would not have stopped as he did to see what was the matter. Jack was all the more bent upon stopping that he could see Powys did not wish it, and all sorts of

hopes and suspicions sprang up in his mind. His father had dismissed the intruder, or he had so far forgotten himself as to betray his feelings to Sara, and she had dismissed him. Once more curiosity came in Powys's way. Jack was so resolute to find out what it was that, for the first time in his life, he was friendly to his father's clerk. "Are you walking?" he said; "I'll go with you a little way. It is a lovely night."

"Yes," said Powys; and he restrained his headlong course a little. It was all he could do—that, and to resist the impulse to knock Jack down and be rid of him. It might not have been so very easy, for the two were tolerably well matched; but poor Powys was trembling with the force of passion, and would have been glad of any opportunity to relieve himself either in the way of love or hatred. Nothing of this description, however, seemed practicable to him. The two young men walked down the road together, keeping a little apart, young, strong, tall, full of vigour, and with a certain likeness in right of their youth and strength. There should even have been the sympathy between them which draws like to like. And yet how unlike they were! Jack had taken his fate in his hand, and was contemplating with a cheerful daring, which was half ignorance, a descent to the position in which his companion stood.

It would be sweetened in his case by all the ameliorations possible, or so at least he thought; and, after all, what did it matter? Whereas Powys was smarting under the miserable sense of having been placed in a false position in addition to all the pangs of unhappy love, and of having betrayed himself and the confidence put in him, and sacrificed his honour, and cut himself off for ever from the delight which still might have been his. All these pains and troubles were struggling together within him. He would have felt more keenly still the betrayal of the trust his employer had placed in him, had he not felt bitterly that Mr Brownlow had subjected him to temptations which it was not in flesh and blood to bear. Thus every kind of smart was accumulated within the poor young fellow's spirit—the sense of guilt, the sense of being hardly used, the consciousness of having shut himself out from paradise, the knowledge, beyond all, that his love was hopeless and all the light gone out of his life. It may be supposed how little inclination he had to enter into light conversation, or to satisfy the curiosity of Jack.

They walked on together in complete silence for some minutes, their footsteps ringing in harmony along the level road, but their minds and feelings as much out of harmony as could be conceived. Jack was the first to speak. "It's pleasant walking to-

night," he said, feeling more conciliatory than he could have thought possible; "how long do you allow yourself from here to Masterton? It is a good even road."

"Half-an-hour," said Powys, carelessly.

"Half-an-hour! that's quick work," said Jack. "I don't think you'll manage that to-night. I have known that mare of mine do it in twenty minutes; but I don't think you could match her pace."

"She goes very well," said the Canadian, with a moderation which nettled Jack.

"Very well! I never saw anything go like her," he said—"that is, with a cart behind her. "What kind of cattle have you in Canada? I suppose there's good sport there of one kind or another. Shouldn't you like to go back?"

"I *am* going back," said Powys. He said it in the depth of his despair, and it startled himself as soon as it was said. Go back? yes! that was the only thing to do—but how?

"Really?" said Jack, with surprise and no small relief; and then a certain human sentiment awoke within him. "I hope you haven't had a row with the governor?" he said; "it always seemed to me he had too great a fancy for you. I beg your pardon for saying so just now, especially if you're vexed; but look here—I'm not much of a one for a peacemaker; but if you don't mind telling me what it's about——"

"I have had no row with Mr Brownlow; it is worse than that," said Powys; "it is past talking of; I have been both an ass and a knave, and there's nothing for me but to take myself out of everybody's way."

Once more Jack looked at him in the moonlight, and saw that quick heave of the breast which betrayed the effort he was making to keep himself down, and a certain spasmodic quiver in his lip.

"I wouldn't be too hasty if I were you," he said. "I don't think you can have been a knave. We're all of us ready enough to make fools of ourselves," the young philosopher added, with a touch of fellow-feeling. "You and I haven't been over good friends, you know, but you might as well tell me what it's all about."

"You were quite right," said Powys, hastily. "I ought never to have come up here. And it was not my doing. It was a false position all along. A man oughtn't to be tempted beyond his strength. Of course I have nobody to blame but myself. I don't suppose I would be a knave about money or anything of that sort. But it's past talking of; and besides I could not, even if it were any good, make a confidant of you."

It was not difficult for Jack to divine what this despair meant, and he was touched by the delicacy

which would not name his sister's name. "I lay a hundred pounds it's Sara's fault," he said to himself. But he gave no expression to the sentiment. And of course it was utterly beyond hope, and the young fellow in Powys's position who should yield to such a temptation must indeed have made an ass of himself. But in the circumstances Jack was not affronted at the want of confidence.

"I don't want to pry into your affairs," he said. "I don't like it myself; but I would not do anything hastily if I were you. A man mayn't be happy, but, so far as I can see, he must live all the same."

"Yes, that's the worst," said Powys; "a fellow can't give in and get done with it. Talk is no good; but I shall have to go. I shall speak to your father to morrow, and then—— Good-night. Don't come any further. I've been all about the place to say good-bye. I am glad to have had this talk with you first. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Jack, grasping the hand of his fellow. Their hands had never met in the way of friendship before. Now they clasped each other warmly with an instinctive sympathy. Powys's mind was so excited with other things, and so full of supreme emotion, that this occurrence, though startling enough, did not have much effect upon

him. But it made a very different impression upon Jack, who was full of surprise and compunction, and turned, after he had made a few steps in the direction of Brownlows, with a reluctant idea of "doing something" for the young fellow who was so much less lucky than himself. It was a reluctant idea, for he was prejudiced, and did not like to give up his prejudices, though at the same time he was generous, and could not but feel for a brother in misfortune. But Powys was already far on his way, out of hearing, and almost out of sight. "He will do it in the half-hour," Jack said to himself, with admiration. "By Jove! how the fellow goes! and I'll lay you anything it's all Sara's fault." He was very hard upon Sara in the revulsion of his feelings. Of course she could have done nothing but send her presumptuous admirer away. But, then, had she not led him on and encouraged him? "The little flirt!" Jack said to himself; and just then he was passing Swayne's cottage, which lay in the deep blackness of the shadow made by the moonlight. He looked up tenderly at the light that burned in the upper window. He had grown foolish about that faint little light, as was only natural. There was one who was no flirt, who never would have tempted any man and drawn him on to the breaking of his heart. From the height of his own good-fortune Jack looked down

upon poor Powys speeding along with despair in his soul along the Masterton road. Something of that soft remorse which is the purest bloom of personal happiness softened his thoughts. Poor Powys! And there was nothing that could be done for him. He could not compel his fate as Jack himself could do. For him there was nothing in store but the relinquishment of all hope, the giving up of all dreams. The thought made Jack feel almost guilty in his own independence and wellbeing. Perhaps he could yet do or say something that would smooth the other's downfall,—persuade him to remain at least at Masterton, where he need never come in the way of the little witch who had beguiled him, and afford him his own protection and friendship instead. As Jack thought of the little house that he himself, separated from Brownlows and its comforts, was about to set up at Masterton, his benevolence towards Powys grew still stronger. He was a fellow with whom a man could associate on emergency; and no doubt this was all Sara's fault. He went home to Brownlows disposed to stand Powys's friend if there was any question of him. But when Jack reached home there was no question of Powys. On the whole it was not a cheerful house into which he entered. Lights were burning vacantly in the drawing-room, but there was nobody there. Lights were burning

dimly down-stairs. It looked like a deserted place as he went up and down the great staircase, and through the silent rooms, and found nobody. Mr Brownlow himself was in the library with the door shut, where, in the present complexion of affairs, Jack did not care to disturb him; and Miss Sara had gone to bed with a headache, he was told, when, after searching for her everywhere, he condescended to inquire. Sara was not given to headaches, and the intimation startled her brother. And he went and sat in the drawing-room alone, and stared at the lights, and contrasted this solitary grandeur with the small house whose image was in his mind. The little cozy, tiny, sunshiny place, where one little bright face would always smile; where there would always be some one ready to listen, ready to be interested, ready to take a share in everything. The picture looked very charming to him after the dreariness of this great room, and Sara gone to bed, and poor Powys banished and broken-hearted. That was not to be his own fate, and Jack grew pious and tender in his self-gratulations. After all, poor Powys was a very good sort of fellow; but as it happened, it was Jack who had drawn all the prizes of life. He did think at one time of going down-stairs notwithstanding the delicate state of his own relations with his father, and making such excuses as were practicable

for the unfortunate clerk, who had permitted himself to be led astray in this foolish manner. "Of course it was a great risk bringing him here at all," Jack thought of saying, that Mr Brownlow might be brought to a due sense of his own responsibility in the matter; but after long consideration, he wisely reflected that it would be best to wait until the first parties to the transaction had pronounced themselves. If Sara did not mean to say anything about it, nor Powys, why should he interfere? upon which conclusion, instead of going down-stairs, he went to bed, thinking again how cheerless it was for each member of the household to start off like this without a single good-night, and how different it would be in the new household that was to come.

Sara came to breakfast next morning looking very pale. The colour had quite gone out of her cheeks, and she had done herself up in a warm velvet jacket, and had the windows closed as soon as she came into the room. "They never will remember that the summer's over," she said, with a shiver, as she took her place; but she made no further sign of any kind. Clearly she had no intention of complaining of her rash lover;—so little, indeed, that when Mr Brownlow was about to go away, she held out a book to him timidly, with a sudden blush. "Mr Powys forgot to take this with him last night; would you

mind taking it to him, papa?" she said, very meekly; and as Jack looked at her, Sara blushed redder and redder. Not that she had any occasion to blush. It might be meant as an olive-branch, or even a pledge of hope; but still it was only a book that Powys had left behind him. Mr Brownlow accepted the charge with a little surprise, and he, too, looked at her so closely that it was all she could do to restrain a burst of tears.

"Is it such a wonder that I should send back a book when it is left?" she cried, petulantly. "You need not take it unless you like, papa; it can always go by the post."

"I will take it," said Mr Brownlow; and Jack sat by rather grimly, and said nothing. Jack was very variable and uncertain just at that moment in his own feelings. He had not forgotten the melting of his heart on the previous night; but if he had seen any tokens of relenting on the part of his sister towards the presumptuous stranger, Jack would have again hated Powys. He even observed with suspicion that his father took little notice of Sara's agitation; that he shut his eyes to it, as it were, and took her book, and evaded all further discussion. Jack himself was not going to Masterton that day. He had to see that everything was in order for the next day, which was the 1st of September. So far had the season

wheeled round imperceptibly while all the variations of this little domestic drama were ripening to their appointed end.

Jack, however, did not go to inspect his gun, and consult with the gamekeeper, immediately on his father's departure. He waited for a few minutes, while Sara, who had been so cold, rushed to the window, and threw it open. "There must be thunder in the air—one can scarcely breathe," she said. And Jack watched her jealously, and did not lose a single look.

"You were complaining of cold just now," he said. "Sara, mind what you are about. If you think you can play that young Powys at the end of your line, you're making a great mistake."

"Play whom?" cried Sara, blazing up. "You are a nice person to preach to me! I am playing nobody at the end of my line. I have no line to play with; and you that are deceiving that poor little simple Pamela——"

"Be quiet, will you?" said Jack, furious. "That poor little simple Pamela, as you call her, is going to be my wife."

Sara gazed at him for a moment, thunderstruck, standing like something made into stone, with her velvet jacket, which she had just taken off, in her hands. Then the colour fled from her cheeks as

quickly as it had come to them, and her great eyes filled suddenly, like crystal cups, with big tears. She threw the jacket down out of her hands, and rushed to her brother's side, and clasped his arm. "You don't mean it, Jack?—do you mean it?" she cried, piteously, gazing up into his face; and a crowd of different emotions, more than Jack could discriminate or divine, was in her voice. There was pleasure and there was sorrow, and sharp envy and pride and regret. She clasped his arm, and looked at him with a look which said—"How could you?—how dare you?—and, Oh, how lucky you are to be able to do it!"—all in a breath.

"Of course I mean it," said Jack, a little roughly; but he did not mean to be rough. "And that is why I tell you it is odious of you, Sara, to tempt a man to his destruction, when you know you can do nothing for him but break his heart."

"Can't I?" said Sara, dropping from his arm, with a faint little moan; and then she turned quickly away, and hid her face in her hands. Jack, for his part, felt he was bound to improve the occasion, though his heart smote him. He stood secure on his own pedestal of virtue, though he did not want her to copy him. Indeed, such virtue in Sara would have been little short of vice.

"Nothing else," said Jack, "and yet you creatures

do it without ever thinking of the sufferings you cause. I saw the state that poor fellow was in when he left you last night; and now you begin again sending him books! What pleasure can you have in it? It is something inconceivable to me."

This Jack uttered with a superiority and sense of goodness so lofty that Sara's tears dried up. She turned round in a blaze of indignation, too much offended to trust herself to answer. "You may be an authority to Pamela, but you are not an authority to me," she cried, drawing herself up to her fullest state. But she did not trust herself to continue the warfare. The tears were lying too near the surface, and Sara had been too much shaken by the incident of the previous night. "I am not going to discuss my own conduct with you; you can go and talk to Pamela about it," she added, pausing an instant at the door of the room before she went out. It was spiteful, and Jack felt that it was spiteful; but he did not guess how quickly Sara rushed up-stairs after her dignified progress to the door, nor how she locked herself in, nor what a cry she had in her own room when she was safe from all profane eyes. She was not thinking of Pamela, and yet she could have beaten Pamela. *She* was to be happy, and have her own way; but as for Sara, it was an understood duty that the only thing she could do for a man was

to break his heart! Her tears fell down like rain at this thought. Why should Jack be so free and she so fettered? Why should Pamela be so well off? Thus a sudden and wild little hailstorm of rage and mortification went over Sara's head, or rather heart.

Meanwhile Mr Brownlow went very steadily to business with the book in his pocket. He had been a little startled by Sara's look, but by this time it was going out of his mind. He was thinking that it was a lovely morning, and very warm, though the child was so chilly; and then he remembered, with a start, that next day was the 1st of September. Another six weeks, and the time of his probation was over. The thought sent the blood coursing through his veins, as if he had been a young man. Everything had gone on so quietly up to that moment—no further alarms—nothing to revive his fears—young Powys lulled to indifference, if indeed he knew anything; and the time of liberation so near. But with that thrill of satisfaction came a corresponding excitement. Now that the days were numbered, every day was a year in itself. It occurred to him suddenly to go away somewhere, to take Sara with him and bury himself in some remote corner of the earth, where nobody could find him for those fated six weeks; and so make it quite impossible that any application could reach him. But he dismissed the

idea. In his absence might she not appear, and disclose herself? His own presence somehow seemed to keep her off, and at arm's length; but he could not trust events for a single day if he were gone. And it was only six weeks. After that, yes, he would go away; he would go to Rome or somewhere, and take Sara, and recover his calm after that terrible tension. He would need it, no doubt;—so long as his brain did not give way.

Mr Brownlow, however, was much startled by the looks of Powys when he went into the office. He was more haggard than he had ever been in the days when Mr Wrinkell was suspicious of him. His hair hung on his forehead in a limp and drooping fashion—he was pale, and there were circles round his eyes. Mr Brownlow had scarcely taken his place in his own room when the impatient young man came and asked to speak to him. The request made the lawyer's hair stand up on his head, but he could not refuse the petition. "Come in," he said, faintly. The blood seemed to go back on his heart in a kind of despair. After all his anticipations of approaching freedom, was he to be arrested after all, before the period of emancipation came?

As for Powys, he was too much excited himself to see anything but the calmest composure in Mr

Brownlow, who indeed, throughout all his trials, though they were sharp enough, always looked composed. The young man even thought his employer methodical and matter-of-fact to the last degree. He had put out upon the table before him the book Sara had intrusted him with. It was a small edition of one of the poets which poor Powys had taken with him on his last unhappy expedition to Brownlows; and Mr Brownlow put his hand on the book with a constrained smile, as a schoolmaster might have put his hand on a prize.

“My daughter sent you this, Powys,” he said, “a book which it appears you left last night; and why did you go away in such a hurry without letting me know?”

“Miss Brownlow sent it?” said Powys, growing crimson; and for a minute the poor young fellow was so startled and taken aback that he could not add another word. He clutched at the book, and gazed at it hungrily, as if it could tell him something; and then he saw Mr Brownlow looking at him with surprise, and his colour grew deeper and deeper. “That was what I came to speak to you about, sir,” he said, hot with excitement and wretchedness. “You have trusted me, and I am unworthy of your trust. I don’t mean to excuse myself; but I could not let another day go over without telling

you. I have behaved like an idiot—and a villain——”

“Stop, stop!” said Mr Brownlow. “What is all this about? Don’t be excited. I don’t believe you have behaved like a villain. Take time and compose yourself, and tell me what it is.”

“It is that you took me into your house, sir, and trusted me,” said Powys, “and I have betrayed your trust. I must mention her name. I saw your daughter too often—too much. I should have had the honour and honesty to tell you before I betrayed myself. But I did not mean to betray myself. I miscalculated my strength; and in a moment, when I was not thinking, it gave way. Don’t think I have gone on with it,” he added, looking beseechingly at his employer, who sat silent, not so much as lifting his eyes. “It was only last night—and I am ready at the moment, if you wish it, to go away.”

Mr Brownlow sat at his table and made no reply. Oh, those hasty young creatures, who precipitated everything! It was, in a kind of way, the result of his own scheming, and yet his heart revolted at it, and in six weeks’ time he would be free from all such necessity. What was he to do? He sat silent, utterly confounded and struck dumb—not with surprise and horror, as his young companion in

the fulness of his compunction believed, but with confusion and uncertainty as to what he ought to say and do. He could not offend and affront the young man on whose quietness and unawakened thoughts so much depended. He could not send Powys away, to fall probably into the hands of other advisers, and rise up against himself. Yet could he pledge himself, and risk Sara's fate, when so short a time might set him free? All this rushed through his mind while he sat still in the same attitude in which he had listened to the young fellow's story. Powys was standing beside him all the time in all the vehemence of passion, thinking every minute an hour, and waiting for his answer. Indeed he expected no answer. Yet something there was that must be said, and which Mr Brownlow did not know how to say.

"You betrayed yourself?" he said, at last; "that means, you spoke. And what did Sara say?"

The colour on Powys's face flushed deeper and deeper. He gave one wild, half-frantic look of inquiry at his questioner. There was nothing in the words; but in the calm of the tone, in the naming of his daughter's name, there was something that looked like a desperate glimmer of hope; and this unexpected light flashed upon the young man all of a sudden, and made him nearly mad. "She said

nothing," he answered breathlessly. "I was not so dishonourable as to ask for any answer. What answer was possible? It was forced out of me, and I rushed away."

Mr Brownlow pushed his chair away from the table. He got up and went to the window and stood and looked out, he could not have told why. There was nothing there that could help him in what he had to say. There was nothing but two children standing in the dusty road, and a pale, swarthy organ-grinder, with two big eyes, playing "Ah, che la morte" outside. Mr Brownlow always remembered the air, and so did Powys, standing behind, with his heart beating loud, and feeling that the next words he should listen to might convey life or death.

"If she has said nothing," said Mr Brownlow at last from the window, speaking with his back turned, "perhaps it will be as well for me to follow her example." When he said this he returned slowly to his seat, and took his chair without even looking at the culprit before him. "Of course you were wrong," he added; "but you are young. You ought not to have been placed in such temptation. Go back to your work, Mr Powys. It was a youthful indiscretion; and I am not one of those who reject an honourable apology. We will forget it for ever—we, and everybody concerned——"

“But, sir——” cried Powys.

“No more,” said Mr Brownlow. “Let bygones be bygones. You need not go up to Brownlows again till this occurrence has been forgotten. I told you Sara had sent you the book you left. It has been an unfortunate accident, but no more than an accident, I hope. Go back to your work, and forget it. Don’t do anything rash. I accept your apology. Such a thing might have happened to the best of us. But you will be warned by it, and do not err again. Go back to your work.”

“Then I am not to leave you?” said Powys, sorely tossed between hope and despair, thinking one moment that he was cruelly treated, and the next overwhelmed by the favour shown him. He looked so wistfully at his employer, that Mr Brownlow, who saw him though he was not looking at him, had hard ado not to give him a little encouragement with his eyes.

“I see no need for your leaving,” said Mr Brownlow. “You know I wish you well, Powys. I am content that it should be as if it had never been.”

The young man did not know what to say. The tumult in his mind had not subsided. He was in the kind of condition to which everything which is not despair is hope. He was wild with wonder,

bewilderment, confusion. He made some incoherent answer, and the next moment he found himself again at his desk, dizzy like a man who has fallen from some great height, yet feels himself unhurt upon solid ground after all. What was to come of it all? And Sara had sent him his book. Sara! Never in his wildest thoughts had he ventured to call her Sara before. He did not do it wittingly now. He was in a trance of giddiness and bewilderment. Was it all real, or had it happened in a dream?

Meanwhile Mr Brownlow too sat and pondered this new development. What was it all to come to? He seemed to other people to be the arbiter of events; but that was what he himself asked, in a kind of consternation, of time and fate.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### NEWS.

IT was the beginning of September, as we have said, and the course of individual history slid aside as it were for the moment, and lost itself in the general web. Brownlows became full of people—friends of Jack's, friends of Mr Brownlow, even friends of Sara—for ladies came of course to break the monotony of the shooting-party—and in the press of occupation personal matters had to be put aside. Mr Brownlow himself almost forgot, except by moments when the thought came upon him with a certain thrill of excitement, that the six weeks were gliding noiselessly on, and that soon his deliverance would come. As for Sara, she did not forget the agitating little scene in which she had been only a passive actor, but which had woven a kind of subtle link between her and the man who had spoken to her in the voice of real passion. The sound of it had

scared and perplexed her at first, and it had roused her to a sense of the real difference, as well as the real affinities, between them; but whatever she might feel, the fact remained that there was a link between them—a link which she could no more break than the Queen could—a something that defied all denial or contradiction. She might never see him again, but—he loved her. When a girl is fancy-free, there is no greater charm; and Sara was, or had been, entirely fancy-free, and was more liable than most girls to this attraction. When the people around her were stupid or tiresome, as to be sure the best of people are sometimes, her thoughts would make a sudden gleam like lightning upon the man who had said he would never see her face again. Perhaps he might have proved tiresome too, had he gone out in the morning with his gun, and come home tired to dinner; but he was absent; and there are times when the absent have the best of it, notwithstanding all proverbs. She was much occupied, and by times sufficiently well amused at home, and did not feel it in the least necessary to summon Powys to her side; but still the thought of him came in now and then, and gave an additional zest to her other luxuries. It was a supreme odour and incense offered up to her, as he had thought it would be—a flower which she set her pretty foot

upon, and the fragrance of which came up poignant and sweet to her delicate nostril. If anybody had said as much to Sara it would have roused her almost to fury ; but still such were the facts of the case.

Jack, for his part, was less excusable if he was negligent ; and he was rather negligent just then, in the first fervour of the partridges, it must be allowed—not that he cared a straw for the ladies of the party, and their accomplishments, and their pretty dresses, and their wiles, as poor Pamela believed in her heart. Apart from Pamela Jack was a stoic, and wasted not a thought on womankind ; but when a man is shooting all day, and is surrounded by a party of fellows who have to be dined and entertained in the evening, and is, besides, quite confident in his mind that the little maiden who awaits him has no other seductive voice to whisper in her ear, he may be pardoned for a little carelessness or unpunctuality—at least Jack thought he ought to be pardoned, which comes very much to the same thing. Thus the partridges, if they did not affect the affairs of state, as do their Highland brethren the grouse, at least had an influence upon the affairs of Brownlows, and put a stop, as it were, to the undivided action of its private history for the time.

It was during this interval that the carrier's cart

once more deposited a passenger on the Brownlows road. She did not get down at the gate, which, she already knew, was a step calculated to bring upon her the eyes of the population, but was set down at a little distance, and came in noiselessly, as became her mission. It was a September afternoon, close and sultry. The sky was a whitish blue, pale with the blaze that penetrated and filled it. The trees looked parched and dusty where they overhung the road. The whole landscape round Brownlows beyond the line of these dusty trees was yellow with stubble, for the land was rich, and there had been a heavy crop. The fields were reaped, and the kindly fruits of earth gathered in, and there seemed no particular need for all that blaze of sunshine. But the sun blazed all the same, and the pedestrian stole slowly on, casting a long oblique shadow across the road. Everything was sleepy and still. Old Betty's door and windows were open, but the heat was so great as to quench even curiosity; or perhaps it was only that the stranger's step was very stealthy, and until it suddenly fell upon a treacherous knot of gravel, which dispersed under her weight and made a noise, had given no sign of its approach. Betty came languidly to her door when she heard this sound, but she went in again and dropped back into her doze upon her big chair when she saw it was but the slow and

toiling figure of a poor woman, no way attractive to curiosity. "Some poor body a-going to Dewsbury," she said to herself; and thus Nancy stole on unnoticed. The blind was down in the parlour window of Mrs Swayne's neighbour, and her door closed, and Mrs Swayne herself was out of the way for the moment, seeing to the boiling of the afternoon kettle. Nancy crept in, passing like a vision across Mrs Preston's open window. Her step made no appreciable sound even in the sleepy stillness of the house, and the sole preface they had to her appearance in the parlour was a shadow of something black which crossed the light, and the softest visionary tap at the door. Then the old woman stood suddenly before the mother and the daughter, who were sitting together dull enough. Mrs Preston was still poorly, and disturbed in her mind. And as for Pamela, poor child, it was a trying moment for her. As from a watch-tower, she could see what was going on at Brownlows, and knew that they were amusing themselves, and had all kinds of pleasant parties, in which Jack, who was hers and no other woman's, took the chief part; and that amid all these diversions he had no time to come to see her though she had the only right to him, and that other girls were by, better born, better mannered, better dressed, and more charming than her simple self.

Would it be his fault if he were fickle? How could he help being fickle with attractions so much greater around him?

This was how Pamela was thinking as she sat by the sofa on which her mother lay. It was not weather for much exertion, and in the peculiar position of affairs, it was painful for these two to run the risk of meeting anybody from Brownlows; therefore they did not go out except furtively now and then at night, and sat all day in the house, and brooded, and were not very cheerful. Every laugh she heard sounding down the avenue, every carriage that drove out of or into the gates, every stray bit of gossip about the doings at the great house, and the luncheon parties at the cover-side, and the new arrivals, sounded to poor little Pamela like an injury. She had meant to be so happy, and she was not happy. Only the sound of the guns was a little comfort to her. To be sure when he was shooting he was still amusing himself away from her; but at the same time he was not near the fatal beauties whom every evening Pamela felt in her heart he must be talking to, and smiling upon, and growing bewitched by. Such was the tenor of her thoughts as she sat by the sofa working, when old Nancy came in so suddenly at the door.

Pamela sprang up from her seat. Her nerves were

out of order, and even her temper, poor child! and all her delicate organisation set on edge. "It is *her* again! and oh, what do you want?" said Pamela, with a little shriek. As for Mrs Preston, she too sat bolt upright on the sofa, and started, not without a certain fright, at the sudden apparition. "Nancy Christian!" she said, clasping her hands together. "Is it Nancy Christian? Is it *you*?"

"Yes, it's me," said Nancy; "I said I would come, and here I am, and I've a deal to say. If you don't mind, I'll take a chair, for it's a long way walking in this heat, all the way from Masterton." This she said without a blush, though she had been set down not fifty yards off from the carrier's cart.

"Sit down," said Mrs Preston, anxiously, herself rising from the sofa. "It is not often I lie down" (though this was almost as much a fiction as Nancy's), "but the heat gets the better of one. I remember your name as long as I remember anything; I always hoped you would come back. Pamela, if there is anything that Nancy would like after her long walk——"

"A cup of tea is all as I care for," said Nancy. "It's a many years since we've met, and you've changed, ma'am," she added, with a cordiality that was warmer than her sincerity; "but I could allays see as it was you."

“I have reason to be changed,” said Mrs Preston. “I was young when you saw me last, and now I’m an old woman. I’ve had many troubles. I’ve had a hard fight with the world, and I’ve lost all my children but this one. She’s a good child, but she can’t stand in the place of all that I’ve lost—— And oh, Nancy Christian, you’re a woman that can tell me about my poor old mother. Many a thought I have had of her, and often often it seemed a judgment that my children should be taken from me. If you could but tell me she forgave me before she died!”

Nancy made no direct answer to this appeal, but she looked at Pamela, and then at her mother, with a significant gesture. The two old women had their world to go back into of which the young creature knew nothing, and where there were many things which might not bear her inspection; while she, on the other hand, was absorbed in her own new world, and scarcely heard or noticed what they were saying. She stood between them in her youth, unaware of the look they exchanged, unaware that she was in the way of their confidences—thinking, in fact, nothing of much importance in the world except what might be going on in the great house over the way.

“Pamela,” said Mrs Preston, “go and see about the tea; and run out to the garden, dear, and get a breath of air; for I have a deal to ask, and Nancy

has a deal to tell me ; and there will be no one passing at this time of the day."

"If they were all passing it would not matter to me," said Pamela, and she sighed, and put down her languid work, and went away to make the tea. But she did not go out to the garden ; though she said it did not matter, it did matter mightily. She went up-stairs to the window and sat down behind the curtain, and fixed her hungry eyes upon the gate and the avenue beyond ; and then she made little pictures to herself of the ladies at Brownlows, and of how Jack must be enjoying himself, and gathered some big bitter tears in her eyes, and felt herself forsaken. It was worse than the Peri at the gate of Eden. So long as Jack had come to the cottage, it mattered little to Pamela who was at the great house. In those days she could think, "They are finer than I am, and better off, and even prettier, but he likes *me* best ;" but now this was all changed—the poor little Peri saw the blessed walking in pairs and pleasant companies, and her own young archangel, who was the centre of the Paradise, surrounded and taken possession of by celestial sirens—if such things can be. To be sure Jack Brownlow was not much like an archangel, but that mattered little. What a change it was ! and all to come about in a week or two. She, too, was like the flower

upon which the conqueror sets his foot ; and Pamela was not passive, but resisted and struggled. Thus she was not curious about what old Nancy could be saying to her mother. What could it be? some old gossip or other, recollections of a previous state of existence before anybody was born—talk about dead things and dead people that never could affect the present state of being. If Pamela thought of it at all, she was half glad that poor mamma should have something to amuse her, and half jealous that her mother could think of anything except the overwhelming interest of her own affairs. And she lingered at the window unawares, until the tea was spoilt, oblivious of Nancy's fatigue ; and saw the gentlemen come in from their shooting, with their dogs and guns and keepers, and the result of their day's work, and was aware that Jack lingered, and looked across the road, and waited till everybody was gone.

Then her heart jumped up and throbbed loudly as he came towards the house. She was about to rush down to him, to forget her griefs, and understand how it was and that he could not help it. But Pamela was a minute too late. She was on her way to the door, when suddenly her heart stood still and the colour went out of her face, and she stopped short thunderstruck. He was going away again, astonished, like a man in a dream, with the birds

in his hand which he had been bringing as a peace-offering. And Pamela heard her mother's voice sharp and harsh, speaking from the door. "I am much obliged to you, Mr Brownlow; but I never eat game, and we are both very much engaged, and unable to see any one to-day;" these were the words the poor girl heard; and then the door, which always stood open—the fearless hospitable cottage door, was closed sharply, and with a meaning. Pamela stood aghast, and saw him go away with his rejected offering; and then the disappointment and wonder and quick change of feeling came raining down from her eyes in big tears. Poor Jack! It was not his fault—he was not unfaithful nor careless; and her mother had sent him away! It all passed in a moment, and she had not time or self-possession to throw open the window and hold out her hands to him and call him back, but only stood speechless and watched him disappearing, himself speechless with amazement, crossing the road backwards with his birds in his hand. Then Pamela's dreams came suddenly to an end. She dried her eyes indignantly—or rather the sudden hot flush on her cheeks dried them without any aid—and smoothed back her hair, and went down flaming in youthful wrath to call her mother to account. Pamela did not know what to make of it when she went

into the little parlour. Old Nancy was sitting on a chair by the wall, just as she had done when she came in, and looking the same; but as for Mrs Preston, she was a different woman. If wings had suddenly budded at her shoulders the revolution could scarcely have been greater. She stood upright near the window, with no stoop, no headache, no weariness—ten years younger at least—here eyes as bright as two fires, and even her black dress hanging about her in different folds. Pamela's resentment and indignation and rebellious feelings came to an end at this unwonted spectacle. She could only stand before her mother and stare at her, and wonder what it could mean.

“It is nothing,” said Mrs Preston. “Mr Brownlow, who brought us some game—you know I don't care for game; and then people change their minds about things. Sit down, Pamela, and don't stare at me. I have been getting too languid about everything, and when one rouses up everybody wonders what one means.”

“Mamma,” said Pamela, too much astonished to know what to answer, “you sent him away!”

“Yes, I sent him away; and I will send any one away that I think mercenary and selfish,” said Mrs Preston. Was it she who spoke? Could it be her mild uncertain lips from which such words came?

and then what could it mean? How could he be mercenary—he who was going to give up everything for his love's sake? No words could express Pamela's consternation. She sat down weak with wonder, and gazed at her mother. The change was one which she could not in any way explain to herself.

“Old Mrs Fennell was very rude to me,” said Mrs Preston. “I fear you have not a very comfortable place, Nancy Christian; but we can soon change that. You that were so faithful to my poor mother, you may be sure you'll not be forgotten. You are not to think of walking back to Masterton. If I had known you were coming I would have spoken to Hobson the carrier. I never was fond of the Fennells from the earliest I remember; though Tom, you know, poor fellow—— But he was a great deal older than me.”

“He was nigh as old as your mother,” said Nancy; “many's the time I've heard her say it. ‘He wanted my daughter,’ she would say; ‘her a slip of a girl, and him none so much younger than I am myself; but now he's caught a Tartar;’ and she would laugh, poor old dear; but when she knew as they were after what she had—that's what drove her wild——”

“Yes, yes,” said Mrs Preston — “yes, yes; you need say no more, Nancy; I see it all—I see it all. Wherever there's money it's a snare, and no mortal

that I can see escapes. If I had but known a month ago! but after this they shall see they can't do what they please with me. No; though it may be hard upon us—hard upon us—— Oh, Nancy Christian," she said, flinging up her arms into the air, "if you had but come to tell me a month ago!"

Pamela listened to this conversation with gradually-increasing dismay. She did not know what it meant; but yet, by some instinctive sense, she knew that it concerned herself—and Jack. She rose up and went to her mother with vague terrors in her heart. "Mamma, what is it? tell me what it is," she said, putting two clinging hands round her arm.

At these words Mrs Preston suddenly came to herself. "What is what?" she said. "Sit down, Pamela, and don't ask foolish questions; or rather go and see after the tea. It has never come, though I told you Nancy was tired. If you left it by Mrs Swayne's fire it will be boiled by this time; and you know when it stands too long I can't bear it. Go, dear, and get the tea."

"But, mamma," said Pamela, still clinging to her, and speaking in her ear—"mamma! I know there must be something. Why did you send him away?"

Mrs Preston gave her child a look which Pamela, driven to her wits' end, could not interpret. There was pity in it and there was defiance, and a certain

fierce gleam as of indignation. "Child, you know nothing about it," she said, with suppressed passion—"nothing; and I can't tell you now. Go and get us the tea."

Pamela gazed again, but she could not understand. It was, and yet it was not, her mother—not the old, faded, timid, hesitating woman who had nothing in the world but herself; but somebody so much younger, so much stronger—with those two shining, burning eyes, and this sudden self-consciousness and command. She gave a long look, and then she sighed and dropped her mother's arm, and went away to do her bidding. It was the first appeal she had ever made in vain, and, naturally, it filled her with painful amaze. Nancy's arrival, and Jack's dismissal, and this curious change in Mrs Preston's appearance, all came together. Her little heart had been full of pain when she left the room before, but it was pain of a very different kind. Now the laggard had come who was all the cause of the trouble then, and he had been sent away without reason or explanation, and what could it mean? "If I had but known a month ago!"—What could it be that she had heard? The girl's heart took to beating again very loud and fast, and her imagination began to work, and it is not difficult to divine what sort of theories of explanation rose in her thoughts. The only thing that Pamela

could think of as raising any fatal barrier between herself and Jack was unfaithfulness or a previous love on his part. This, without doubt, was Nancy's mission. She had come to tell of his untruthfulness; that he loved somebody else; perhaps had pledged himself to somebody else; and that between him and his new love, instant separation, heartbreak, and despair must ensue. "He need not have been afraid to tell me," Pamela said to herself, with her heart swelling till it almost burst from her breast. All her little frame, all her sensitive nerves, thrilled with pain and pride. This was what it was. She was not so much stunned by the blow as roused up to the fullest consciousness. Her lip would have quivered sadly had she been compelled to speak; her voice might have broken for anything she could tell, and risen into hard tones and shrieks of pain. But she was not obliged to speak to any one, and so could shut herself in and keep it down. She went about mechanically, but with nervous haste and swiftness, and covered the little table with its white cloth, and put bread on it, and the tea for which Nancy and her mother sighed; and she thought they looked at her with cruel coldness, as if it was they who were concerned and not she. As if it could be anything to anybody in comparison to what it was to her! As if she must not be at all times the principal in

such a matter ! Thus they sat down at the little round table. Nancy, who was much in her ordinary, ate and drank, and was very comfortable, and pleased with the country cream in her tea ; but the mother and the daughter neither ate nor drank. Mrs Preston kept saying now and then a word or two to Nancy which Pamela could not understand, but mostly was silent, pondering and full of thoughts ; while Pamela, with her eyes cast down, and a burning crimson colour on her cheeks, sat still and brooded over the cruelty she thought they were showing her. Nancy was the only one who “enjoyed,” as she said, “her tea.”

“ You may get a drop of what’s called cream in a town, but it ain’t cream,” said Nancy. “ It’s but skim-milk frothed up, and you never get the taste of the tea. It’s a thing as I always buys good. It’s me as lays in all the things, and when there ain’t a good cup o’ tea at my age, there ain’t nothing as is worth in life. But the fault’s not in the tea. It’s the want of a drop of good cream as does it. It’s that as brings out the flavour, and gives it a taste. A cup o’ good tea’s a cheering thing ; but I wouldn’t say as you was enjoying it, Mrs Preston, like me.”

“ I have other things in my mind,” said Mrs Preston ; “ you’ve had a long walk, and you must want it. As for me, my mind’s all in a ferment. I don’t seem

to know if it's me, or what has happened. You would not have come and told me all this if you had not been as sure as sure of what you had to say?"

"Sure and sure enough," said Nancy. "I've knowed it from first to last, and how could I go wrong? If you go to London, as you say, you can judge for yourself, and there won't be nothing for me to tell; but you'll think on as I was the first—for your old mother's sake——"

"You'll not be forgot," said Mrs Preston—"you need not fear. I am not the one to neglect a friend—and one that was good to my poor mother; you may reckon on me." She sat upright in her chair, and every line in her face had changed. Power, patronage, and protection were in her tone—she who had been herself so poor and timid and anxious. Her very words were uttered more clearly, and with a distincter intonation. And Pamela listened with all her might, and grew more and more bewildered, and tried vainly to make out some connection between this talk and the discovery which she supposed must have been made. But what could Jack's failure in good faith have to do with anybody's old mother? It was only Nancy who was quite at her ease. "I will take another cup, if you please, Miss Pamela," said Nancy, "and I hope as I'll live to see you in your grandeur, feasting with lords and ladies, instead

of pouring out an old woman's tea—for them as is good children is rewarded. Many's the day I've wished to see you, and wondered how many of you there was. It's sad for your mother as there's only you ; but it's a fine thing for yourself, Miss Pamela—and you must always give your mind to do what your mamma says.”

“How should it be a fine thing for me?” said Pamela ; “or how should I ever feast with lords and ladies ? I suppose you mean to make fun of us. As for doing what mamma says, of course I always do—she never tells me to do anything unreasonable,” the girl added, after a momentary pause, looking doubtfully at her mother. If she were told to give up Jack, Pamela felt that it would be something unreasonable, and she had no inclination to pledge herself to that.

“It's nigh my time to go,” said Nancy. “I said to the carrier as he was to wait for me down the road. I wouldn't be seen a-getting into the waggon here. Folks talks awful when they're so few ; and thank you kindly, Mrs Preston, for the best cup of tea as I've tasted for ten years. Them as can get cream like that, has what I calls some comfort in this life.”

“Pamela,” said Mrs Preston, “you can walk along with Nancy as far as Merryfield Farm, and give my

compliments, and if they'd put a drop of their best cream in a bottle—— It's all I can do just now, Nancy Christian ; but I am not one that forgets my friends ; and the time may come——”

“The time *will* come, ma'am,” said Nancy, getting up and making her patroness a curtsy, “and I'm none afraid as you'll forget ; and thank you kindly for thinking o' the cream—if it ain't too much trouble to Miss Pamela. If you go up there, as you think to do, and find all as I say, you'll be so kind as to let me know.”

“I'll let you know, you may be sure,” said Mrs Preston, in her short decisive tones of patronage. And then Pamela, much against her will, had to put on her hat and go with Nancy. She did it, but it was with an ill grace ; for she was longing to throw herself upon her mother and have an explanation of all this—what had happened, and what it meant. The air had grown cool, and old Betty had come out to her door, and Mrs Swayne was in the little garden watering the mignonette. And it was not easy to pass those two pairs of eyes and preserve a discreet incognito. To do her justice, Nancy tried her best ; but it was a difficult matter to blind Mrs Swayne.

“I thought as it was you,” said that keen observer. “I said as much to Swayne when he told me as there was a lady to tea in the parlour. I said, ‘You take

my word it's her as come from Masterton.' And I hope, mum, as I see you well. Mrs Preston has been but poorly; and you as knows her constitution and her friends——”

“She knows nothing about us,” said Pamela, with indignation; “I never saw her in my life before. And how can she know about mamma's constitution, or her friends either? Nancy, come along; you will be too late for Hobson if you stand talking here.”

“It's never no loss of time to say a civil word, Miss Pamela,” said Nancy. “It's years and years since I saw her, and she's come through a deal since then. And having a family changes folks' constitutions. If it wasn't asking too much, I'd ask for a bit o' mignonette. Town-folks is terrible greedy when they comes to the country—and it's that sweet as does one's heart good. Nice cream and butter and new-laid eggs, and a bit o' lad's love, or something as smells sweet—give me that, and I don't ask for none o' your grandeurs. That's the good o' the country to me.”

“They sends all that country stuff to old Mrs Fennell, don't they?” said Betty, who in the leisure of the evening had crossed the road. “I should have thought you'd been sick of all them things—and the fruit and the partridges as I see packed no later than

this very afternoon. I should have said you had enough for six, if any one had asked me."

"When the partridges is stale and the fruit rotten," said Nancy, shrugging her shoulders; "and them as has such plenty, where's the merit of it? I suppose there's fine doings at the house, with all their shootings and all the strangers as is about——"

"They was at a picnic to-day," said Betty. "Mr John, he's the one! He makes all them ladies leave their comfortable lunch, as is better than many a dinner, and down to the heath with their cold pies and their jellies and suchlike. Give me a bit of something 'ot. But they think he's a catch, being the only son; and there ain't one but does what he says."

Pamela had been standing plucking a bit of mignonne to pieces, listening with tingling ears. It was not in human nature not to listen; but she roused herself when Betty's voice ceased, and went softly on, withdrawing herself from the midst of them. Her poor little heart was swelling and throbbing, and every new touch seemed to add to its excitement; but pride, and a sense of delicacy and dignity, came to her aid. Jack's betrothed, even if neglected or forsaken, was not in her fit place amid this gossip. She went on quietly, saying nothing

about it, leaving her companion behind. And the three women gave each other significant glances as soon as she had turned her back on them. "I told 'em how it would be," said Mrs Swayne, under her breath—"it's allays the way when a girl is that mad to go and listen to a gentleman." And Betty, though she sneered at her employers with goodwill, had an idea of keeping up their importance so far as other people were concerned. "Poor lass!" said Betty, "she's been took in. She thought Mr John was one as would give up everything for the like of her; but he has her betters to choose from. He's affable like, but he's a deal too much pride for that."

"Pride goes afore a fall," said Nancy, with meaning; "and the Brownlows ain't such grand folks after all. Nothing but attorneys, and an old woman's money to set them up as wasn't a drop's blood to them. I don't see no call for pride."

"The old Squires was different, I don't deny," said Betty, with candour; "but when folks is bred gentlefolks, and has all as heart can desire——"

"Well, it ain't our business," said Nancy; "and I'll say good-night, for I've a long way to go. If ever you should want anything in Masterton, I'd do my best to serve you. Miss Pamela's a long way on, and walking fast ain't for this weather; so I'll

bid you both good-night. We'll have time for more talk," she added significantly, "next time I come back; and I'd like a good look at that nice lodge you've got." Old Betty did not know what the woman meant, but those black eyes "went through and through her," she said. And so Nancy's visit came to an end.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### WHAT FOLLOWED.

PAMELA could make nothing of her companion. Nancy was very willing to talk, and indeed ran on in an unceasing strain ; but what she said only confused the more the girl's bewildered faculties ; and she saw her mount at last into the carrier's cart, and left her with less perception than ever of what had happened. Then she went straying home in the early dusk, for already the days had begun to grow short, and that night in particular a thunderstorm was brewing, and the clouds were rolling down darkly after the sultry day. Pamela crossed over to the shade of the thick hedge and fence which shut in the park, that nobody might see her, and her thoughts as she went along were not sweet. She thought of Jack and the ladies at Brownlows, and then she thought of the wish her mother had uttered—Had she but known this a month ago ! and between the

terrible suspicion of a previous love, and the gnawing possibility of present temptation, made herself very miserable, poor child. Either he had deceived her, and was no true man; or, if he had not yet deceived her, he was in hourly peril of doing so, and at any moment the blow might come. While she was thus lingering along in the twilight, something happened which gave Pamela a terrible fright. She was passing a little stile when suddenly a man sprang out upon her, and caught hold of her hands. She was so sure that Jack was dining at Brownlows, and yielding to temptation there, that she did not recognise him, and screamed when he sprang out; and it was dark, so dark that she could scarcely see his face. Jack, for his part, had been so conscience-stricken when Mrs Preston refused him entrance that he had done what few men of this century would be likely to do. He had gone in with the other men, and gulped down some sherry at the side-board, and instead of proceeding to his dressing-room as they all did after, had told a very shocking fib to Willis the butler, for the benefit of his father and friends, and rushed out again. He might have been proof against upbraiding, but compunction seized him when Mrs Preston closed the door. He had deserved it, but he had not expected such summary measures; and "that woman," as he called her in

his dismay, was capable of taking his little love away and leaving him no sign. He saw it in her eye ; for he, too, saw the change in her. Thus Jack was alarmed, and in his fright his conscience spoke. And he had watched Pamela go out, and waylaid her ; and was very angry and startled to see she did not recognise him. " Good heavens, do you mean to say you don't know me ?" he cried, almost shaking her as he held her by the hands. To scream and start as if the sight of him was not the most natural thing in the world, and the most to be looked for ! Jack felt it necessary to begin the warfare, to combat his own sense of guilt.

" I thought you were at dinner," said Pamela, faintly. " I never thought it could be you."

" And you don't look a bit glad to see me. What do you mean by it ?" said Jack. " It is very hard, when a fellow gives up everything to come and see you. And your mother to shut the door upon me ! She never did it before. A man has his duties to do, whatever happens. I can't go and leave these fellows loafing about by themselves. I must go out with them. I thought you were going to take me for better for worse, Pamela, not for a month or a week."

" Oh, don't speak so," said Pamela. " It was never me. It must have been something mamma had

heard. She does not look a bit like herself; and it is all since that old woman came."

"What old woman?" said Jack, calming down. "Look here, come into the park. They are all at dinner, and no one will see; and tell me all about it. So long as you are not changed, nothing else is of any consequence. Only for half an hour——"

"I don't think I ought," said Pamela; but she was on the other side of the stile when she said these words; and her hand was drawn deeply through Jack's arm, and held fast, so that it was clearly a matter of discreet submission, and she could not have got away had she wished it. "I don't think I ought to come," she repeated, "you never come to us now; and it must have been something that mamma had heard. I think she is going away somewhere; and I am sure, with all these people at Brownlows, and all that old Nancy says, and you never coming near us, I do not mind where we go, for my part."

"As if I cared for the people at Brownlows!" said Jack, holding her hand still more tightly. "Don't be cruel to a fellow, Pamela. I'll take you away whenever you please, but without me you shan't move a step. Who is old Nancy, I should like to know? and as for anything you could have heard—— Who suffers the most, do you suppose,

from the people at Brownlows? To know you are there, and that one can't have even a look at you——"

"But then you can have a great many looks at other people," said Pamela, "and perhaps there was somebody else before me—don't hold my hand so tight. We are poor, and you are rich—and it makes a great difference. And I can't do just what I like. You say *you* can't, and you are a man, and older than I am. I must do what mamma says."

"But you know you can make her do what you like; whereas, with a lot of fellows——" said Jack. "Pamela, don't—there's a darling! You have me in your power, and you can put your foot upon me if you like. But you have not the heart to do it. Not that I should mind your little foot. Be as cruel as you please; but don't talk of running away. You know you can make your mother do whatever you please."

"Not now," said Pamela, "not now—there is such a change in her; and oh, Jack, I do believe she is angry, and she will make me go away."

"Tell me about it," said Jack, tenderly; for Pamela had fallen into sudden tears, without any regard for her consistency. And then the dialogue became a little inarticulate. It lasted a good deal longer on the whole than half an hour; and the

charitable clouds drooped lower, and gave them shade and shelter as they emerged at last from the park, and stole across the deserted road to Swayne's cottage. They were just in time; the first drops of the thunder-shower fell heavy and big upon Pamela before they gained shelter. But she did not mind them much. She had unburdened her heart, and her sorrows had flown away; and the ladies at Brownlows were no longer of any account in her eyes. She drew her lover in with her at the door, which so short a time before had been closed on him. "Mamma, I made him come in with me, not to get wet," said Pamela; and both the young people looked with a little anxiety upon Mrs Preston, deprecating her wrath. She was seated by the window, though it had grown dark, perhaps looking for Pamela; but her aspect was rather that of one who had forgotten everything external for the moment, than of an anxious mother watching for her child. They could not see the change in her face, as they gazed at her eagerly in the darkness; but they both started and looked at each other when she spoke.

"I would not refuse any one shelter from a storm," she said; "but if Mr Brownlow thinks a little, he will see that this is no place for him." She did not even turn round as she spoke, but kept at

the window, looking out, or appearing to look out, upon the gathering clouds.

Jack was thunderstruck. There was something in her voice which chilled him to his very bones. It was not natural offence for his recent shortcomings, or doubt of his sincerity. He felt himself getting red in the darkness. "It was as if she had found me out to be a scoundrel, by Jove," he said to himself afterwards, which was a very different sort of thing from mere displeasure or jealousy. And in the silence that ensued, Mrs Preston took no notice of anybody. She kept her place at the window, without looking round or saying another word; and in the darkness behind stood the two bewildered, trying to read in each other's faces what it could mean.

"Speak to her," said Pamela, eagerly whispering close to his ear. Jack, for his part, could not tell what to say. He was offended, and he did not want to speak to her; but, on the contrary, held Pamela fast, with almost a perverse desire to show her mother that the girl was his, and that he did not care. "It is you I want, and not your mother," he said. They could hear each other speak, and could even differ and argue and be impassioned without anybody else being much the wiser. The only sound Mrs Preston heard was a faint rustle of

whispers in the darkness behind her. "No," said Jack, "if she will be ill-tempered, I can't help it. It is you I want," and he stood by and held his ground. When the first lightning flashed into the room, this was how it found them. There was a dark figure seated at the window, relieved against the gleam, and two faces which looked at each other, and shone for a second in the wild illumination. Then Pamela gave a little shriek and covered her face. She was not much more than a child, and she was afraid. "Come in from the window, mamma! do come, or it will strike you; and let us close the shutters," cried Pamela. There was a moment during which Mrs Preston sat still, as if she did not hear. The room fell into blackness, and then blazed forth again, the window suddenly becoming "a glimmering square," with the one dark outline against it. Jack held his little love with his arm, but his eyes were fascinated by that strange sight. What could it mean? Was she mad? Had something happened in his absence to bring about this wonderful change? The mother, however, could not resist the cry that Pamela uttered the second time. She rose up, and closed the shutters with her own hands, refusing Jack's aid. But when the three looked at each other, by the light of the candles, they all looked excited and disturbed. Mrs

Preston sat down by the table, with an air so different from her ordinary looks, that she seemed another woman. And Jack, when her eyes fell upon him, could not help feeling something like a prisoner at the bar.

“Mr Brownlow,” she said, “I daresay you think women are very ignorant, especially about business—and so they are; but you and your father should remember—you should remember that weak folks, when they are put to it—— Pamela! sit down, child, and don’t interfere; or, if you like, you can go away.”

“What have I done, Mrs Preston?” said Jack. “I don’t know what you mean. If it is because I have been some days without coming, the reason is—— But I told Pamela all about it. If that is the reason——”

“That!” cried Mrs Preston, and then her voice began to tremble; “if you think your coming or—or going is—anything——” she said, and then her lips quivered so that she could articulate no more. Pamela, with a great cry, rushed to her and seized her hands, which were trembling too, and Jack, who thought it was a sudden “stroke,” seized his hat and rushed to the door to go for a doctor; but Mrs Preston held out her shaking hands to him so peremptorily that he stopped in spite of himself. She was trembling all over—her head, her lips, her

whole frame, yet keeping entire command of herself all the time.

“I am not ill,” she said; “there is no need for a doctor.” And then she sat resolutely looking at him, holding her feet fast on the floor and her hand flat on the table to stop the movement of her nerves. It was a strange sight. But when the two who had been looking at her with alarmed eyes, suddenly, in the height of their wonder, turned to each other with a glance of mutual inquiry and sympathy, appealing to each other what it could mean, Mrs Preston could not bear it. Her intense self-command gave way. All at once she fell into an outbreak of wailing and tears. “You are two of you against me,” she said. “You are saying to each other what does she mean? and there is nobody on earth—nobody to take my part.” The outcry went to Jack Brownlow’s heart. Somehow he seemed to understand better than even Pamela did, who clung to her mother and cried, and asked what was it—what had she done? Jack was touched more than he could explain. The thunder was rolling about the house, and the rain falling in torrents; but he had not the heart to stay any longer and thrust his happiness into her face, and wound her with it. Somehow he felt ashamed; and yet he had nothing to be ashamed about, unless, in presence of this

agitation and pain and weakness, it was his own strength and happiness and youth.

"I don't mind the storm," he said. "I am sure you don't want any one here just now. Don't let your mother think badly of me, Pamela. You know I would do anything—and I can't tell what's wrong; and I am going away. Good-night."

"Not till the storm is over," cried Pamela. "Mamma, he will get killed—you know he will, among those trees."

"Not a bit," said Jack, and he waved his hand to them and went away, feeling, it must be confessed, a good deal frightened—not for the thunder, however, or the storm, but for Mrs Preston's weird look and trembling nerves, and his poor little Pamela left alone to nurse her. That was the great point. The poor woman was right. For herself there was nobody to care much. Jack was frightened because of Pamela. His little love, his soft little darling, whom he would like to take in his arms and carry away from every trouble—that she should be left alone with sickness in its most terrible shape, perhaps with delirium, possibly with death! Jack stepped softly into Mrs Swayne's kitchen, and told her his fears. He told her he would go over to Betty's lodge and wait there, in case the doctor should be wanted, and that she was not to let Miss Pamela wear herself

out. As for Mrs Swayne, though she made an effort to be civil, she scoffed at his fears. When she had heard what he had to say she showed him out grimly, and turned with enjoyment the key in the door. "The doctor!" she said to herself in disdain—"a fine excuse! But I don't hold with none o' your doctors, nor with gentlemen a-coming like roaring lions. I ain't one to be caught like that, at my time of life; and you don't come in here no more this night, with your doctors and your Miss Pamelas." In this spirit Mrs Swayne fastened the house up carefully, and shut all the shutters, before she knocked at the parlour door to see what was the matter. But when she did take that precaution she was not quite so sure of her own wisdom. Mrs Preston was lying on the sofa, shivering and trembling, with Pamela standing frightened by her. She had forbidden the girl to call any one, and was making painful efforts by mere resolution to cure herself. She said nothing, paid no attention to anybody, but with her whole force was struggling to put down the incipient illness, and keep disease at bay. And Pamela, too frightened to cry, too ignorant to know what to do, stood by, a white image of terror and misery, wringing her hands. Mrs Swayne was frightened too; but there was some truth in her boast of experience. And, besides, her character was at stake. She had sent Jack away,

and disdained his offer of the doctor, and it was time to bestir herself. So they got the stricken woman up-stairs and laid her in her bed, and chafed her limbs, and comforted her with warmth. Jack, waiting in old Betty's, watched the light mount to the higher window and shine through the chinks of the shutters, until the storm was over, and he had no excuse for staying longer. It was still burning when he went away, and it burned all night through, and lighted Pamela's watch as she sat pale at her mother's bedside. She sat all through the night and watched her patient, while the lightning still flashed and the thunder roared, and her young soul quaked within her. It was the first vigil she had ever kept, and her mind was bewildered with fear and anxiety, and the confusion of ignorance. She sat alone, wistful and frightened, afraid to move lest she should disturb her mother's restless sleep, falling into weary little doses, waking up cold and terrified, hearing the furniture, and the floor, and the walls and windows—everything about her, in short—giving out ghostly sounds in the stillness. She had never heard those creaks and jars before with which our inanimate surroundings give token of the depth of silence and night. And Mrs Preston's face looked grey in the faint light, and her breathing was disturbed; and by times she tossed her arms about, and murmured in her

sleep. Poor Pamela had a weary night; and when the morning came with its welcome light, and she opened her eyes after a snatch of unwitting sleep, and found her mother awake and looking at her, the poor child started up with a sharp cry, in which there was as much terror as relief.

“Mamma!” she cried. “I did not mean to go to sleep. Are you better? Shall I run and get you a cup of tea?”

“Come and speak to me, Pamela,” said Mrs Preston. “I am quite well—at least I think I am well. My poor darling, have you been sitting up all night?”

“It does not matter,” said Pamela; “it will not hurt me; but I was frightened. Are you sure you are better? Poor mamma, how ill you have been! You looked—I cannot tell you how you looked. But you have your own eyes again this morning. Let me go and get you some tea.”

“I don’t want any tea,” said Mrs Preston. “I want to speak to you. I am not so strong as I used to be, and you must not cross me, Pamela. I have something to do before I die. It upset me to hear of it, and to think of all that might happen. But I must get well and do it. It is all for your sake; and you must not cross me, Pamela. You must mind all I say.”

"No," said Pamela, though her heart sank a little. "I never did anything to cross you, mamma; but Mrs Swayne said you were not to talk; and she left the kettle by the fire that you might have some tea."

"I do not care for tea; I care for nothing but to get up and do what has to be done," said her mother. "It is all for your sake. Things will be very different, Pamela, from what you think; but you must not cross me. It is all for you—all for you."

"Oh, mamma, don't mind me," said Pamela, kissing her grey cheek. "I am all right, if you will only be well; and I don't know anything you can have to do. You are not fit for anything but to lie still. It is very early yet. I will draw the curtains if you will try to go to sleep."

"I must get up and go," said Mrs Preston. "This is no time to go to sleep; but you must not cross me—that is the chief thing of all; for, Pamela, everything will be yours—everything; and you are not to be deceived and taken in, and throw it all away."

"Oh, mamma dear, lie still and have a little more rest," cried Pamela, ready to cry with terror and distress. She thought it was delirium, and was frightened and overwhelmed by the unexpected calamity. Mrs Preston, however, did not look like a woman who was raving; she looked at the old silver watch under her pillow, drawing it out with a

feeble hand, which still trembled, and when she saw how early it was, she composed herself again as with an effort. "Come and lie down, my poor darling," she said. "We must not spend our strength; and my Pamela will be my own good child and do what I say."

"Yes, mamma," said the poor child, answering her mother's kiss; but all the while her heart sank in her breast. What did it mean? What form was her submission to take? What was she pledging herself to? She lay down in reluctant obedience, trembling and agitated; but she was young and weary, and fell fast asleep, in spite of herself and all her fears. And the morning light, as it brightened and filled the little room, fell upon the two together, who were so strange a contrast—the young round sweet face, to which the colour returned as the soft sleep smoothed and soothed it, with eyes so fast closed, and the red lips a little apart, and the sweet breath rising and falling: and the dark, weary countenance, worn out of all freshness, now stilled in temporary slumber, now lighting up with two big dark eyes, which would wake suddenly, and fix upon the window, eager with thought, and then veil over again in the doze of weakness. They lay thus till the morning had advanced, and the sound of Mrs Swayne's entrance made Pamela wake, and

spring ashamed from her dead sleep. And finally, the cup of tea, the universal cordial, was brought. But when Mrs Preston woke fully, and attempted to get up, with the eager look and changed manner which appalled her daughter, it was found to be impossible. The shock, whatever it was, had been too much for her strength. She fell back again upon her bed with a look of anguish which went to Pamela's heart. "I can't do it—I can't do it," she said to herself, in a voice of despair. The convulsive trembling of the previous night was gone; but she could not stand, could not walk, and still shook with nervous weakness. "I can't do it—I can't do it," she said over and over, and in her despair wept; which was a sight overwhelming even to Mrs Swayne, who was standing looking on.

"Hush, hush," said that surprised spectator. "Bless your poor soul, don't take on. If you can't do it to-day, you'll do it to-morrow; though I don't know, no more than Adam, what she's got to do, Miss Pamela, as is so pressing. Don't take on. Keep still, and you'll be better to-morrow. Don't go and take no liberties with yourself. You ain't fit to stand, much less to do anything. Bless you, you'll be as lively as lively to-morrow, if you lie still and take a drop of beef-tea now and again, and don't take on."

“Yes, I’ll do it to-morrow. It’ll do to-morrow; a day don’t signify,” said Mrs Preston; and she recovered herself, and was very quiet, while Pamela took her place by the bedside. Either she was going to be ill, perhaps to die, or something had happened to change her very nature, and turn the current of her life into another channel. Which of these things it was, was beyond the discrimination of the poor girl who watched by her bedside.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.