DIANA

MRS. OLIPHANT

DIANA TRELAWNY

THE HISTORY OF A GREAT MISTAKE

BY

MRS OLIPHANT

IN TWO VOLUMES

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DIANA.

CHAPTER I.

HERSELF.

DIANA TRELAWNY was a great heiress in the ordinary sense of the word, though the term was one which she objected to strongly. She was rather a great proprietor and landowner, no longer looking forward to any inheritance, but in full possession of it. She had a fine estate, a fine old English house, and a great deal of money in all kinds of stocks and securities. Besides this, she was a handsome woman,

quite sufficiently handsome in the light of her wealth to be called beautiful—not a girl, a beautiful woman of thirty, with some talents, a great deal of character, and a most enviable and desirable position. She was not, indeed, chairman of the quarter-sessions, as she might have been had she written herself Daniel instead of Diana, nor was she even on the commission of the peace. She did not, so far as I am aware, regret either of these disabilities; but these, and a few more of the same kind, were the chief things that distinguished her from the other great county magnates. She paid very little attention to these points of difference. A woman who is rich, and has a commanding position, has few but sentimental grievances to complain of. These sentimental grievances are often very disagreeable, and tell like personal insults by times; but they

are practically inoperative in cases like that of Miss Trelawny. She had broken the bonds of youth, the only ones which, in her position, might have restrained her. She had no objections that all the country and all the world should know she was thirty; and being thirty, she claimed full independence, which was as fully accorded to her. She had no tastes or inclinations to make that independence unlovely: and no theory of emancipation which demanded exceptional boldness of fact to justify it —a thing which gets many women into trouble. Her house was as pleasant a house as could be found, her society courted, her character respected. She had all the advantages of a country gentleman, and she had other advantages inseparable from the fact that she was a lady and not a gentleman. A marriageable young squire of her age and good looks would no doubt

have been an extremely popular and much-sought-after person; but Diana was more popular and more sought after than any young squire. For even if you take the very worst view of English society, and believe that managing mothers and daughters eager to be married are as abundant as blackberries, the fact still remains that certain reticences must be observed, and that the best women do not throw themselves at the hero's head—or feet. Whereas, in Diana's case, these reticences were scarcely necessary, for everybody paid undisguised court to the beautiful, wealthy, smiling, and gracious young woman, and the best men in the neighbourhood thought no shame to throw themselves at *her* head —or feet, as the case might be. She was more openly courted than any man, for it was more seemly and fit that she should be courted, and no disgrace to the noblest.

The county was more proud of her, more devoted to her, than it would have been to any male potentate. It made a kind of queen of her, always in dutiful and loyal subordination to the real mistress of these realms; but Diana was the queen of the county. Thus her sex was nothing but an additional pedestal to this enviable person: for to be sure she did not much care, being as yet indifferently interested in politics, for the disadvantage of having no vote.

Diana, however, had not always been so fortunate and so great: she was not born the heiress of the Chase, and of all the good things involved in that. Old Lady Trelawny, its last ruler, was a Trelawny born, and princess of the name, as well as a Trelawny by marriage. She and her husband had united the two branches of the family, he having the title and she

the property: and had intended in so doing to re-found and concentrate in their descendants the strength of the race, which had become straggling and weakly, running into wild offshoots of collaterals which sucked all the strength from the parent stem. But, alas! there is nothing more remarkable than the indifference of Providence to such arrangements, even in the most important families. In this case Heaven took no notice of the intention at all, but simply left this pair childless, as if their offspring had been of no consequence, confounding all their designs. They could not believe for a long time that such a neglect was possible; but they lived long enough to get over their surprise, and to form a great many new plans for their future heir, who had to be chosen within a certain circle of kinship. It may be supposed that this choice, which had

to be made among them, fluttered the family of Trelawny beyond measure, and kept up for years a wonderful excitement in all its branches. Such a possibility hanging over one's head is very bad for the character, and it is to be feared that the Trelawnys in general made exhibitions of their eagerness in a way which did not please the sharp-sighted old pair to whom the privilege of choice was given.

The only one of all the lineage who did not answer to the general call, and put in some claim more or less servilely to his chance of the inheritance, was a certain Captain John, who had disappeared from the surface of the family long before, and Lady Trelawny knew why. Up to the time when the old lady was seventy, it still seemed quite clear to her that Captain John kept out of the way because he could not bear to see her the wife of Sir John,

though such had been her position for the last half-century.

The old pair were at Brighton when the husband's last illness began: and looking from their windows, in the feebleness of their old age, they watched daily a certain procession of girls from one of the many girls' schools (or should I not say establishments for young ladies?) in the place, which amused the old people much. It was an event in Sir John's dull morning when they passed with their fresh faces, in charge of a handsome, stately young woman, who was the English governess. By degrees both Sir John and my lady became interested in this girl: and it may be supposed what a leap of additional warmth was given to the rising fancy when they found out that her name, too, was Trelawny. Trelawnys are not so plentiful as Browns: the old lady drove to Mrs

Seymour's school to find out who she was, and sent her half-a-dozen invitations before Diana could be persuaded to go. "Why should I go? I would in a moment if I could do anything for them; but they are smothered in friends and doctors and servants," said the proud young woman. Mrs Seymour, who was a sensible person, coaxed and persuaded and half compelled the visit; and when it turned out that this stately Diana was the only child of Captain John, it may be supposed what excitement awoke among all the Trelawnys. It gave the old lady a great shock at first, for she had believed in Captain John as living on somewhere in mournful old bachelorhood, keeping out of sight and out of the world in order to escape the misery of seeing herself at seventy the wife of another, and her *désillusionment* cost her a pang. Afterwards, when she found out that Captain

John had married late in life — he was older by ten years than she—a homely little clergyman's daughter who had been kind to him in a little village in Wales where he fished and dreamed his life away, and had died there a dozen years before, her heart was touched more than ever; and it was Lady Trelawny's tears that persuaded Diana, against her will, to leave her independent position and become the nurse and companion of the old people. Before Sir John died the decision was made, but it was the old lady who carried it out. Captain John had been the nearest in blood, first cousin to both husband and wife. His daughter was, of all the Trelawnys, the one most near to them, their natural heir.

A year afterwards Diana had become Miss Trelawny of the Chase, a very great lady, and had taken the county by storm

at the first glance. Perhaps, indeed, their want of any previous familiarity with her had something to do with the position to which she rose immediately in her own right. The county had not seen her grow up, and did not know all her youthful faults and weaknesses, as was the case with most of her fellow-magnates. She came into it full-grown, full-blown, beautiful, stately, independent, neither to be snubbed nor patronised nor put down. The episode of the school, which might have sentenced a humbler woman to exclusion from the reigning caste, what did it matter in a Trelawny? Your princesses born can do anything, the humblest offices. She neither bragged of it nor was ashamed of it, but would mention it simply in her conversation when need was, in the most matter-of-fact way, as a princess ought to do. What did it matter to her one way or another? The

humility and the greatness were immaterial to Diana. She was herself in all times and places, and had been herself before she became Miss Trelawny of the Chase; though the title (really a title in the circumstances) suited her admirably. Her neighbour, Mr Biddulph, called her "the image that fell down from Jupiter." Such was her position in the world, eminent, rich, remarkable in position, yet something more—something that had nothing to do with her position, which was simply her, and her alone.

There was one thing, however, which startled the county much, and filled it with disapproval, which would have been warmer had there been any real belief in the purpose announced. Diana declared from the beginning that she would not marry. This is not an announcement which excites very warm belief in any case. If it is not believed of a man, how should it be of

a woman, to whom (as everybody still believed in those days) it is the one thing needful? This, however, was what Diana said, quite seriously, without, it was supposed, meaning any joke; and, indeed, joking was not in her character. She said in so many words that she did not mean to marry. There was a great deal to do on the estate, she said, which was true; for the old Trelawnys had done little, and had not at all marched with the times, but contented themselves with the state of affairs which had existed a hundred years ago, or at least in the beginning of the century. The farming was bad, the cottages were bad, everything was behind in Trelawny parish. "But a gentleman could do all that so much better than you could," her friends said to her. "It is my business, and not any problematical gentleman's," said this impracticable young woman. She

had a belief in celibacy which was incredible to the community in general; and thought, however bad it might be to make that state compulsory, that unmarried persons, both lay and clerical, were an advantage here and there to their fellow-creatures. The question was discussed continually between her and her neighbours, the Biddulphs, to whom such a rebellion against all the rules which regulate human life seemed monstrous, and not to be put up with. It was un-English, they said—it was wicked; but Diana only smiled. One thing was certain, that this fad kept up her importance and her unique position as the finest of matches could not have done; and it seemed to some of her friends that it was more to Diana's credit to allege this as the reason, than to allow it to be believed that she was guilty of the eccentricity of despising or objecting to matri-

mony. "She would be nobody if she married," they said. "She would just be like other people; but Miss Trelawny of the Chase is a great personage." This was so much more reasonable, so much more natural a motive, everybody felt, than any foolish fancy about work to be done or personal responsibilities to be upheld, that the neighbourhood was quite glad to adopt it. "Diana likes to be important," was an answer to everything; and Diana did not contradict the opinion so universally formed. Perhaps she did like the importance of her position, and even the suitors and suitors' friends who paid such court to her, in hopes of appropriating, some time or other, her solid attractions of money and land and social position to themselves. So Queen Elizabeth did too, I suppose, whatever were the real motives of that astute sovereign for declining to share her throne.

Diana did not want her throne to be shared; but she did not, perhaps, being human, dislike the great competition there was for the vacant place.

Besides this, probably there had been experiences in her life which made the question of marriage less attractive to her. Few people live to be thirty without something of the kind, happy or unhappy; but nobody in the neighbourhood of Trelawny had been taken into her confidence in this respect. So she lived in the great house a cheerful and busy life, working at her estate as few landlords take the trouble to work, making a profession of it which cannot be said to be usual. Sometimes she was alone, but more generally there were guests to give the semblance of a family to the huge old mansion: and very pleasant society Diana managed to gather round her,—people of

all kinds, almost of all classes, within the limits which education and refinement made possible — poor people and rich people, great people and small people, in a *mélange* which was both picturesque and pleasant. There is nothing that gives such a zest to society as having been shut out from it for years; and if it was at all common for the poor and aspiring to be frequently raised at once into the possession of great means and independence as had happened to Diana, nothing, I believe, would benefit more by this than society. What dreams she had entertained in her loneliness, when Mrs Seymour's parlour was the highest sphere possible to her, of the fine company she would like to see if she had the power! To sit and work, and listen diligently to the words of wisdom which fell from the lips of the senior curate, sometimes on her own account

venturing a respectful remark as to the last story in the 'Monthly Packet,' was all that Diana could hope for in those days; and as she sat with her head bowed and her mind half impatient, half amused, listening to the conversation of these her superiors, it would be endless to tell how many fascinating groups she gathered round her, how much brilliant conversation went flashing about, while Mrs Seymour prosed, and the curate at his ease laid down the law. Sometimes she was half afraid these good people would hear the fun and the laughter that were going on so near them, and would bend her head close over her needlework to hide the smile upon her face. Strange freaks of fancy? for often now, when the beautiful drawing-room at the Chase was full of the best society, Diana, drooping her head, would hear again Mrs Seymour prosing and the curate

laying down the law, and listen to them a while with a smile on her face and very gentle thoughts. But in all probability, had she been born in the purple at Trelawny, and never sat in Mrs Seymour's parlour, she would have been satisfied with the county magnates and fine people within reach, and would not have made those efforts after *good* society which the county enjoyed, yet looked upon with suspicion—wondering why its own provisions in that particular should not be good enough for her, as they had been for her forefathers. It did not injure her popularity, however—rather increased it. The Chase was a pleasant house to visit, and its mistress "a delightful person to know:" and she was one of the best matches in England, and might at any moment turn anybody's second son into an important county gentleman. Can the reader be sur-

prised that on all accounts, and in every section of society, there should be but one opinion about such an important and attractive person as Miss Trelawny of the Chase ?

CHAPTER II.

HER NEIGHBOURS.

THERE were very great people in the county, whom I will not venture to describe here, — a duke, with his duchess, and all the fine things that naturally belong to dukes: and two barons, and Sir Johns without number: for the county was large and important. Miss Trelawny, I believe, had she acted with ordinary prudence, might have had the Marquis, and been Duchess in her day. He was some years younger than she was; but, as everybody said, if *his* family did not object to that difference of age on the

wrong side, why should she? and the young man was fathoms deep in love, and did not get over his disappointment for three months at least; and nothing could have made a finer match than the Trelawny estate with the Duke's lands. However, I am not qualified to enter upon any discussion of the motives of such sublime personages. The neighbours who specially belonged to Diana, and who were most interested in the episode of her life which it is my business to relate, were the Hunstantons, who lived in the nearest "place" to Trelawny, and were deeply attached to its mistress; and another small and insignificant household, which, except in consequence of its connection with Diana, would scarcely have been of sufficient importance to be mentioned at all. This latter family was composed of two ladies, an aunt and a niece—the one a clergyman's

widow, the other a clergyman's orphan-child; peevish, humble-minded, weakly little gentlewomen, with nothing remarkable about them except the simple prettiness of the girl, Sophy, who was a soft, smiling golden-haired creature, unobtrusive and gentle as a little bird. Mrs Norton was disposed to be mysterious about the connection of herself and her niece with Diana, fearing, as she said, to "compromise" a lady in her position; but this connection was of the very simplest kind. Sophy had been at Mrs Seymour's school —a piece of extravagance which had cost her kind aunt a great deal more than she could afford—but the girl had been delicate, and sea-air had been prescribed for her, and good little Mrs Norton was willing to "live anyhow" in order to secure advantages for the child to whom she had performed all a mother's duties. Diana

was one of the women to whom a dependent of some kind is an invariable appendage, gathered to her by sheer attraction of nature: and Sophy Norton took the place of the necessary burden to be carried about on the other's strong shoulders. The child was delicate, the governess was kind. She nursed her, she petted her, she became to her a sort of amateur mother. Mrs Norton lived in cheap little lodgings at Brighton to be near her little girl, and when she asked the governess to come to tea with Sophy, she too felt that in her way she was exercising kindness and patronage, and that Miss Trelawny's care of Sophy was compensated by the notice which she, a lady of private means, not requiring to work for her living, took of the governess—so that on this foundation of mutual kindness they got on in a very pleasant way.

I will not say that Diana herself felt Mrs Norton's notice to be of the elevating character which the excellent little woman herself supposed: but she was lonely, and very grateful for kindness of any description simply offered. She liked the prattle of the two innocent creatures, the aunt not much wiser than the niece; and she liked the spectacle of their love, which brought sometimes a wistful look to her own face, and sometimes lit her up with smiles, for it had its amusing as well as its tender aspects. When Diana came to her kingdom, it is not to be described what awe, and wonder, and pride, took possession of Mrs Norton's soul. To think that the governess to whom she had condescended should have risen to be such a great lady! but yet, at the same time, to think that she had always appreciated Miss Trelawny,—always done her best, though that

was but little, to show her appreciation! When old Lady Trelawny died, Mrs Norton wrote, with much timidity, to offer, if Diana would like it, a visit of sympathy for one day only—for she had her pride, and meant nothing but kindness, if not perhaps a tremulous expedient of love to recall little Sophy to the mind of one who now might be as good a friend to the little girl "as I tried to be to her, my dear, in her days of poverty." Diana accepted this not entirely unalloyed kindness. She understood the alloy and forgave it; nay, perhaps liked the little bit of gold there was all the better for that heavenly kind of dross mixed with it —the anxious love of Sophy which prompted her aunt to seek her interest in any practicable way. They came to the Chase for two days, and stayed two months, amusing and refreshing their hostess in her loneliness with their pretty foolish ways. They

were like two kittens to Diana; their harmless gambols gave her pleasure such as sensible persons did not always understand. When she had kept them with her all that time, it seemed hard to send the two little things away again into the seaside lodgings or small suburban house which they contemplated. Diana offered them a cottage in her park which had been built by some other kind Trelawny for a poor relation,—a little red house, overgrown with climbing roses and honeysuckle, set in a little clearing of green lawns in the heart of the trees. No words could tell Sophy's delight with this pretty nest; but Mrs Norton did all she could to maintain her dignity, and to seem to doubt and hesitate a little—firstly, as to whether she ought to accept such a favour from a friend who was not a relation, as she said; and secondly, as to whether in the midst of the trees it might

be damp. But in a very short time both these fears were put to flight, and no children were ever more happy over the fitting up of a doll's house than those two little ladies were over their furnishing. And, again, to the wonder of her sensible friends, so was Diana too. Is not a grown-up sister, a young mother, sometimes excited about the doll's house as well as its lawful possessor? Miss Trelawny bought little bits of furniture, sought out scraps of china, had little brackets fitted in the little corners, and stands of flowers set out in the tiny hall. It was a toy mansion for her pets, upon which she expended more trouble than on her own stately dwelling-place; though what she could see in those two silly little women! as Mrs Hunstanton constantly said.

The Hunstantons were of a totally different class. They were landed gentry as

good as the Trelawnys themselves, if not quite so rich. They had a house in a great grove of trees which, except in the heat of summer, was not very cheerful, and which was supposed not to be wholesome for the delicate boy who was their eldest hope and the heir. He was a pale melancholy individual, like neither father nor mother, and it was on his account that they constantly spent their winters abroad. Mr Hunstanton was an unsteady man with nerves, who had attacks of neuralgia and notions, and was fond of meddling, people said, with things that did not concern him much. He was thin to the utmost possible of thinness, running about in jerks and thinking in jumps, a hasty man, not wise but yet lovable, and ready to undertake anything for anybody. His wife was as unlike him in person as in character. She was sensible, cool, and indisposed to "mix herself

up" with other people's affairs—still handsome though nearly fifty, calm in disposition, and somewhat disposed to criticism, for which she had ample ground in her husband's doings and sayings. They had married late, and had some children still in the nursery, and the weakly boy of sixteen already mentioned, whom it was the chief object of their lives to tide over the difficult period of youth. For him they were always ready to move at a moment's notice, to fly from the east winds or from the damp, or from the too great heats of summer. Climate was one of the few things which both of them believed in, and their house was full of books on the subject, and every new place was eagerly caught at and inquired about. All along the Riviera they had wandered, over Italy with all its islands, into Spain, to Gibraltar, to Algiers, up the Nile—almost as many

places as there had been winters in the delicate boy's life. Curiosities from all of these spots which possessed any curiosities filled their rooms, and the acquaintances which an active-minded man like Mr Hunstanton made in these prolonged periods of leisure were beyond counting. He had something to do with private histories all over the world, and had thrust his nervous head into more tangled webs than could be reckoned. His wife, who at first had tried to restrain him, had long ago given up the attempt as impracticable, and only looked on and wondered and criticised.

Such were Diana's nearest neighbours. The Nortons were in the park, to be got at at a moment's notice—convenient people who could be sent for, who were always ready to fill up a corner, to do anything that might be agreeable. Sophy sung a little pleasantly and prettily, as she did

everything. Her aunt was ready to play quadrilles and waltzes, or the simpler kind of accompaniments, till midnight at any time. They were liked by all the much greater people into whose society they had been transplanted bodily, and whom they delighted in, in return, with enthusiasm. The Duchess, on the one occasion when she had spent three day at the Chase, at the time when Diana had been thought possible for her most noble son, paid special attention to Mrs Norton, taking her for the resident clergywoman of the place: and the distinction was one which had never been forgotten. It must be added that, by some special dispensation of Providence, the clergy of the parish were an uncle and nephew—one rector, the other curate; two black-browed, silent men, whose chief use in nature seemed to be (besides their duties in the parish) to balance these two

little ladies at Diana's dinner-table. They were both unmarried, and Nature seemed to intend that if not two couplings at least one should result from this singularly appropriate balance of forces. Everybody, however, saw this except the parties concerned, as so often happens. They did not see it at all. The elder Mr Snodgrass unjustly stigmatised poor little Mrs Norton as a gossip; and the younger one had lost his head, not to speak of his heart, in a vain adoration of Diana, who was about as far removed from him as her namesake in the skies. And this taciturn young man was the favourite butt for Sophy's simple little wit, which was not of a brilliant character indeed, but now and then could be sharp on a personal peculiarity. Thus perverse human nature balked Providence, as seems not unusual on the surface in mortal affairs.

Diana had been reigning for full two years when this story begins, and for more than one the pair of little ladies had been settled in the Red House. They had not complained of the damp during the first winter; but now that another was about to begin, there was a little flutter of talk about Sophy's cough, which had not been lost upon Diana. Sophy, there was no doubt, had a cough. She had not got rid of it last year until the end of May, and though it did not seem to hurt her, it was enough to disturb Mrs Norton, and even to attract Diana's attention whatever she was doing, stopping her in the midst of the most interesting conversation. Was it the humid atmosphere under the trees? was it the green, too luxuriant growth about the Red House? Diana set out walking one October morning, after many thoughts, to satisfy herself on this point.

She was fond of the girl in her own person, and she was moved by a still deeper sympathetic sense of the love of the aunt to whom Sophy was everything. What would the economy matter, the pretty house which they had rent free, or even the fine company which Diana felt was still more dear to Mrs Norton—in comparison with her child's health? Diana went across the park, the short cut, not afraid of the moisture which shone on the grass, in her strong boots and serge dress. She was tall and fully developed, in the long lines and noble curves that became her age: no longer a slim girl, but mature, in the pride and height of life: her step firm and commanding, though light and swift; her fine head held high, not a stoop nor a droop had she; light and strong and beautiful, like a tall lily among the fragile undergrowth of blooms. Sophy was

sitting by the window, looking out upon the park, with a basket of flowers before her, and all the flower-vases of the house ranged round her; the air sweet with mignonette; the sunshine coming in over her head, and catching the ruddy glimmer in her hair. "Here is Diana, auntie," she said, getting up to run to the door and welcome her friend. Mrs Norton was sitting with her needlework by the table. There was a pucker in her gentle little brow, for Sophy had coughed three times since breakfast. Something would have to be done. "I will take my courage in both hands, and I will speak to Diana," she said to herself, then looked round the pretty room and sighed.

It was a very pretty room. Diana had almost furnished it, as well as given the house. Opposite the window was an old-fashioned convex mirror, making the pret-

tiest sparkling picture of the park with its trees; a little old cabinet underneath had Mrs Norton's pet china arranged upon it, catching the sunshine: the sofa by the fireside was as softly luxurious, though it was so small, as anything in the Chase. "What have we done that she should have been so good to us? and she will think it ungrateful," Mrs Norton said to herself, drying her eyes; but nothing could be ungrateful which was done with such reluctant sorrow. She heard the sound of the voices outside, and got up from her work tearfully, thinking how rash Sophy was with her cough to run to the door. "I shall never get her to take care —here," she thought. "How nice of you to come!" Sophy was saying. "Oh, I was just sitting at the window, wishing and wishing for you—yes, isn't the mignonette sweet?—it is almost the last thing

now—the flowers are going. Oh, but come in, come in—you must not stand in the hall; and your boots are wet, Diana. You have come across the grass."

"Which is not a thing for little girls to do," said Diana, letting the long serge skirt drop which she had been carrying looped over her arm. She was fond of long dresses, though they were inconvenient, and had to be looped up. "I have come to speak to your aunt about business, and you may run away for a little. Go and see if your ribbons are all right for this evening: for you are coming up to dinner to meet the Hunstantons and the clergy; and you know in that case you are always to look your best."

"As if I cared how I look, for *them!*" said Sophy. "But are we really, really coming up to-night? My white is not quite fresh enough if Mrs Hunstanton is

coming—she is so particular; and my blue is rather shabby; and you don't like my green. What am I to wear? There is the grey Japanese silk you gave me; or shall I put on my pink spotted?"

"Here is the auntie," said Diana. "Send her away, Mrs Norton, for I have something to consult you about."

"Your grey, my love," said Mrs Norton, "with the blue ribbons. That is pretty for this season, and not so thin. Oh, Diana! I ought to have gone to you. I, too, want to tell you of something. If you should think me ungrateful, or that I don't feel all your kindness to the bottom of my heart——"

"We mean the same thing, poor little auntie. That cough of Sophy's——"

"Then you have noticed it," cried Mrs Norton, turning very pale. "You think it very serious—as I do! like her mother's!

O Diana, my child! Perhaps the doctor has said something to you. What shall I do? what shall I do?"

"It is not the least serious," said Diana. "I spoke to the doctor, and he laughed."

"He laughed!" Mrs Norton wavered between relief and offence. Then she shook her head. "I have no confidence in country doctors. He would not have laughed if—if he had any real experience—if—if he knew——"

"Do not cry," said Diana. "Pray, pray do not cry. I have come to propose something to you. I want you to go to Italy with the Hunstantons."

Mrs Norton gave a little shriek. "To Italy! Oh, Diana!" Then she stopped in the first impulse of joy. "You are deceiving me," she said, trembling. "You think it a great deal more serious than you say."

"I think you are the silliest little woman! and if you make me out to have a hundred meanings I never thought of, I will not speak to you any more. Ask the doctor. Ask a dozen doctors if you please. But look here — if you are proud and hoity-toity, why, then, there must be a general dissolution and breaking up of friendship; and you know, Mrs Norton, it is a dreadful thing to break off with and alienate a true friend."

"I do, I do! Oh, how could you ever think it of me, Diana? and why do you speak to me so formally? If we were to go away to-morrow and never to come back again, do you think that would make me less grateful to you? And me hoity-toity! was I ever?—could I ever be?—does any one think it possible?"

"Do you know what that is?" said Diana. "I found it in my desk to-day.

Mrs Norton looked at the paper through her tears. She knew very well what it was. Though she was not rich, she prided herself on having travelled abroad in her time, and knowing all about such matters. It was a banker's letter recommending herself to the correspondents of the firm—one of those documents which make the traveller's path easy, and are of more use than any passport—as long as they hold out.

"Now," said Diana, with a threatening aspect, "if you make any objections or say anything disagreeable, I am your landlady, and I shall evict you. If you refuse to go I shall take your roof off. I shall turn out all your furniture; and anybody who pleases may take your china. There! the power of threatening can no further go. And now I must hurry home, for I have a great deal to do to-day. Give me some of Sophy's mignonette. Tell her she is a

little goose, and that young Mr Snodgrass prefers pink to blue; and if you were not very inexorable and unkind, his poor uncle —but of course if you will not listen to him, what does it matter what I say? Sophy, good-bye—I have no time to stay."

"But, Diana, Diana!" said Mrs Norton, breathless, with the letter in her hand, rushing to the door after the hasty visitor.

"I have not another moment—there are people waiting: good-bye till the evening," cried Diana, half-way across the lawn, with her blue gown over her arm.

"She will wet her feet, she will catch cold, she will get rheumatism. Oh, if she knew what it was to have neuralgia like me! But Italy!" said Mrs Norton to herself. She went back to her little drawing-room in a flutter of excitement. Italy! It had been the pride of her life to have been at Geneva once in her early days, and

in this one expedition she had found a parallel to all she had heard of wonderful and stupendous since then. "I can understand it," she had said, "because, when I was at Geneva——" With this the greatest traveller, and even Mr Hunstanton himself, had been quelled. But now Italy! It took away the little lady's breath. She went in and looked at the banker's letter. Surely it would turn into a bit of rag again in her hands. It could not be real. Italy —and a hundred pounds! Mrs Norton was dumb. She gasped for breath: she had not composure enough to call down Sophy, blissfully occupied in looking up her ribbons, and unaware that there was anything to hear.

Diana went back with a smile on her face. The power of doing such things as this is most likely sweeter when it is newly acquired than when people have possessed

it all their life. She liked the indulgence. To be very rich, is it not to be in some sort a god upon earth, putting right the wrongs of fortune, and remedying its injustice? It was not so always: had she herself been ill in the old days, she must have borne it, and died in patience without hope of relief; and now to be able to forestall the first possibility of danger to another seemed very sweet to her. Yet she was not unaware, and the recollection made her smile again, that there was something absurd in the choice of Sophy Norton as the recipient of her bounty. There was many a consumptive girl in the county to whom the help would have been invaluable —but Sophy was not consumptive or unhealthy. She had a cough which was no more dangerous than a toothache, and which had only attracted the notice of her friend from the fact of the supposed

dampness of the little Red House in the park. What a curious commentary it was on the inequalities of fortune, and the duty of the rich to bear the burdens of the poor! Mrs Norton was not exactly poor: she had enough to keep a house comfortably enough, therefore it was to her that the rent-free cottage naturally fell; and Sophy had no more need of transportation to a warm climate than one of the elm-trees had, therefore of course it was Sophy who had the means thrust into her hand. What a curious travesty of need and of duty! and what could the great lady say for herself who was so glad to offer this pleasure and favour to her semi-dependants? She did nothing but smile, with an acute sense of those difficulties of life which no one can explain and scarcely any one overcome. Had Diana known the people to whom this favour

would have been most a favour—to whom it might have been life and death—probably they would have been proud persons who would have rebelled at even the most delicate help. No man can save his brother. Those who want help most are those who will not accept, who cannot get it, whose wants are as far removed from the ken of the helpful by natural independence or by ignorance as if there were no help-givers in the world. Her own feelings even were to herself the strangest commentary upon her sincere desire to be of use to her fellow-creatures. This was a joke, a piece of self-indulgence, not noble neighbourliness, such as it was in Diana to do if need were. She laughed at herself and her banker's letter, and the little show of violence with which she had insisted on its acceptance. Who could tell how near at hand and in what immi-

nent need might be the other whom to save Diana would have strained every nerve? And how blind and poor and miserable is human nature, which cannot clear up even these initial difficulties! She went on sighing before the smile had died off her face, feeling amid all her power and capabilities how limited and how poor!

CHAPTER III.

TO ITALY.

"I DID not think Diana had been such a fool," was the remark of Mrs Hunstanton, when the arrangement was proposed to her. She made no objection to the joint journey. The invalid boy for whom they travelled, and in whom all her hopes were concentrated, was on the whole a fatiguing companion, dear as he was both to father and mother; and as Mrs Norton was one of the women who are utterly beyond fatigue in the amusement of children, there was compensation for the risk of being bored by the helplessness of the

two little women. But that Miss Trelawny should carry her "infatuation" about these trifling persons to the length of sending them off like an anxious mother because the girl had a cough, filled her with an angry surprise. If she had a cough, what had Diana to do with it? She had an aunt of her own to look after her, and they had, Mrs Hunstanton supposed, enough to live on, or what business had they there at Diana's table meeting the best people in the county? Her unaccountable fondness for them irritated her friend. What could she see in such commonplace persons? for indeed the mixture of amusement and habit and indulgence in Diana's affection was incomprehensible to Mrs Hunstanton, who either was fond of people or disliked them, and disapproved of such complications of feeling. To tell the truth, the Nortons themselves took Diana's kindness

as proof of a deep and absorbing love, and asked each other, with a gentle complacency, what they had done to make her so fond of them. "Not that I should wonder at *any one* being fond of you, my darling," the aunt said; a sentiment which the niece echoed warmly, both putting Diana's love down to the credit of the other. Diana herself smiled a little when they talked to her of her love. Yes; she supposed she was fond of them in a way, poor little souls! and she laughed at the indignation of Mrs Hunstanton, which was so *naïve* and open. It was no harm to that good woman, did not take anything from her, that her friend should pet and spoil these little women. Still it irritated her; and to think of this extravagant indulgence of their weaknesses angered her almost beyond bearing. "As for their coming with us, they are welcome

to come, I am sure," she said, thinking, not without a little relief, of Reginald, who was "a handful" on a long journey. She saw in her mind's eye Mrs Norton devoting herself to the boy, petting him —for it was her nature to be always petting somebody—reading to him, finding out endless stores of conundrums and foolish games for his amusement; and she was mollified. It was possible even that, though of themselves bores, they might be a kind of acquisition on the journey; but what Diana could mean by it! Mrs Hunstanton shrugged her shoulders, and made up her mind that human creatures in general were more inscrutable than any other mystery on the face of the earth. She had occasion to learn this truth nearer home. There was her own husband always dancing about on somebody's business, meddling with somebody's

affairs. No such temptation disturbed her mind. She was interested about her own people, loved them, and would have spent her last sixpence and her last hour in serving them. But people who did not belong to you! What right had you to be disturbed and deranged by their affairs?

Nevertheless, notwithstanding Mrs Hunstanton's objections to the whole business, she took a good deal of trouble that evening in enlightening the inexperienced travellers, who had a thousand questions to ask.

"When I was at Geneva, there was a light kind of challis which I wore — a kind of dust-colour—with flowers upon it," said Mrs Norton.

"Oh, not dust-colour, dear auntie; let it be grey," said Sophy.

They were all in a flutter of expectation and excitement, eager to be told if new

outfits were necessary, and a total change of raiment, as if they had been going to India. For Mrs Norton, with no rent to pay, was rich enough to indulge Sophy with several new dresses if necessary, and would have liked the business. Mrs Hunstanton cut them very short. "I hope you don't think you are going to eternal summer," she said.

"No, indeed—until we get away from this sad world altogether, Mrs Hunstanton."

Sophy had no desire to escape from this sad world. She said, "But it is much warmer. It is to take away my cough; and Reginald — of course Reginald goes for the warm weather?"

"Equable, equable. We don't jump up and down the thermometer as we do at home. And the place is very dull. You can't think how dull it is—high houses: if you live on the second floor—and unless

you are rich you must live on the second, or even the third floor—you can't even see the street. As for a glimmer of sunshine, that is past praying for, if you happen to be on the wrong side. And no society, or next to none. The Italians are very exclusive; and the English—well, the less said about the English the better," said Mrs Hunstanton, in her serious vein.

The two little ladies looked at each other Tears sprang to Sophy's eyes, who was the one most easily moved. "We must go now," she said, "to please Diana." And then, after a pause, "Diana is so kind. Perhaps she is too kind, auntie. If it had not been all settled for us—you know there are other places which are not dull."

"And ungrateful, too!" Mrs Hunstanton said to herself; but she said nothing more about the dulness of Pisa. She gave them some small instructions, which re-

stored their cheerfulness; and told them when she meant to start. And though they were damped, their courage rose after the interview was over. "If it was as bad as she says, who would wish to go there?" said Mrs Norton, with unusual shrewdness. "They are going themselves, so we must have some society. Depend upon it, dear, Diana would not send you if she were not sure it was for your good."

Sophy, who had no doubt on this subject, accepted the assurance very sweetly; and Mr Hunstanton, who met them on the road, gave them much greater encouragement. They had come out next day in Diana's own pony-carriage, which neither of them had courage to drive, and they met him on the road, trudging along in his gaiters. "My wife would not give you much advice," he said; "you should

have come to me. Take alpaca and that sort of thing, Mrs Norton. Don't you call it alpaca? or merino, is it? Not too thin, nor yet too thick. You will enjoy it very much. None of those blighting colds we have here, but an equable, pleasant temperature. You can always go out every day, and a little pleasant society always at your command. We know people everywhere; and, of course, wherever we are, after knowing you so intimately as Diana's friends, and all that, there will be a corner for you."

"Sophy," said Mrs Norton, with enthusiasm, when he had passed on, "Diana may say what she pleases, and I know she is cleverer than you and I; but for real understanding there is nothing like a gentleman! They know how to convey information, and they are so genuine. Now, ladies are always jealous. It must

be jealousy. What a different account he gave! Mr Hunstanton is a very nice man, and he understands what is due to people in our position. It will be a great advantage to be near them: for whatever Mrs Hunstanton may say, of course they must have some society. Besides, my love," added Mrs Norton, "the great thing is your health. We can bear anything if your cough goes."

"I think it is better since Thursday," said Sophy. Thursday was the day of Diana's visit, when this great step was decided upon.

"I think so too," said the aunt. "You know how one's toothache goes away when one knocks at the dentist's door."

This was perhaps not a very flattering simile: but that Sophy's cough did improve immediately was very apparent. Diana from the great house looked on at

the movements in the little one with that amused observation which Mrs Hunstanton could not understand. That Sophy's cough was better, that Mrs Norton was no longer frightened to expose her niece to the cold winds, and even bore with equanimity Sophy's adoption of the "short cut" across the park, which would have alarmed both of them a few weeks before, and that Mrs Norton herself had no neuralgia when she drove out and in to Ireton to do the shopping which she found inevitable, — all this was very apparent to Diana. Mrs Hunstanton, and even Miss Trelawny's maid, remarked these circumstances with wrath, and the former hotly declared it to be utter cynicism and disbelief in human nature which made Diana laugh, and go on petting the little humbugs as much as ever. Is there always perhaps a little cynicism mingled with the

toleration of the larger nature? Diana protested against it warmly, and felt herself injured by the imputation. She did not expect so much as the others did. It pleased herself to be kind and liberal to them. She did not want gratitude. Thus one part of the world will argue for ever, while another part receives the favours given and feels itself relieved from obligation by that very argument; and a third, incapable either of the generosity or the ingratitude, stands by and grows wroth and criticises. After all, it is the givers who have the best of it, though they have all the loss and the largest share of the pain,—which is a paradox, as most things that concern this paradoxical human nature must be.

The travellers went away, and Diana was left alone. Even in the heyday of health and life this is seldom desirable.

She was alone in the world. So fortunate, so happy, so capable a woman, with "everything that heart could desire," did her prosperity, her wealth and power, and beautiful surroundings do much for her? I think they did ameliorate her lot to an almost incalculable extent. Shut up in a limited space, in sordid circumstances, poor, with nothing to occupy her active faculties, she would have been like a caged lion. But she had abundance to do — occupations important and valuable and necessary, not the things done for the mere sake of occupation which are the lot of so many women, and indeed also of many men. The work of the estate, taken up for the first time for many generations with genuine enthusiasm, exercised all her powers; and as she had the advantage over most reformers of being able actually to execute a great many of the reforms

she had planned, her work kept her going as perhaps no other work could have done. A reforming despot, eager to set everything right, and really able in many cases to enact the part of Providence, redress wrongs, and do poetic justice among men, —what position could be more sustaining and encouraging to a vigorous and fanciful soul? Diana's "work" occupied her like a profession. She was rich, for what use but the good of others? The most extravagant expenditure possible to herself personally, she thought, could not amount to half of her income—though she loved to have beautiful things about her, and to spend liberally with the generous habit of her nature. She never meant to marry, she never meant to save. The next Trelawny who should succeed her would find an unencumbered estate, and an improved one, please God, but hoards

of money none. This was the intention of her life. You may believe, if you please, that some disgust of youth with the ordinary arrangements of humanity, some horror of false love, or unforgotten outrage of the heart, was at the bottom of the system upon which she had formed her future existence. But whatever this was, she had surmounted the pain of it, and her imagination had been caught by that ideal of the virgin princess, which has something captivating in it, though it is rarely recognised by the world. Then she had herself been poor, and knew how to give succour and who needed it.

But she kept the family lawyers of the Trelawny house, I allow, in a state of fever and exasperation very prejudicial to the health of these respectable gentlemen. They thought her mad, no less, when she

proposed to them to give large slices of her income to this one and the other—not "the poor," in the ordinary sense of the word. Subscriptions to hospitals, to orphanages, to charities in general, that they understood; but a civil list of pensions like the Queen's —sometimes more liberal than her Majesty is permitted to give! "The young woman is mad!" said Mr Seign and Mr Cachet. But it was in favour of Diana's sanity that she had her dresses from Paris, and drove a beautiful pair of horses, and bought pictures, and saw a great deal of society. Her conservatories were the pride of the county; her head gardener a man of such erudition that professors quailed before him. This did not look like insanity; neither did the great Christmas party which gathered in the Chase, when Mr Cachet was one of the guests, and was forced to acknowledge that things had not been carried on with any-

thing like so much splendour in old Sir John's time. She was not a hermit nor an anchorite nor a monomaniac. As for her resolution not to marry, of course that meant solely that she had not yet been addressed by the right man; and when he appeared, no doubt he would make short work with the civil list. This calmed the tone of Messrs Seign & Cachet's remonstrances. They protested on principle against any new "eccentricity" of the feminine Squire of Trelawny; but they trusted in time and the chapter of accidents, and Diana's beauty and her youth—for naturally when she has a large property, however it may be under other circumstances, a woman of thirty has by no means ceased to be young.

Thus Diana occupied herself through the dulness of the winter; but when spring began to thrill nature with its first touches

through the gloom her energy flagged. There was no one with her. Were I to say that these two silly little women in the Red House had been "company" for Diana it would be folly; and yet she missed them and their chatter and their soft voices. How much domestic comfort there is in pleasant looks and smiles and soft tones, even when unaccompanied by high qualities! They had gone away without thinking much of her who was so much their superior, accepting her favours with light hearts, but quite easy in the thought that Diana liked to give. And she, foolish, bigger, nobler creature, missed them! How absurd it was, yet true! And she missed also the Hunstantons, her nearest neighbours, and her strength of winter flagged; and all those imaginations to which "in spring a young man's fancy lightly turns" awoke in Diana's mind—not to thoughts of

love, but to those unnamed and unnamable disturbances, longings for something other than what we possess, which are not confined to youth alone. "Folk are longen to gon on pilgrimages,"—old characteristic of human nature never changed! Diana got up one morning with a sudden thought in her mind. She, who for these last two years had been helping all sorts of people to all sorts of pleasure, she had never been anywhere herself, except in the last months of old Lady Trelawny's life, when she went to Cannes with her in an invalid pursuit of the warmth and sunshine. She made up her mind all at once to go to Italy too.

"I don't know whether it was fortunate or unfortunate for her, but it was the fact that her first rapid glance round all her horizon to try to remember if she knew any one who would like to be taken there with her—came to nothing. If she chose

to go she must make up her mind to go for herself. Well, she said after an interval, why not go for myself? There was nothing unlawful in it, no more than in getting dresses from Paris, which she did without hesitation. Therefore, accordingly, with her usual rapidity, having placed everything on a safe footing that none of her enterprises might be arrested, Diana set off. She sent no warning letters before her. Perhaps this was rash: but it was not as if she expected any special warmth of welcome. She knew exactly how she would be received by all her friends,—how Sophy and her aunt would flutter about her; how Mrs Hunstanton would raise her eyebrows, and proceed to immediate but probably silent speculations as to what had brought her; how Mr Hunstanton would claim her interest in the histories of all his friends; even how sickly

Reginald would inspect her to see what she had brought him. All this Diana knew beforehand. She went rapidly across the sea and land on the last wild days of March, and found herself whirled through the Tuscan plain among the almond-trees in the beginning of April. What a flush there was everywhere about of those almond-trees, useful and meant for fruiting, not kept merely to be the earliest ornaments of the garden, like ours! She seemed to be wandering through the backgrounds of all the Italian pictures she knew, seeing the soft evening light strike upon the little cones of hills, the old castles and convents. Was this the Val d'Arno, the country of dreams, and were these the Apennines? There was a vague elation, a sense of wondering joyous unreality, in the very names.

The Hunstantons "knew themselves" in

all these places which are frequented by invalids, and knew where to go. They were established in an old palace on the sunny side of the river. There they had saved wood and kept themselves warm all the winter, and now began to talk of the risks of too much heat and the necessity of closing the *persianis*. Reginald was better, and as for Sophy's cough, no one had heard it since she left England. It had been cured too soon; but only Mrs Hunstanton recollected this fact, or ever had mentioned it. The Hunstantons had the second floor of the palace, being economical people; the Nortons had a little *appartemento* above. They lived separately, yet together; and Reginald had been so much happier with the Nortons to fall back upon, to find out conundrums for him, and play games with him, and fill up his idle moments, that his mother had forgotten all her objections to

her fellow-travellers. Reginald was her very dear son, but he was not an interesting boy. Sometimes even fathers and mothers are conscious of this fact, but kind little Mrs Norton was quite unconscious of it. "I do really believe that Diana, who thinks of everything, saw what an advantage it would be for Reginald, and that she sent them for that, as much as for Sophy's ridiculous little pretence of a cough," Mrs Hunstanton had been saying on the very evening of Diana's arrival. This was when she and her husband were alone after dinner on one of their "off-nights." On alternate evenings they held small receptions,—little gossiping friendly parties which were not parties, and to which the English—of whom this lady had said that the less said of them the better—constantly came. One stranger only interfered on this evening with the conjugal *tête-à-tête*.

He was an Italian—a Florentine—of the great house of the Pandolfini, but not a wealthy scion of the race.

"Yes; Sophy is an unselfish little thing. I always told you so. She likes to be of use."

"I observe," said Pandolfini, who bore the title of Cavaliere, but was invariably addressed, according to Italian use and wont, by his Christian name. He spoke good but formal English, avoiding the contractions with which we break the solemnity of our speech. "I observe that it is the epithet for the young lady—unselfish. All the English say so. Is there not, then, another epithet which will mean something more large, more fine?"

"What could be finer than unselfishness?" said Mrs Hunstanton, raising her eyebrows. "Mind, *I* don't apply it as so many people do; and I was not talking of

Sophy, whose chief claim is that she is young and pretty, but of her aunt: or rather, indeed, of Diana."

"Ah, Diana!" said her husband; "that is a different thing altogether."

"And who, then, is Diana?" said Pandolfini, smiling. He had heard the name a great many times; but that any one should be ignorant who Diana was seemed so unlikely to the little party, that the Italian, though a constant visitor, knew nothing of her but her name.

"Oh, Diana! Why, you know she—— Who is that, my dear, at the door? We don't expect any one, do we, to-night?"

"*I* don't expect any one—unless you have forgotten what night it was, as I've known you to do, and asked somebody——"

"Why, why!" said Mr Hunstanton—"God bless me! listen: if I did not know

she was safe in England I should say that voice—— My dear!—why, it is! Diana, her very self!"

The Italian stood behind backs, smiling and looking on. The room was large and but partially lighted, with frescoes on the walls shining out here and there where there was light enough to see them. He saw a lady come in against one of these illuminated bits of wall, relieved against a mass of dark-crimson drapery, holding out her hands. She was in black, with a lace veil wound about her head. The smile faded off his face as he stood and gazed. He had been thinking of Sophy's type of English womankind, which was what he had seen most, with that same amused, indulgent, kind semi-contempt which had been in Diana's mind. But here he was stopped suddenly short. The beautiful face which met his look without

being aware of it was pale, partly by nature, partly by fatigue. Her hair was dark, shining with a soft gloss, yet ruffled over her forehead by a tendency to curl which had often disturbed Diana: her eyes of that lustrous and dewy grey which is so rare: her face as perfect in its somewhat long oval as if it had been painted by Luini, but not weak as Luini's faces sometimes are. She stood smiling, putting out her hands, which looked like snow through the cloud of drooping lace. "Yes, it is Diana—the last person in the world you expected to see!" she said.

Pandolfini felt the words echo down to the very bottom of his heart. Surely the very last person in the world he had expected to see,—such a woman as he had been looking for all his life! Fortunately he was in the shade, and she was occupied with her friends and the welcome they

gave; and though she saw there was a stranger present, could not see, and therefore could not be offended by, his gaze. And an Italian can gaze at a woman without impertinence as a man of no other nation can. If she is beautiful, is it not the homage he owes her? and if she is not beautiful, it is kind to make her think so—to give the admiration due to her sex, if not to her. Presently, however, he awoke to the recollection that English susceptibilities were sometimes shocked by this simple homage. He did not go away as an Englishman would have done, but he went to one of the distant windows, and, half hidden in the curtains, looked on still while they put her in a chair, discharging volleys of questions — while they offered her everything, dinner, tea, wine, all that a traveller might be supposed to require, and she replied with soft

laughter and explanations, declaring herself fully refreshed and rested. Then there was a flutter and a rush, and the two little ladies from the third floor came rushing in, called by Reginald, and blotted out the beautiful new-comer with their embracings. When the party remembered him at last, and brought him out of the shadow and presented him to the stranger, Pandolfini, much against his will, had to go away. Not even his Italian simplicity was proof against the little chill that came over the English group as he was brought (of course by good Mr Hunstanton's officious kindness) into the midst of it. "I must not disturb the happiness of the re-seeing," he said in his formal English, carefully pronouncing every syllable. Sophy had been sent by her aunt to fetch something as he got his hat in the anteroom, and lingered a moment in the great gloomy

staircase, lighted only by the little coiled taper she carried, and by the lamp of the servant who stood ready to show him the way down that dark cavern of stairs. It made a curious picture, — the light all centring in Sophy's whiteness, her muslin dress, and the flower face that bloomed over it in all the English glory of complexion. She lingered to say good-night to him, putting out her soft little hand. "You are happy to-night?" he said, looking at her with that kind smile. "How can I help it?" cried Sophy, but with a curious wistful look in her eyes; "Diana has come." Then she ran with a thrill and vibration of light and brightness up into the dark, carrying her taper, and he more heavily went down to the night and the outside world.

Diana has come! He kept saying it to himself all the way back to his lodging,

trying to harden the soft syllables in the English way—then melting, softening over them, taking them back to his own tongue. The moon was large in the sky, stooping out of the blue, wondering at him—she, too, who was Diana. He laughed to himself softly, and then—strange!—felt his eyes full of tears. Why, in the name of every sylvan goddess?—because an English lady whom he had never seen before had suddenly appeared in the big, dim, painted room, where her country-people were staying—the most natural of incidents. What could he do but laugh at himself thus suddenly startled into—sentiment. Yes, that was the word—a foolish word, meaning a foolish thing. But why that filling of the eyes? He was an Anglo-maniac, and it vexed him to feel how southern he was, how unrestrained, overcome in that foolish Italian way by

feeling. An Englishman would not have been capable of these absurd tears. And as he pursued his way in the moonlight all the length of the Lung' Arno the bells began to strike their prolonged Italian twenty-two hours, for it was ten o'clock: and every chime all over the city (for need I say every clock was a little behind its brother?), prolonging the twenty-two into half a hundred, struck out the same sound that was in his heart: Di—ana—Diana—Diana! She had come—she whom no one had heard of till to-day.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO LITTLE WOMEN.

"So you have been happy," said Miss Trelawny. She was in her room at her hotel, lying upon a sofa, not because of fatigue so much as to please the two little women who were fluttering about her, and to whom it was a matter of conventional necessity, that having just "come off a journey," a lady ought to be fatigued and should "lie down." Diana, in her perfect health and vigour, had thrown off all her tiredness in a night's rest; but Mrs Norton did not think this possible, and was doubtful even whether it was right.

"Oh, very happy," said Sophy; "everybody has been kind to us. We have had the most delightful parties — little dances even: and almost everybody has a reception one night in the week. And it is so beautiful! and all the churches and things to go and see; and the alabaster shops: and Mr Pandolfini has been so kind."

"Yes, Diana, it has been very nice indeed," said her aunt; "everybody is kind, as Sophy says. So interested in her, seeing that she was delicate——"

"Oh, auntie, I am not delicate now— my cough is quite, *quite* gone. I feel as if I could do anything. Fancy, Diana, Mr Pandolfini took us all over the Cathedral and up the Leaning Tower, and to see everything; and then there was a little impromptu dance at the Winthrops — Americans, you know — and I danced —

I danced with *him alone* four dances. I was quite ashamed of myself——"

"Is Mr Pandolfini *him alone?*" said Diana, laughing; "but what does all this mean? For I thought Mrs Hunstanton said there was no society in Pisa——"

"She must have been in an ill temper that day," said Sophy; "there never was such delightful society anywhere, never! Oh, Diana, you will enjoy it so; everything is *so* lovely! The Cathedral alone, when you go over it as you ought, and the Campo Santo, and all the pictures. Mr Pandolfini knows them all, every one, and tells you everything. Oh, Mr Pandolfini is *so* kind!"

"Ah, little one, is it so?" said Diana, looking up at her with a smile. But Mrs Norton interposed hastily—

"Sophy always thinks everybody is *so* kind that shows a natural interest in her.

She is so ridiculously humble-minded. But even a virtue should not be carried too far, should it? We must not say a word against Mrs Hunstanton, who has been a very good friend to us; but what she said about society was quite a mistake. The society is very good. I need not tell you, my dear Diana, that Sophy is a little goose, and knows nothing: all society is good to her when people are kind to her; but I have a little more experience. The Hunstantons themselves, of course we know what they are—very good friends to us and very nice, and everything one could desire—but not perhaps, you know, the very *crême de la crême.*"

"Ah, indeed," said Diana, with a smile; "and who then are the *crême de la crême?*"

"Oh, we must not try to prejudice you," said Mrs Norton; "you will see for your-

self. Everybody of course will be glad to see *you*, Diana. But I must say I think it is the greatest testimony to people's disinterestedness that they have been so good to us. We are not wealthy, you know, nor great ladies; but everybody has seen my Sophy's sweetness, Diana. That is what goes to my heart. They do all so appreciate Sophy——"

"Oh, auntie, how can you say so?" cried Sophy, rosy with blushes, running to her, and clasping her arms round her. "Fancy anybody thinking of poor little me! They like me because I am *your* child."

Diana lay on her sofa and laughed very softly to herself. The mutual admiration amused, and it did not displease her. Mrs Hunstanton would have taken it very differently, but Diana could not but be amused. "Come," she said, "it is not kind to leave me in so much lower a place. I

am only to be received, because I am Miss Trelawny; that is hard upon me. I should like to be liked for myself too."

"O Diana! you!—as if any one would look at me when *you* are there!" cried Sophy, with a blush and flutter, running to kiss her friend; while Mrs Norton remonstrated more gravely—

"My dear Diana, you are a person of importance, we all know, in every way. You are so clever, very different from either Sophy or me: besides being a great lady, which, of course, opens every door. You must not grudge us, dear, a little interest that people take in us, because we are quite unimportant. It is her innocence, you know, that interests everybody—such a little white dove of a creature—and partly, too, because you have been such a friend to us, Diana. Everybody knows how kind you have been."

This silenced Diana, who had no mind to be commended for her kindness. She told Sophy where to find certain little boxes of gloves and trifling ornaments which she had bought in her passage through Paris, and so turned the course of the conversation. They were much delighted as a matter of course with their presents, and most eager to get a little information about the fashions, which Diana, who got her dresses in Paris, must be so well qualified to give. Then Diana's maid was called, and the last gown was brought out, and examined with the greatest interest, Diana looking on from her sofa, always with a smile. They were not rich enough to have their dresses from M. Worth; but they were not at all disposed to wear things that were out of fashion. Why should they? and both the aunt and the niece were very serious in their conviction that it was a great advantage to

be able to study Diana's things, and see exactly what was the newest trimming, and how "a really good" gown was made. Mrs Norton was very clever with her needle, and thought nothing of altering the trimming of a dress when she saw a newer fashion, or even of changing the cut of the garment itself (if the stuff would allow). "It is so much more easy when you have a pattern before your eyes instead of only the plate in a fashion-book," she said. Diana's maid, Morris, had her own opinion about this, and was indignant that her mistress's things should be copied; but Diana threw open her wardrobe with that absurd liberality which shocked Morris as much as it shocked Mrs Hunstanton. They did not understand how it was possible that she could be amused by the sight of those two heads so closely bent over her best dress, pinching the flutings

with their inquisitive fingers, and examining with such precision the way in which it was looped up. "What a blessing that your new grey is not made up!" said the aunt to the niece; "I see exactly how this is done." "You are so clever, auntie," said Sophy, admiringly. "The front width forms a *tablier*," said Mrs Norton, "and the back is in a *pouff*. See! nothing could be more simple; and yet how handsome it looks! To be sure, yours is not such handsome silk as Diana's; but with your light little figure——" "And, dear auntie, don't you think your plum-colour could be altered to look like this, with a new flounce at the bottom? I must not be selfish, and let you think always of me," said Sophy. How angry Mrs Hunstanton would have been, and how Maria Morris gloomed at the two little ladies! But Diana, in the background, was amused and pleased on

the whole. How could it be supposed to harm her? And it pleased them; and to see them fluttering over it, consulting, and putting their little heads on one side, and examining all the seams, and looking as if something much more serious than affairs of the State were in hand, was as good as a play.

She had bought a box of gloves for Sophy, and a pretty parasol and ribbons for Mrs Norton. The first of these had created a slight disappointment, she could see, gloves being then cheap in Tuscany. "But I am sure it was most kind of Diana to think of you at all: and they are such beautiful gloves," said Mrs Norton, in a reassuring tone. Diana felt a little mortified to find that she had thus brought, as it were, coals to Newcastle; but even that amused her more or less — for her little *protégée* was already more learned than

she in the smaller necessities of the toilet, and where things could be got cheap.

Diana got up from the sofa while they were occupied with her wardrobe, and betook herself to her letters. Hers was not the usual lady's budget of not very necessary correspondences: already the questions, the references, the applications which weary out the absent who are involved in the real business of life, and make a holiday almost more troublesome than a working day, had begun. She had to write to her steward, to her lawyer, and to more than one of the pensioners on her civil list, who thought it their duty to make deferential communications to her about their families, and consult her as to the steps to be taken for placing Willie in an office or Fanny at school. No one could believe that it was not personal love which made Diana good to them—a perception

of their own excellences, not general in the world; and this sentiment in her mind no doubt made all the trouble she took a pleasure to her. This conviction arose from no protestations of affection on Diana's part; but simply from the fact of her beneficence, which otherwise no one could understand, not even her friends. She replied as best she could to those applications about Willie and Fanny, approving generally of what was being done, and sending a little present to make up for the deficiency in interest which she felt rather guilty about, but which no one suspected. "How you can be fond of so many commonplace people is a thing I don't understand," said Mrs Hunstanton, who came in while she was thus occupied. "I am not fond of them," said Diana, humbly. Her friend shook her head with undisguised impatience. She was rather shocked even by the idea.

"You are either the most affectionate person in the world, or you are the greatest deceiver," she cried, in her non-comprehension, stung to warmer energy than usual by the sight of Mrs Norton and Sophy in the background, still examining the new *mode*.

"I am either a fool or a humbug: is that what you would say?"

"Not a humbug, perhaps, not a conscious humbug: a cynic, that is what it is. You despise everybody, therefore you can manage to be good to them. Look at that now! I would not put up with it for a moment—turning over all your things—making your very gowns common——"

This is a sort of desecration that goes to a woman's heart—to bring down her newest fashion to the common level—to copy in poor materials the very finest and newest cuts! "I could not away with it!" said

Mrs Hunstanton, and she meant what she said.

Diana laughed, which was quite exasperating in the circumstances. "They like it," she said, "and it does me no harm. I am very glad to see Sophy looking so well——"

"My dear Diana, Sophy never looked the least ill, except in your anxious eyes. Well, I don't intend to say anything more about it; you chose to do it, and that is enough. Tom is as ridiculous as you are. He insists that I should take them everywhere, and introduce them to all the people we know. I allow that they are very good to Reginald—oh, very good. They actually make his life happier, and of course I am grateful. It is not that I dislike them or grudge anything I can do; but you, Diana, you! to waste so much affection upon two little selfish——"

"Unselfish, you mean."

"It comes to the same thing," said Mrs Hunstanton, in her fervour. "Oh yes, they are always giving in, thinking what you will like, and deferring to each other; and the result is that they have everything they wish, which, rich as you are and clever as you are, Diana, is more than could be said for you——"

"I have a great many things I like," said Diana, quietly; "no one has more; and I have my own way—you don't consider the blessedness of that. Above all things in the world, one likes one's own way."

"You have your own way by letting every one have theirs," said her friend. "What is Sophy about? Are you going to copy all Diana's things, one after the other? But you must allow for the difference of style: Diana's things will never suit you."

"Indeed Sophy is a great deal more sensible than to think she could be like Diana," said Mrs Norton, with dignity; "there *is* a great difference of style; and different people like different things," she added, oracularly, "some one, some another." Mrs Norton felt herself able to show fight with the backing up of Diana behind her, and even, with that moral support, felt strong enough slightly to under-value Diana: a whimsical way, yet a very genuine one, of proving unbounded faith in her. For the moment indeed she had an easy victory, for Mrs Hunstanton was struck dumb by the audacious idea that Sophy's "style" should be identified in opposition to Diana's, and was silent against her will, finding no words at her command to say. And the others gathered up their presents, while the little scratch of Diana's pen was the only sound clearly audible. Sophy turned

over her gloves half regretfully, half pleased. They were beautiful gloves—some of them twelve-buttons! which was wonderful—much better than she ever would have herself bought; but then the Tuscan gloves did very well, and if it had only occurred to Diana to bring her something more useful! "But how good of Diana to think of you at all!" Mrs Norton was whispering in her ear.

"I don't hear you talking," said Diana, "if it's out of consideration for me, never mind. You don't disturb me, and my letters are almost done."

"You must go over all the sights," said Mrs Hunstanton; "my husband will give us no peace till you have seen everything. How pleased he will be to have a new person to take about! He will not spare you a single picture or a single chapel. He likes to do things thoroughly."

"But Diana must not do too much," said Mrs Norton, "after such a long journey. She must keep quite quiet for a day or two, and lie on the sofa. Indeed I should have the blinds down, if she would be guided by me. She must not try her nerves too much."

"Have I any nerves?" said Diana, laughing; "to lie on the sofa would make an end of me. But I don't think I am good for sight-seeing. It is quite enough at present to say when one wakes, This is Italy. Fancy being in Italy! What could one desire more?"

"But, dear Diana, that is nothing!" cried Sophy, great in her superior knowledge. "Wait till you have seen Pisa properly — oh, only wait a little! You don't know—you can't imagine how nice it is!"

Mrs Hunstanton cast a look of impatience

upon this outburst of enthusiasm. She had put up with these little women good-humouredly enough hitherto, and had been rather grateful for their good offices in respect to Reginald; but Diana's presence made a change. Their little ways exasperated her as soon as their protectress and patron appeared on the scene. They were Diana's folly — they were the one thing unaccountable in her, at least the most prominent thing; and as soon as Mrs Hunstanton saw that familiar smile of kindness on Diana's lip, she became censorious, critical, impatient, as when she was at home.

"There are much finer places in the world than Pisa," she said. "We need not raise Diana's expectations; but still there is something to see, and Mr Hunstanton——"

"Oh, but please, Diana, let Mr Pan-

dolfini go too!" cried Sophy, irrepressible. "No one knows so well as he does; and he is so clever and so good-natured. He will take you everywhere. I never understood anything till he explained it. Oh please, Mrs Hunstanton, let Mr Pandolfini take Diana! He is the best."

"Sophy!" said her aunt in an undertone, raising a warning finger. "It is not that she does not appreciate dear Mr Hunstanton—he is always so kind; but Mr Pandolfini being a stranger——"

"Oh, I am not jealous for my husband," said Mrs Hunstanton, with a laugh.

Sophy did not appreciate either the warning or the displeasure. She babbled on about the sights she had seen, while Diana listened and admired. She knew a great deal more, and had seen a great deal more than Diana, not only the Cathedral and the Campo Santo, but

an alabaster shop which Mr Pandolfini had told her was very good, and not so dear as some of the others; and where Sophy had bought the dearest little pair of oxen with a funny waggon, "just like what you see the peasants have," she said, with a sense of knowing all about it which was very pleasant. Diana put up her letters composedly, and let the girl run on. Mrs Hunstanton felt that she herself would have been quite incapable of so much patience, and this made her still more angry in spite of herself. But she had made up her mind to stay them out, and got rid of them at last triumphantly, by reminding Sophy that there was choir-practice that afternoon at the Winthrops, who had "interested themselves very much" in the English service, and were very musical. This master-stroke left Mrs Hunstanton in possession of the field. She

breathed a sigh of relief when they were gone.

"That little Sophy is beyond anything," she cried. "Why, she patronises you, Diana, for being foolish enough to send her to Italy when she had no more need to go——"

"Hush," said Diana, putting up a hand as if to close her friend's mouth; "but tell me, who is this Mr Pandolfini? Sophy does not seem able to talk of anything else. Poor child! has she come out here innocently to meet her fate?"

"Diana, don't be so ridiculous about that child; you make me so angry. You do nothing but encourage her in every kind of nonsense——"

"Is love nonsense? — and marrying? I thought you were always preaching their advantages."

"Ah, to you! that is a different thing

altogether — except that there is no one half good enough for you. You! Yes, of course we shall all be too happy to see a Prince Consort."

"There will never be a Prince Consort," said Diana; "if you knew what it is to be free, after being under somebody's orders all your life!"

"But a good husband does not give you orders; only men in novels, so far as I can see, call upon their wives to obey them in that melodramatic way. If Tom were to do it, I cannot say I should be angry: it would be too comical—I should laugh. Marriage is not slavery, Diana."

"But if I don't mean to try it, why should I? there are quantities of people in the world to marry and be married. It is no sin, is it? but rather a variety. Now, acknowledge that I am convenient now and then, from the mere fact that

there is only one of me! But it is the whole duty of woman in Sophy's case. To marry and to marry well—to get a kind good man, who will not object to her aunt. So I repeat, Who is Mr Pandolfini? To call her by such a big-sounding name would be very droll. But Italians are kind. Tell me who he is?"

"He is—well, he is not for Sophy, if that is what you mean. The ridiculous idea! Sophy—a little nobody, a blanche Miss! If you knew the man, you would laugh——"

"But you don't laugh——"

"No; because men are such fools! and you never know what absurdity they may be guilty of when a girl has that little admiring manner, and looks up to them. Still, the Cavaliere has better taste—he has more sense. He might die for *you*, Diana; but that little thing——"

"For me!" Diana laughed, but a faint colour came upon her face. "That means, I suppose, that a tall dark woman seems more in this hero's way than a little light one? Let us hope that the law of contraries will bring them together. I should not like little Sophy to be disappointed—and her aunt."

"You are really too absurd about Sophy and her aunt. Is a man to marry both of them? But he is *my* friend, and I can't have him brought down to such a fate. If that is what you mean, Diana, it must be a stand-up fight between you and me. I shall not give in if I can help it; and I am sure he is not such a fool."

"There is a wavering in your voice which sounds like alarm," said Diana, laughing; "but I have no evil intentions in respect to your Mr Pandolfini. I shall not stand

up and fight. If Sophy cannot do it for herself, I shall not interfere."

"Sophy!" said Mrs Hunstanton, with vast disdain; but nevertheless there was a slight quaver in her voice.

CHAPTER V.

THE PALAZZO DEI SOGNI.

A GREAT many things happened in the next few days. The first floor of the Palazzo dei Sogni, where the Hunstantons lived, being vacant, Diana was made by her friends to take it for the remainder of the season; and they brought her in triumph from her hotel, where indeed she had felt herself out of place, to the vast magnificent faded rooms, so bare and yet so noble, in which the Marchesi dei Sogni had vegetated for generations. There were few things left in them except mere furniture which could be made money of; but

the furniture itself would have gone long ago, had it not been for the more immediate advantage of letting the *piano nobile*, and the immediate disadvantage of buying other chairs and tables in modern taste. Accordingly, the beautiful rooms were still furnished as became them, with articles which, if not so old as the walls, had at least lived there for more than a century. And there was one Vandyke — indifferent the dealers said, but very splendid still to be in the private enjoyment of an English lodger, —a full-length of a melancholy dark Di Sogni of two hundred years ago, which threw still further dignity upon the lofty rooms, all opening upon one another, in which his ancestors had lived and died. Sophy and her aunt were overawed by the splendour of this presiding deity, yet ventured to suggest that a new drawing-

room suite in blue satin would be "sweet," and make everything look quite different —which no doubt was very true.

Diana, however, was entirely in her place in these rooms, and enjoyed them with that thrill of her being which she herself laughed at as a sign of superannuated youthfulness and romanticism, and which, to tell the truth, none of her friends comprehended at all. For, after all, what was Italy more than any other place? A better climate, a good many things to see, and, as Sophy thought, delightful society, and many little parties, balls, and other gentle diversions which she had never before attained to. In their hearts they all thought Diana a little absurd. But at the same time it was very pleasant to have her there, and to get the advantage of her large rooms as it grew hotter, and of her carriage, in

which Mrs Norton and Sophy went about everywhere. They had felt often that Mrs Hunstanton was not very hospitable in respect to her little carriage, which had only one horse, and no very great accommodation. "I suppose she thinks she cannot ask one of us without the other," Mrs Norton had said; "but I am sure, as long as my darling had a drive now and then, I should not mind." "If she would only have taken auntie sometimes — that is all I should have cared for," said the girl. They were very unselfish, always preferring each other. But Diana's carriage made everything smooth. When she went out, she had the chief seat; but when she did not go, Mrs Norton and Sophy were quite happy. Sometimes they would take pretty Mrs Winthrop, the American, and her little daughter, and then their airs of gentle

patronage was delightful. They were very kind, always ready to be of use. "What were our blessings given to us for, but to be shared with others?" Mrs Norton would say; "I am sure dear Diana is of that opinion." And no doubt there crept by degrees a certain confusion into her mind on the subject, and she ceased to be quite sure that dear Diana's opinion on this subject was more important than her own. All this Mrs Hunstanton beheld with hostile eyes. She had no patience with Diana's supineness. "You demoralise everybody," she cried at last, wound up to desperation. "They were good enough little silly creatures, but now they are unendurable." Was there perhaps a consciousness in her mind, behind this warmth of righteous indignation, that the additional importance which the two little ladies had taken upon them, and the carriage and Diana's backing,

had made a difference in their attentions to Reginald? If so, Mrs Hunstanton would no doubt have felt that she was quite right in finding fault with such selfishness, for had not they paid court to herself assiduously until such time as they needed her no longer? Mercenary little things, both aunt and niece!

No one, however, could shake Diana out of this supineness, or could drive her into a fiery round of sight-seeing such as her friends desired. She went out and walked, roaming about the sacred places, making slow acquaintance with the things she wanted to see, spending the cool hours under the shadow of the Vandyke in these great cool melancholy rooms, sitting out in the balcony, where a faint waft of orange-blossom out of the nearest convent garden came upon the soft evening air. Fortunately there was a moon, which, so

long as it lasted, whitening the *loggias* and high roofs of the tall houses on the other side of Arno, and casting a long silvery gleam along the course of the river between, pleased her more than anything. They said she was lazy, and they said she was sad; but Diana was no more sad than a nature finely touched is apt to be by moments everywhere, and she had more occupation every day than good Mr Hunstanton, who was the chief supporter of the lazy theory, got through in a week. It was only her friends, however, as so often happens, who found fault with her. The general community looked with profoundest admiration upon this beautiful young woman ("though not so very young," some people said), who was so rich, and in her own country such a great lady. Again, Diana had the advantage over a young Squire Trelawny of

her own age and wealth. Much as that personage would naturally have been prized in an English colony, she was looked up to still more. She was so rich; she had so much power to give pleasure to others, and such goodwill to do it. And then to pay court to her injured no one's *amour propre*, neither that of man or woman. To want to marry her even, had it gone so far as that, would have been no shame to any one. She rose easily, without any effort of her own, into something of the same princess position which she held at home. The English chaplain went to her at once, you may be sure, and got the largest subscription from her that had ever been known in the records of the church at Pisa. If she did not buy alabaster at Sophy's favourite shop, she bought better things, and befriended everybody, which was the best of all. On the ground of hav-

ing been once poor herself, her sympathy for all who were poor went the length of absurdity, Mrs Hunstanton thought. And even Mrs Norton remonstrated gently. "We have no right to say so, but you must not be too good, Diana," she said. Diana was a puzzle to the people who were so familiar with her, who felt authorised to find fault with her, to lecture her, to point out a great many better ways of doing everything. Sophy, indeed, took upon herself to allow that perhaps dear Diana was a little eccentric. "But then she is so good! we all love her so!" cried the little girl, with a certain indulgence and patronage.

Diana was aware of all this, more or less. She knew that they were conscious of a mild superiority, even while they took everything, and a degree of importance above all, from her. But she only smiled; they meant no harm. It was nature. They

could not bring out any more than was in them: they were good, if they were not wise. They meant no harm. And if her own little world was more puzzled than respectful, the outer world had a great respect for Diana. She was so rich! What a thing that is! And if it makes the homeliest persons interesting, how much more must it do for those who are not homely, who are interesting by gift of nature? Miss Trelawny was on everybody's lips—all the more, perhaps, that she did not drive about constantly, as her companions wished, and show herself in everybody's eyes.

Thus the first week or two passed; and insensibly the little receptions of the Hunstantons began to take place down-stairs on Diana's floor. The rooms were so much handsomer; and what did it matter which of them it was that gave the simple refreshments required? Thus it was settled,

though not without a little feeling on Mrs Hunstanton's part that she too was making use of Diana, as she objected to all the other people for doing. But then it was good for Diana to see people. Somehow the rustle and murmur of the little society acquired dignity in the loftier and more splendid rooms of the *piano nobile*, where the little coterie of the English Church party—the people who had choir-practice every week in Mrs Winthrop's rooms, and who flattered themselves that their "simple beautiful service" must be a revelation to any belated Italian who stumbled across the threshold of their chapel—could rub shoulders with worldly-minded travellers and with Italians *pur sang*, without either coterie coming in the way of the other. For Sophy's sake, there had even been a dance one evening in one of those fine rooms. Everything had widened and grown

larger since Diana came. She neither danced nor did she join in the choir-practice; but all kinds of people came and bowed before her as she sat opposite the Vandyke.

One of those who ventured least to occupy her attention was Pandolfini, though he came with the rest, and never missed an occasion. Diana had noticed him a great deal on his first introduction to her. She had, indeed, almost watched him; and he had been vaguely aware of the scrutiny, although quite at a loss to know why it was; but after a few days he had been conscious that it relaxed, and that Diana watched him no more. Had she heard something of him that interested her? He had done things in his day that might have interested a woman. He had conspired, as everybody had done in his time in Italy, and had fought for his country, and had got the usual reward of the disinter-

ested. What did it matter? The country had been saved, and what was an individual in comparison? But the idea that this beautiful noble Englishwoman, the first sight of whom had so deeply touched his own imagination, should have heard of him, and should think him worthy of observation, went to Pandolfini's heart. Once more he felt the tears come into his eyes, and was ashamed and grieved at himself secretly, as a demonstrative Italian, how unlikely to please her in her national reticence! But yet she noticed him, kept an eye upon him when nobody observed but himself—alas! and in a few days gave it over, and noticed him, except as she noticed everybody, no more. Had Pandolfini known that this was merely for Sophy's sake, the little English *mees* of whom he had never thought twice, who was to him only a pretty child, a little

nobody! It is well in this life that our knowledge of what other people think of us is happily so circumscribed.

But he did not know this, and as his secret pleasure had been great in seeing her attention turned towards him, so was it bitter to him now to find it withdrawn. She had heard good of him, which had interested her; and then she had heard something less good. This must be how it was. The consequence was, that he had kept studiously away from Diana—at first in hope, thinking that she might perhaps turn to him, call him, make him feel that her interest in him was more than the common; and then, in fear and discouragement, searching the depths of his recollection to see what thing he could have done by which he could have been discredited in her eyes. This thought was appalling to him. Had he ever looked

like a coward or a traitor? had he done anything of doubtful aspect, which could be told against him? or was some traitor at work behind-backs defaming him? He had made himself so sure at first that there was something which had specially attracted her attention to himself. And so there was, poor Pandolfini! But Diana had very soon found out that he was as innocent as a child of any thoughts of Sophy; and that the frank admiration and confidence of that little simpleton had not even affected his vanity. He was perfectly innocent and unaware of it. She was almost glad to make the discovery, though she could scarcely have told why; but it changed her interest in the grave Italian with his blue eyes. Why should she think more of him? Sophy was to be discouraged evidently in her too great appreciation of his kindness, and unless Diana

kept him outside of her circle of acquaintance, it would be difficult to do this. So thus it happened that the intercourse between them was checked, and that he knew less of Diana than the newest and least notable member of the little society.

On one special evening, towards the middle of April, it happened at once that this distance became the object of remark, and that it ceased to exist, almost at the same moment. Diana, in her usual seat opposite the great picture, had been left alone for the moment by the ebbing of the little crowd, most of her guests having strayed towards the next room, in which music was going on. Stranded in the same way, and quite alone, stood Pandolfini. He was in front of the portrait, holding up a book to the light, which fell full upon his face: and it was a remarkable face — no longer with the

beauty of youth, but with that beauty of expression which comes with years. His dark hair, cut short *à l'anglais*, showed touches of white at the temples; his face was long, the oval but slightly sunken of the cheeks, the forehead white in comparison with the rest—and the eyes blue. Blue eyes in an Italian face are not like blue eyes anywhere else. There is a pathos and sweetness in the very colour, something of simplicity, poetry, almost childhood in the midst of the dark fervour and force of the rest. Mr and Mrs Hunstanton, standing together, as it happened, near the door which led into the music-room, remarked, at the same moment, these two left almost altogether alone.

"Can't they find anything to say to each other, I wonder?" said Mrs Hunstanton, almost under her breath.

"I thought these two would have been

friends," said her husband. "Why shouldn't they be friends? they ought to have taken to each other. Somebody must have prejudiced her against him. I have told her half-a-dozen times what a nice fellow he was; but she has never taken any notice. I am surprised at Diana—to take up such a prejudice——"

"Why do you suppose she has a prejudice?" Mrs Hunstanton thought she knew why Diana did not care for their Italian friend.

"We must bring them together. I am determined to bring them together. Here is the very opportunity, and I'll do it at once. Music! what do I care for the music? Music is the greatest interruption —but only one must not say so—— Look here, Di——"

"Tom, for heaven's sake let them alone! They are beginning to talk of their own

accord. Don't meddle, I tell you!" cried his wife, grasping him by the arm, and giving him an impatient shake. Mr Hunstanton was obedient for once in his life, and stopped when he was told.

"Well, I am glad they are taking a little notice of each other," he said; "not that they will ever get any further. A nice soft little creature like Sophy is the right person for such a fellow as Pandolfini."

"I think you are all out of your senses about Sophy," said Mrs Hunstanton, indignant.

"Well, well, let us see what is going on," said he, with all his usual energy, "in the next room."

While this colloquy was going on, Diana, raising her eyes by chance, had been suddenly caught by a resemblance, real or imaginary, between the portrait

opposite to her and the man who stood immediately beneath. Having been once aroused, she looked again at Pandolfini, in whom she had taken a passing interest as the possible lover of Sophy, but whom she had ceased to notice for some time back. And he felt her eyes upon him, felt that she was at last looking at him fairly, her interest awakened — and his heart began to beat. He felt, too, that they were alone, though the others were so near. It was the first time they had really been brought face to face.

"Mr Pandolfini," said Diana, at last, "I wonder if it is only a trick of the light or of my eyes, but I seem to see a resemblance between you and the Vandyke. Has it ever been noticed before?"

He turned to her instantly, with a smile which lighted up his face like a sunbeam —a sudden, sweet, ingratiating, Italian

smile—trying hard to keep the tremulous eagerness of response down, and look as calm as she did. "I do not remember," he said, in his slow and elaborate English; "but it would not be wonderful. My mother was dei Sogni—of the house of the Dreams," he repeated, with some humour in his smile.

Diana was dazzled by the look he gave her. It is the only word to use. It was not the ordinary smile, but a lighting up of the whole man, face and soul. "Indeed!" she said, ashamed of the commonplace word. "Then I may believe I am right. I did not know there was any relationship, so it was clever on my part. But if you belong to the race, Mr Pandolfini, what poor intruders you must feel us all to be! Invaders, Goths, *Forestieri*—that means something like barbarians, does it not?"

"Perhaps — in the ancient days," he said; "but now it has another signification. What was that anecdote which finds itself in all your histories?—Anglorum, Angelorum."

"Ah, we are but a poor kind of angels nowadays," said Diana; "black often, not white, I fear; and when we rush over your beautiful places, and crowd your palaces—like this—you must be forbearing indeed, to think well of us. I feel myself an interloper when I look at your ancestor: he is the master of the house, not I."

"That is—pardon me," said the Italian, "because the Signora Diana is of the house of the dreams too."

Diana looked up at him surprised. She was half offended too, with the idea of a certain presumption in the stranger who ventured to use her Christian name on such short acquaintance. But Pandolfini's

anxious respectfulness was not to be doubted, and she remembered in time that it was the Italian custom. Besides, Diana was but human, and to be addressed in this tone of reverential devotion touched her somewhat. "You mean of the house of the dreamers, I suppose. I have nothing to say against it. I suppose it is true."

Then there was a momentary pause. Pandolfini, like other men, was absorbed and struck dumb, when the moment he had looked forward to, the moment when he could speak to her and recommend himself, really came. His mind was full of a hundred things, and yet he could not think of one to say.

"You have been pleased — with our Pisa," he said at last, with a sense, which made him hate himself, of the utter imbecility of the words.

"What shall I say?" Diana looked

up at him with a smile. "I don't know. Something has happened to me; but I am not sure if you will understand my loss. Italy was a wonder and a mystery when I came here: and now it is a place to live in, just like another. Do you understand? I know, of course, it is non-sense."

"It is not non-sense—it is true-sense," said the Italian; and the blue in his eyes moistened. "I do know what you would say."

"Yes; everything that was impossible seemed as if it might be here. It was Italy, you know," said Diana, growing rapid and colloquial. "And now, yes, it is Italy—a place more beautiful than any other, but just a place like any other. It is very absurd, but I am disappointed. You must think me very foolish, I am sure."

"I think," said Pandolfini — and then he paused. "It is that I know the meaning of it. Did not I say the Signora Diana was *dei Sogni* too?"

CHAPTER VI.

NEW ARRIVALS.

After this "these two," as Mr Hunstanton called them, "got on," to make use also of his expression, very well. Pandolfini was very modest, and he was not in love as a boy of twenty falls in love. Men take the malady in different ways. His imagination had not rushed instantly to the point of marrying Diana, appropriating her, carrying her off, which is the first impulse of some kinds of love. Her appearance to him was like the appearance of a new great star in the sky, dwindling and dimming all the rest, but at the same

time expanding and glorifying the world, making a new world of it, lighting up everything both old and new with its light. Darkness and despondency would have covered the earth had that new glory of light suffered eclipse; but he had not yet realised the idea of transferring it to his own home, and making the serene sweet star into a domestic lamp. He was too humble, in the beginning of the adoration by which he had been seized without any will of his own, to think of anything of the kind. He was so grateful to her for having come, for shining upon him, for not disappointing him or stepping down from her pedestal, but being what he had supposed her to be at the first glance. Women do not always do this, nor men either. Sometimes, very often it must be allowed, they not only come down from the pedestal on which we have placed them, but jump

down, with harsh outbursts of laughter, spurning that elevation. But Diana lost no jot of her dignity to the imaginative Italian. Still and always she was *dei Sogni*, one of the dream-ladies, queens of earth and heaven. Sometimes her lavish liberality startled him in the habits of his poverty, for he was economical and careful as his race, not knowing what it was to be rich, and unfamiliar with the art of using money. Few of his delights had ever come in that way. He had been kind to his friends and to his inferiors in a different fashion, in the way of personal service, of tender sympathy, and the help one mind and heart can give to another; but it had never been in his power to lavish around him things which cost actual money as Diana did, and he was puzzled by her habits in this respect, and not quite sure, perhaps, that this was not a slight coming down from her high

ideal position. But the fault, if fault it was, tended at least towards nobleness, for Diana's personal tastes were simple enough, notwithstanding a certain inclination towards magnificence, which did not displease him.

He watched her as narrowly as a jealous husband, though in a very different sense, to make quite sure that she was everything he believed her to be. But Pandolfini was subtle as his race, notwithstanding that he was an Anglomane, and declared his enthusiasm for all the English virtues of openness, candour, and calm. He did not show his devotion as a blundering Englishman would have done. No one suspected him of his worship of Diana—no one—except two very acute observers, who made no communication to each other, but on the contrary avoided the subject—to wit, Diana herself and Mrs Hunstanton. As for Diana,

she was unconscious as long as possible, and denied it stoutly to herself as long as possible; yet nevertheless had the fact conveyed to her in the very air, by minute and all but invisible indications which she would not admit but could not gainsay. And her friend divined, being his friend also, and a silent observer, the very reverse of her kind busybody of a husband, to whom the idea that Pandolfini had any special admiration for Diana would have been simple food for laughter, neither less nor more.

Thus the course of events went on. When "these two" had a little talk together, Mr Hunstanton would chuckle and rub his hands with pleasure. "Yes, I think they are getting on a little better," he said. "Why they should not have taken to each other, is a thing I cannot comprehend. With so many things in

common! But you see the Italian does not understand the Englishwoman, nor the Englishwoman the Italian. She is too independent for him; and he is too—too ——too everything for her. The more they see of each other, the more they will respect each other; but there will never be any real understanding between them. A pity, isn't it?—for there are not two better people in the world."

"Dear Diana," said Mrs Norton, to whom he was talking. "It is not that she has really any strong-mindedness about her; but there is no doubt that gentlemen always do prefer women to be dependent: they don't like a girl to say like Diana that she does not want assistance, that she can manage her affairs, and all that sort of thing. That is what I think is such a pity. Of course it would be a great deal better if there was a

gentleman at the Chase to look after everything."

"W—well," said Mr Hunstanton: his land marched with the Chase, and there were matters in which it did not appear so very clear to him that a gentleman would be an advantage. "To be sure she never will give in to prosecuting poachers or that sort of thing, which is positive quixotism and folly."

"And there are matters which a gentleman *must* understand *so much* the best."

"W—well," said Mr Hunstanton again. "Arguments don't answer, you see; it is not a thing that can be argued about. Natural propriety and all that, and abstract justice—and—— Diana knows what to say for herself; but then the fact is, that this must be treated as a practical question. It don't bear argument. I'm glad

to see them talking to each other a little; but it will never go beyond that."

"Did you wish it to go beyond that?" said Mrs Norton, quickly.

"Who — I? Oh no, dear no; why should I wish it? Bless me! that was not what I was thinking of. I thought they might be friends. I like my friends to take to each other. Now, *you* appreciate Pandolfini: why shouldn't Diana? that is all I say. But people are wrong-headed; the best people in the world are often the most wrong-headed,—even Pandolfini himself."

"I have never seen anything that was not nice in Mr Pandolfini," said Mrs Norton. "He has always been so good. How kind he has been to Sophy and me! Indeed you are all kind. I don't wonder at it so much among those who know my child's sterling qualities, though, I trust,

I am always grateful. But when a man like Mr Pandolfini, who knows next to nothing of her, is equally kind, as kind as her oldest friend, why that, I must say, is remarkable. It shows such a kind nature — it must be so disinterested——"

"Disinterested?" said Mr Hunstanton. "Do you think that is the word? When a man, who is not an old man, pays attention to a pretty young girl — well, it may be very kind, and all that—but I don't think disinterested is the word I should use."

"What could *we* do for him?" cried Mrs Norton. "You may say Diana, too; but then she knows us, and I hope she is fond of us; but Mr Pandolfini, what could we do for him? It must all be kindness — pure kindness — for we never can pay him back."

"Aha! is that how it is?" said Mr Hunstanton to himself.

"Is that how what is?" she asked, a little sharply.

"Nothing, nothing, my dear lady — I meant nothing," said Mr Hunstanton. "So that is how it is! I must say I thought as much. I generally can see through a millstone as well as another, when there is anything to be seen: and I allow that I thought it—so that is what is coming. Holloa! who is that at the other end of the room?—the Snodgrasses, I should say, if there was anything in the world which could bring them to Pisa: the—Snodgrasses! I shall expect to see the parish march in next, in full order, in clean smock-frocks, farmers and ploughmen. Actually the Snodgrasses! if one can trust one's eyes. Excuse me, Mrs Norton, I must go and see. I hope the

Hall has not been burnt down, and that there is nothing the matter with the children. I must go and see."

"The Snodgrasses!" Mrs Norton said under her breath, with something like consternation. She had once entertained a very high opinion of the Snodgrasses. They were the clergy of the parish, and she had a belief in the clergy, very natural to one who had herself belonged to that sacred caste. What had brought them here at this moment? Was it, could it be, a ridiculous pursuit of Diana, who, *of course*, had never thought of *them?* or was it anything else? She drew a little nearer to the door to hear what she could. The devotion of the Snodgrasses to Diana, the way in which they followed her about, the little speeches they made to her, had always been particularly offensive to Mrs Norton. It was on Diana's account, who

could not fail to be annoyed, she said; but, indeed, Mrs Norton was more annoyed than Diana. And now here they were again, leaving the parish uncared for! How could they account to themselves for such a dereliction of duty? She would not approach the new-comers, or show any interest in them, on the highest moral grounds; but she crept towards them, talking to the people she found in her way, and gradually drawing nearer the door. It was the Snodgrasses: there was no mistaking them, both in their long coats, with their long faces, black-haired and somewhat grim, as with the fatigue of a journey. They were not very comely to start with, and it was almost ludicrous, their critic thought, to see two men so like each other, and without even the excuse of being father and son! The rector was slimmer, the curate stouter;

they had heavy eyebrows, and very dark complexions. Mr Snodgrass, senior, had a great deal to say, and was facetious in a clergymanly fashion. Mr Snodgrass, junior, was silent, and generally kept in the background when it was not necessary for him to act audience for his uncle's jokes. At the present moment, more abashed than usual by the strangers among whom he suddenly found himself, he stood in a corner, gazing at Diana, with a look which specially irritated Mrs Norton always, though it would have been difficult for her to have explained why.

"Who could have thought of seeing you here?" she said, as the rector came up to her with that expressive grasp of the hand which was one of his special gifts, and which everybody remarked as the very embodiment of cordiality and friendliness, a sort of modest embrace. He was not

glad to see her particularly, nor she to see him; but if they had flown into each other's arms it could scarcely have been a warmer greeting than that silent clasping of hands, without even a "How d'ye do?" to impair its eloquence.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" he said; "but the truth is, dear Bill was not at all well. I can't tell what is the matter with him. But not well at all—quite out of work and out of heart——"

"Chest?" said Mrs Norton, solemnly.

"No, I don't think so. Nothing organic they tell me. Only want of tone, want of energy. As Easter was over so early this year, and nothing particular going on, I thought I might as well carry out an old intention and come to Italy——"

"This is entirely a chest place," said Mrs Norton, still very serious. "I don't think

it is supposed very good for other complaints."

"Ah, I don't think it will do dear Bill any harm," said the rector. "I could quite suppose I was in my own parish, looking round. Miss Trelawny is blooming as usual."

"Blooming is not the word I would apply to Diana, Mr Snodgrass; but she is very well."

"Ah, you were always rather a purist about language. Well, then, you must allow that your niece is blooming. I never saw Miss Sophy look so well."

"My niece has been very much appreciated here," said Mrs Norton. "She has found herself among people who understand her, and that is always an addition to one's happiness."

"Surely," said the rector, to whom the idea of Sophy as a person not understood

by her surroundings was novel. He objected to Sophy and her aunt as "parasites," just as Sophy and her aunt objected to himself and his dear "Bill" as annoyances to Diana. "It is too bad," Mrs Norton cried, hurrying across to Mrs Hunstanton after this little encounter. "Diana hates these men—and she cannot get rid of them wherever she goes."

"Diana is a great deal too kind to everybody," said Mrs Hunstanton. "She has a way of concealing when she is bored which I call downright hypocrisy—but I don't see why she should hate them in particular, poor men!"

"Look at that!" said Mrs Norton, with a certain vehemence. It was the curate whom she pointed out, and Pandolfini, who was by, profited also by the indication. He was standing straight up in a corner, poor curate, shy and frightened

of the voluble groups about, among whom there were several Italians and a good deal of polyglot conversation. Mr William Snodgrass knew no language but his own, and was not very fluent even in that. He stood up very straight, as if he had been driven into the corner or was undergoing punishment there, and gazed over everybody's head, being very tall, at Diana. The very dulness of the gaze had something pathetic in it, like the adoration of a faithful dog. Neither for the strange people nor the new place had the poor curate any eyes. Mrs Hunstanton looked at him with familiar scorn, as a person well aware of his delusion, and treating it with the contempt it deserved — but Pandolfini gazed with very different feelings at his fellow-worshipper. Even while he smiled at the frightened look upon the poor fellow's countenance, and his evident

dismayed avoidance of the strangers about, his dumb devotion touched the Italian's heart.

"It is Miss Trelawny upon whom his eyes fix themselves."

"Yes; he does nothing but stare at Diana—silly fellow! As if a woman like Diana, without thinking of her position, would ever look at him."

"Nevertheless," said Pandolfini, "to turn his eyes to the best, though it be without hope, is not that well?"

"It might be very well," said Mrs Norton, "if it were not such an annoyance to Diana. At home she cannot move for him—he is always following her about like a dog. And you know, Mr Pandolfini, if a woman were the best woman that ever lived, that is unworthy of a man."

"I do not know—no, that is not what I should say. When the person is Miss

Trelawny, many things may be pardoned," said the Italian. He was so brown that an additional tint of colour scarcely showed on his face; but as his eyes turned from the curate to Diana, a subdued glow came over his countenance, and a light into his blue eyes. Mrs Hunstanton, who was a quick observer, caught him in the very act. She looked at him, and sudden perception awoke in her. And he felt it with that sensitiveness which is like an additional sense, and looked at her in her turn with a pathetic half smile, explaining the whole, though not a word was said. Mrs Hunstanton was touched: perhaps such a confidence, made without a word, by the eyes only, yet so frank and full of feeling, went more to her heart than if it had been accompanied by much effusion in words. But there was nothing said, and Mrs Norton remained pleasantly unaware of

anything that had happened, and went on discoursing about the Snodgrasses, uncle and nephew, with quite as much unction as if both her companions had been giving her their entire attention, as indeed she believed them to do.

"In my dear husband's time," she said, "the clergy of a parish were never both absent even for a day. He would have been shocked beyond description at the idea. Do you think it can be right, Mr Pandolfini, for both the rector and the curate to be away together? If any one is sick, what is to become of them? and they are not even married, so as to leave some one behind who could look after the poor. Do you think it can be right under any circumstances?" And this anxious champion of justice fixed her eyes with an almost severe appeal on the Italian's face.

"Can I tell?" he answered, throwing up his hands and his shoulders with a characteristic gesture. "The curate never leaves his parish in my country. When he would have leisure, he takes it among the rest. A poor priest does not think of *villeggiatura*, what you call holidays. He is too poor——"

"But even the rector," said Mrs Norton, insisting. "Of course, if there is a very good curate—yes, yes, they are generally poor in England as well as in other places —a poor curate, that is what people are always saying; but even the rector. Of course, I forgot, I beg your pardon, your priests are never married, poor wretched men! What a bondage to put upon a man! don't you think so, Mr Pandolfini?"

He laughed; perhaps this little woman and her talk was a relief at the moment.

He said: "I have my prejudices. Your English gentleman who is a curate, I do not know him. He is a clergyman: that is different. We may not judge one the other."

"I don't wish to judge any one; but surely, Mr Pandolfini, anything so unnatural——"

"Not always unnatural. Me! I do not marry myself."

"But you will one day," said Mrs Norton, decidedly. "Of course you will. Now, why should not you marry? I am sure you would be a great deal happier. Those who have not known what it is," said the little lady with a sigh, "cannot be expected to realise—ah! the difference between being alone in the world and having some one to love you and care for you! Since I lost my dear husband, how changed life has been! Before that, I never did anything

for myself; he stood between me and every trouble——"

"But in that way I think it would be better for a man not to have a wife," cried Mrs Hunstanton. "I daresay Mr Pandolfini does not want to take a woman on his shoulders, and do everything for her. Tom does not stand between me and every trouble, I can tell you. He pushes a good share of his on to my shoulders, and gives me many a tangled skein to untwist. I never try to persuade my friends to marry; but you shouldn't frighten them——"

"I — frighten them!" Mrs Norton's horror was too deep for words. "I think it is time for us to say good night," she resumed, with dignity. "Will you look for my niece, Mr Pandolfini, while I speak a word to Diana? I really cannot let my child be late to-night."

"So that is how it is!" Mrs Hunstanton

said to herself: her husband had said the same, with an inward chuckle of satisfaction, and determination to "help it on" with all his might, not very long before; but in a very different sense. The lady's surprisal of poor Pandolfini's secret, however, was of so delicate a kind that her conclusion was very different. She hoped that she might never be tempted to betray him; and her sympathy was more despondent than hopeful. For Diana — Diana, of all people in the world! and yet Mrs Hunstanton said to herself, though she was not romantic, There is nothing that persevering devotion may not do. In the long-run, even the dull adoration of young Snodgrass might touch a woman's heart —who could tell? And Pandolfini was a very different person. Could anything be done for him? As she turned this over in her mind, he passed her, fulfilling

Mrs Norton's commission, with Sophy, all pink and smiling, on his arm. Sophy was looking up in his face with that pretty air of trust and dependence which charms most men, but fills most women with hot indignation. Mrs Hunstanton, like many other ladies, believed devoutly that flattery of this description was irresistible, and was always excited to a certain ferocity by the sight of it. Little flirt, little humbug! she said in her heart.

"Do you see them?" said her husband, coming up to her, rubbing his hands; "the very thing I have always wished—a nice sweet clinging little thing, just the wife for Pandolfini. Why, Hetty——"

Mrs Hunstanton had a large fan in her hand. It was all she could do not to assail him with it in good sound earnest. "Tom," she cried, exasperated, "hold your tongue,

for heaven's sake! Don't be a greater fool than you can help!"

Which was a very improper way for a wife to speak to her husband it must be allowed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ENGLISH LADY IN PISA.

The presence of the Snodgrasses did not make very much difference to the party in the Palazzo dei Sogni; Mr Hunstanton introduced them to the English club, and, as was natural, they established themselves in the select coterie of the English Church, and were a great godsend to the chaplain, and attended the choir practices, and soon became very well known in Pisa. And in the evening receptions, which took place sometimes at Miss Trelawny's, sometimes at Mrs Hunstanton's, these two black figures were perpetually apparent,

the uncle circulating among the little society, the nephew standing up in his usual corner. Poor curate! he did not get very much attention from any one. The Hunstantons confined their civilities to the necessary number of Good nights and Good mornings: Sophy flouted him perpetually: and Mrs Norton made him alarming little speeches about the parish, and asked him if he felt better, in a tone which inferred a contemptuous refusal to believe that he had been ill at all. All this he bore, poor fellow; he was not ill to speak of. If he could have been left in his corner staring at Diana for twelve hours at a time, or the whole twenty-four, had that been possible, he would have been happy — and would have minded none of the snubs that were freely dispensed on all sides. And Diana herself was always kind to the poor young man.

She did not talk to him, for he could not talk; but she would give him a kindly smile when she passed him. She gave him her hand when he came in, and when he went away. Now and then in heavenly courtesy she would say three words to him. "I hope you are better, Mr Snodgrass. I hope you like Pisa. What have you been seeing to-day?" One of these phrases kept him happy for a day. He did not expect any more, nor indeed half so much; and with what aim he continued to haunt and follow her, and put all his existence into the distant enjoyment of her sight and presence, it would be hard to say. As for gaining her love, *marrying* her!—it seemed about as hopeful as that he should marry the other Diana in the heavens, the moon, that shone with such warm Italian splendour over the high house-tops. In his

brightest dreams he could not have imagined anything of the kind.

The only other person who took any notice of poor William Snodgrass was the one other who might have been supposed least likely to notice him. Pandolfini took the poor young fellow up. Notwithstanding the curate's awkwardness and shyness, the kind Italian insisted upon making acquaintance with him. There is no one so kind as an Italian, endowed with that *cortesia* which the old writers speak of as a quality of God. "The Lord of all Courtesy," is not that a title which Dante gives to the Supreme? Pandolfini had this divine quality as much as any man, even an Italian, ever had; and his heart was touched by the most tender sympathy for this fellow-in-feeling, whom it was too absurd to think of as his rival. The poor curate was no

one's rival. He had given up his being to the most beautiful and noble creature, so far as he knew, who had ever crossed his horizon; and had not Pandolfini done so too? The sympathetic Italian gave himself up to the task of cultivating this dull but tender soul. He took him to private gems of pictures which the public saw only on rare occasions: he took him through everything that was most worth seeing: and having his eyes opened by the fact that the heavy young Englishman had set his affections upon the highest object within his firmament, saw other glimmers of perception in him which no one else had found out.

"There, I can't understand Pandolfini," said Mr Hunstanton; "the uncle, now, is a man of the world. He is a man that knows what he is about. He has read a little and observed a little—as much as

you can expect from a clergyman. But Bill Snodgrass is a nonentity. He is as dull as ditch-water. You can't get a sensible word out of him. The rector can talk and take his own part like any other man."

"I do not agree with you, my friend," said the Italian, "there are some fine things in the Stupid: there are feelings: I do not mean feelings of the heart alone. He has nothing to say about it; but he will know a fine picture when he sees one."

"When you tell him it is fine—"

"I never tell him anything; but there are things which Mr Bill, if so you call him (I admire your monosyllables), can see—and a great many people cannot see," said Pandolfini simply, yet with meaning, with a half-smile at his companion, who laughed, unabashed, and rubbed his hands.

"He means me! Yes, I know him. The best fellow that ever breathed; but if he can give you a random cut round the corner! I refused to buy something once of a friend of his—and it turned out—what did it turn out, Pandolfini? an enormous prize, you know. How was a man to divine that? There was nobody to speak up for it, and I don't pretend to be a connoisseur. By the way, if you have friends who want to sell anything, you had better send them to Diana. She is the person. She could buy us all up and never feel it. To see her so simple as she is, you would never suppose that she was such a great lady at home."

"Is she, then, a great lady at home?"

"As great as a princess in other places. You didn't know? Well, I don't suppose it will make much difference to you, but

that's the truth. She is what we call a great Squire in England. You know what that means?"

"Yes; I know what that means." Pandolfini looked at him with a half-smile, yet sigh. What difference could it make to him? He had never thought of putting himself on a level with that beautiful princess, of securing her to be his — his housewife, his chief possession. All that he had thought of was the pleasure of being with her, looking at her, like poor Snodgrass. Now here was something which put a still greater difference between them, and removed her out of his sphere. Was it not an irony of fate that before one woman only the doors of his heart should have flown wide open? and that she should be so entirely out of his sphere? A slight vague smile came upon his face, half at himself and his evil for-

tune—half with a tremulous and painful pleasure that she should be so rich, so magnificent, so secure of everything that was good. Whatever happened, that was always well: that she should be a kind of queen, regnant, and safe from all straits and contradictions of fortune in the outer world as well as in the hearts that loved her. But he sighed. Why was it that the world was so made that the beautiful was always beyond reach, that love must be never more than a dream? He murmured over a verse or two of Leopardi, as he went upon his way, with that smile and sigh.

"O natura, o natura,
Perchè non rendi poi,
Quel che prometti allor? perchè de tanto,
Inganni i figli tuoi."

Nothing more pathetic or more poignant than that sense of tantalised anguish and

pleasure—supremest good held before the eyes, but ever inaccessible, giving happiness and suffering together, without blame of any one, or wrong, can be. And Pandolfini was not the kind of man who rails at fortune. He went away melancholy along Arno: yet smiled while he sighed.

Somehow or other this passing and temporary life of the English visitors in the foreign town had become too serious, too securely established and certain with all of them, being as it really was an affair of a few weeks or months at the utmost, and incapable of extension. Perhaps this was Diana's fault. Arriving in March, she had no more than six or seven weeks before her, a mere temporary visit — but the temporary was uncongenial to her nature. She established herself half unconsciously, involuntarily as if she had been at home. She made her *piano nobile*

in the old palace assume a certain resemblance to herself, just as she, on the other hand, perhaps unconsciously too, perhaps with a touch of that fine vanity which disguises itself under the semblance of taste, suited herself to her dwelling-place, and put her dress and all her surroundings into conformity with it. If Diana had not had the kind of lofty beauty to which utter simplicity of toilet is becoming, probably it might not have occurred to her to leave the new dress from Paris, before which Mrs Norton and Sophy had rendered homage, hanging in her wardrobe, and put on the old velvet gown, which, as Sophy indignantly remarked, "she had worn all last winter!" But this was what she did: though in some lights the long sweeping folds of the velvet, which was of a very dark Venetian blue, looked somewhat faded, at least in the eyes of her friends. "I

never thought Diana would be like that: wearing out her old dresses, when she can afford to have as many new ones as she pleases!" Sophy cried, almost weeping at the recollections of all M. Worth's *poufs* and *plissès*. "It does not matter for us," Mrs Norton added, with serious vexation, "*we* know her and look up to her in any dress; but among strangers!" Thus her friends were annoyed by her supposed frugality: and perhaps Diana, if her French toilet had been more becoming to her, would not have felt the necessity of conforming her dress to the style of those great rooms, so pathetically faded, so noble and worn, and independent of all meretricious decoration.

She did other things, which perhaps were less justifiable still, and which excited the displeasure of another section of her friends. In a country practically unconverted to the

laws of political economy, she was but too glad to forget them, and gave alms with a largeness and liberality which, I suppose, is quite indefensible. She was even so misled as to allow the shameless beggars about to come to her for weekly pensions, putting them on their honour, and talking to them in friendly, if somewhat solemn Italian—slow as Pandolfini's English, and from the same cause. "Giving to all those beggars,—I can't imagine what Miss Trelawny can be thinking of," cried the rector; "surely she must know that she is helping to demoralise them: destroying all the safeguards of society." "So far as that goes, I don't think Diana will do *them* much harm; but I object to have the staircase haunted by Peppino and Company," said Mr Hunstanton. "I must talk to her, and you had better talk to her, Snodgrass. As for demoralising, you

know, they're past that. I defy you to demoralise Peppino. You can't blind a man who has no eyes; can you, now?" But this will be enough to show that Diana gave dissatisfaction on both sides: only Pandolfini and the curate stood by with silent adoration, and thought everything she did and was, the noblest and the fairest that ever were made visible to eyes of men.

It must be allowed, however, that neither the disapproval nor the adoration affected Diana. She went on her way calmly, indifferent to what was said, laughing, though gently, at Mr Snodgrass's serious remonstrance, and at the half-crying appeal of Sophy. And everything seemed to conspire around her to give the air of stability and everlastingness which seemed natural to her life. She acquired for herself, without knowing it, a distinct posi-

tion, which was partly by her beauty, no doubt, partly even by her height and dignity of person, and partly from the individuality about her, and her modest indifference to ordinary rule. There is an immodest indifference which gives distinction of a totally different kind; but Diana—who did not come for pleasure as commonly so called, who appeared seldom at public places, and whose enjoyment of her strange habitation was that of an inhabitant not of a tourist—Diana became known in Pisa as scarcely ever *forestiera* had been before. Pandolfini felt that he could divine why, believing, as was natural at once to a patriot and a lover, that his race was quick to recognise supreme excellence, and that it was natural that all who knew her should bow down before her. But anyhow, in her retirement, in her quietness, she became known as if by

an instinct of sympathy. The beggars in the piazzas asked nothing of her, but blessed her with bold extravagance as she passed. The people uncovered right and left. *Quant' è bella!* they said, with that unfeigned and heartfelt admiration which is pure Italian, not loudly, to catch her ear, nor yet in whispers, as if they were ashamed of it, but in their ordinary tones, all being natural, both the popular worship and its object. The curate when he became aware of this grew red, and clenched his fist, with an English impulse "to knock down the fellow;" but Pandolfini, who knew better what it meant, followed her steps at a distance with glowing eyes, and was proud and happy in the universal homage. He quoted lines out of the 'Vita Nuova' to his stupid faithful companion. Not always to his listener's edification. "How do you suppose I can understand

that stuff?" growled the Rev. William through the beard he was growing, and the Italian ceased to throw about such pearls.

But it may be imagined what a thunderbolt fell into this peaceful little society when there began to be consultations among the leaders of the party about going away. "Our time will soon be up, you know," Mr Hunstanton said one evening, rubbing his hands; "May is a very nice month to get home in. A week or two in Switzerland; perhaps a week or two in London, if my wife has good accounts of the children. That's what I like. After May it's sultry here and uncomfortable, eh, Pandolfini? Off in November, home in May, that's my rule—and if you like to take it old style, you know, as they do in Russia, so much the better. That's my regular rule."

"W — what?" said Mrs Norton, who sometimes tried to persuade herself that she was rather deaf, and would not hear anything that was unpleasant; but she had scarcely self-possession for this little trick, being too much aghast at the idea thus presented to her mind, which it seemed incredible they should all have ignored till now.

Then there was a pause of universal dismay, for they had all enjoyed themselves very much, and disliked the idea of breaking up. Mrs Hunstanton alone went on working placidly, and the murmur of Reginald's voice, who was playing patience at a table, and whispering the value of the cards to himself, became suddenly audible. The impatience of the whole company with Reginald cannot be described. "My dear boy," said the rector sharply, (in a tone which meant

You odious idiot!) "couldn't you just count as well if you did it to yourself?"

"What has the boy done?" said Mr Hunstanton with surprise. "Yes; we must bolt. I don't know how that may affect your plans, Diana."

"I have no plans," she said. "I came here by the light of nature, because you were all here——"

"And you will come away in the same manner," said Mr Hunstanton briskly. Sophy turned round and transfixed him with her eyes, or would have done so had his middle-aged composure been penetrable, or had he seen her, which had something also to do with it. But he did not see her, and, good man, was perfectly easy in his mind.

"Well, I confess I shall be sorry," said the rector, "and so, I am sure, will be my dear Bill. We have had a very agreeable

visit, nice society, all centring round the Church in the most delightful way, and so many charming people! I shall be very sorry to think of breaking up."

He stopped somewhat abruptly, with unexpected suddenness, and in the silence, more audible still than Reginald's whispering, came a sort of groan from the burdened bosom of the curate, who stood behind-backs in his usual place, and who had felt himself covered by his uncle's speech. This made everybody look up, and there was a faint titter from Reginald, by way of revenge for the rector's rebuke. It was Sophy who had the boldness to take up this titter in the wild stinging of disappointment and dismay.

"Why should *you* feel it so much, Mr Snodgrass?—what does it matter to you? You will have to go home to the parish whether or not!" she cried.

"Sophy, hush, hush! Yes, dear Mr Hunstanton, how pleasant it has been!" said Mrs Norton. "What a blow to us all to break it up! I should like to stay here for ever, winter and summer. It would not be too hot for me. For I can never be grateful enough to Italy," she added, impressively, "for restoring health to my dear child."

This called the general attention to Sophy, whose blooming countenance, a little flushed by vexation, looked very unlike any possible failure of health. Sophy was as near crying as possible. She had to put force upon herself to keep the tears out of her eyes.

"Let us not make ourselves miserable before the time," said Diana. "It is not May yet; there is a week of April left. Let us gather roses while we may, and in good time here is Mrs Winthrop and

our musical people. Sophy, come and help to get the songs out. We can talk of this another time."

Sophy came, with a sullenness which no one had ever remarked in her before. She made no reply to what Diana said, but pulled the music about under pretence of arranging it. As she did so, with her back turned to the rest of the company, Diana saw a few hot hail-drops of tears pattering down among the songs. She put her hand kindly upon Sophy's shoulder.

"Sophy, dear," she said, "is it the thought of going away? is this what you feel so much?"

"Oh, leave me alone, please! I have got a headache," cried Sophy, jerking away from her friend's grasp.

Diana said nothing more. She was grieved and disturbed by this very strange new development. She put down all the

songs and music that were likely to be wanted, and opened the piano, and greeted with her usual dignified kindness the new people who came rustling in to the agitated atmosphere. It did not seem agitated to them. Mrs Winthrop came in all smiles and flounces, and there was a gathering round the piano, and much laughter and talk and consultation, as is customary on such occasions. Diana herself did not sing except rarely. She helped to set the little company going, over their madrigals and part-songs, and then she withdrew, with that sensation of relief which is afforded to the mind of the mistress of a house and chief entertainer by the happy consciousness of having set an amusement going, by means of which her guests will manage to entertain themselves for the rest of the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EVENING PARTY.

DIANA seated herself in her favourite place, in a great chair covered with dark old velvet, which had got a bloom on it by dint of age, such as youth sometimes has, like the *duret* of a purple plum. Her own dress was made in toned white, creamy and soft, not the brilliant white of snow, and of rich silk, which fell in heavy splendid folds. But it was "old-fashioned" in its cut, which Sophy had deeply deplored already, with a plain long skirt, "such as was worn three years ago!" the girl had cried with vexation. A certain

weariness was about Diana as she laid her head back on the velvet, weariness yet satisfaction in having settled all her people comfortably in the way of amusing themselves, and being thus herself left free. Mr Hunstanton was talking with Colonel Winthrop, who was the husband of the musical lady, and two other persons who did not care for music. Mrs Norton, who was not musical, except in the way of playing waltzes (of which she knew three) and one old set of quadrilles, had taken pity upon Reginald, and had gone to the side-table with him to play piquet, which was more amusing than patience. Diana looked round her with a sigh of comfort, feeling that all her guests were off her hands. The central group at the piano was the brightest point. Mrs Winthrop, who was a pretty young woman, and acted as conductor, held the chief place, holding

a pink forefinger in the air instead of a baton, swaying her head, and tapping her foot according to the measure. Around her were her troupe with their music, among whom, most evident to Diana, was Mrs Hunstanton, "putting in a second," as she had been adjured to do—and anxious to escape, Sophy singing soprano, with the half-tearful, half-sullen look gradually melting from her face under the charms of the madrigal; and over Sophy's head, holding his book high, the poor curate, who had been forced into it, and who, with his mouth open, and his eyes wandering, added a powerful but uncertain bass. The soft lights of the candles on the walls lighted them all up, shining upon the lightness of their faces, and the dresses of the ladies, as they stood grouped about the piano. Behind, Mr Hunstanton's darkly attired group of men gave an agreeable balance to the picture.

In front of Diana there were but three figures. Mrs Norton and Reginald, with a table between them, covered with the glories of the coloured cards, which were repeated in the rose-coloured ribbons of her cap; and standing quite alone in front of the dim profundity of a great old mirror —Pandolfini. He was the only one who was alone as she was, though not by design, like Diana. The glass was so old and so dim that it almost shrouded him, giving its background of mysterious reflection to make even his solid figure look unreal. But one thing about him was very real, which was that his eyes were fixed upon herself. It was an inadvertent moment, and Mr Hunstanton's sudden announcement of approaching departure had brought a certain agitation into the atmosphere. To Diana, who had taken root in the friendly place, notwithstanding her con-

sciousness that her stay could not be long, the feeling was painful—but to Pandolfini it was like the crush of overthrow. He had known it, he said to himself—of course he had known it—but it had not appeared such an utter and miserable conclusion of all hopes, and revolution in life. The room had contracted round him, and the lights grown dim, just as he felt the firmament itself would contract, and the sun grow dim to him, when she was gone—and he had forgotten himself. He had not been able to talk, to join in what everybody was doing, so long as this feeling that the earth had opened under his feet, ready to swallow him up and all things, was foremost in his mind. He had had his full of revolutions: he knew what they were, and how men could live through them, and the vulgar placidity of every day overcome all the violence

that could be done in life. But here was a revolution which could not be got over. Yes, yes, he said to himself drearily, as, under cover of the music and the movement, he put himself thus behind-backs, and allowed his eyes to rest upon Diana with a half-despairing intentness. *Si! si!* it could be got over. If a man is hacked limb by limb he has to bear it, making no unseemly outcries; but still the thought of what it would be, the going out of all sweet lights and hopes, the settling down of darkness, the horror of something taken away which could never be replaced, appalled his very soul. What an irony it was, what a cruelty of fate! He had been well enough before, contenting himself with his existence, thinking of no Diana, satisfied with the life which had never known her. But now! — without knowing, Pandolfini gazed at her out of

the shadows with eyes that glowed and burned, and with a longing and fixedness very startling to her pensive calm, as suddenly she turned to him with a half-smile and met his look!

Diana drew a little back in her chair, swerved for a moment, so startled that she did not know what to do or think. She felt a blush rising over her—why she could not tell: a sort of self-consciousness seized upon her, consciousness of herself as being gazed at, rather than of him who was gazing. Why should he or any one look at her so? Then she recovered, with a slight shake of her head to throw off the impression, and a confused laugh at her own vanity (as she called it): and seeing nothing better to do, beckoned to him to come to her. Pandolfini was not less confused than she. His first thought was that he had betrayed himself, and

that nothing was to be done now but to face his fate with melancholy boldness, which becomes the unfortunate. He had made up his mind before now in moments of peril to sell his life dearly. If this unconscious queenly lady was to have his life like a flower, at least she should be aware of what it was which was thrown on her path for her delicate foot to tread on. A kind of tender fury came into his mind. He went up to her slowly, almost solemnly, as a man might be supposed to go to his death—not affecting to be indifferent to it, but ready for whatever might befall.

Diana had called him: but she was confused, not knowing how she was to speak to this man, who looked at her not as acquaintances look. In her embarrassment she found nothing but the most *banal* of nothings to say.

"I cannot suppose you are not fond of music, Mr Pandolfini."

"Should I unite myself to the gentlemen, then? But neither does Miss Trelawny—it is not that one does not love music."

"I cannot answer for myself," said Diana, gladly plunging into an abstract subject. "I am fanciful—I think I like music only when it goes to my heart."

"What a pretty idiom is that!" said Pandolfini. "One loves everything most when it touches *there*." He had placed himself just a step behind her, enough to make it difficult for her to see him, while he could see her perfectly. It was an unfair advantage to take. "But music," he added, "it has other aims—the ear first, and the mind and the imagination."

"There is my deficiency," said Diana. "I only understand it in this way. Other

arts may instruct, or may inspire; but if music does not touch me, move my feelings, I do not make anything of it. I do not understand it. This is my deficiency."

"I acknowledge no deficiency," said the Italian in a low tone. The excitement in his blood was subsiding a little, but still he wanted some perfume to reach her from the myrtle-bow crushed on her path. And the tone was one which answered her musical requirements, and went right to her heart. Where had she heard that tone before? It was not the first time in her life, as may be supposed; but it seemed a long time since, and the thrill of recognition was also a thrill of alarm.

"We will not quarrel on this point," she said, "especially as the present performance is not one to call forth much feeling; but it makes people happy, which is always something."

"Happy?" said Pandolfini; "is it this then which in your English calls itself happiness? Ah! pardon—the Italian is more rich. This is (perhaps) to be amused—to be diverted—but *happy*—no. We keep that name for better things. I, for instance," he added once more, in so low a voice that she had to stoop forward to hear him, "I might say so much—and, alas! it is for a moment, for a breath, no more. But *they*, these gentlemen and ladies—they divert themselves: the difference is great."

"You must say ladies and gentlemen, Mr Pandolfini," said Diana, glad to be able to escape from too grave an argument; "in English it is more courteous to put *us* first."

"Pardon," he said, with the flush of ready shame, which every one feels who has made a slip in a new language. "I thought it was used so. But in all

languages heaven goes before the earth. I ought to have known."

Diana laughed, but he did not laugh. He was not without humour; but at present he was in deadly earnest, incapable of seeing the lighter side. "At all events, that is pure Italian," she said. "Your compliments are delightful, Mr Pandolfini—so general that one ventures to accept them on account of all the other women in the world. I wish one could believe it," she added, shaking her head.

"I do believe it," he said once more, in his deepest tone.

"Ah! you speak too low: I cannot hear you—which is an English not an Italian fault. But you are right to discriminate between happiness and amusement. We do so too, but we are not sufficiently particular about our words, and use the first that comes to hand."

Then there was a pause, and this time it was he who began. "Is it true," he said, "that this is soon to come to an end?—that you are going away?"

"I suppose we must go, sooner or later. Not perhaps with the Hunstantons; but people do not stay here for summer, do they? It is for winter one comes here?"

"I am no judge," he said gravely, with that seriousness, on the verge of offence with which a man hears his own country criticised. "I have spent many summers here. You shut yourself up behind the *persianis* all day; but when evening comes —ah, Miss Trelawny! the night of summer that goes to the heart, as you say. I have never been in your country. I cannot tell if among the seas you can know. Ah, you smile! I am wrong; I can believe it. England is no more sombre when you—such as you—live there; but in Italy I

would give—how much—a year! years—of my life that you might see one summer night. The air it is balm; so soft, so warm, so cool, so dark. The moon more lustrous than any day. And all the people out of doors. You who love the people it would make you glad. Upon the stairs and in the doorways, everywhere, all friendly, smiling, singing, feeling the air blow in their faces. How it has made me happy! —But now,—now——"

"You ought to be more happy than ever, Mr Pandolfini," said Diana, raising herself erect in her chair, turning round upon him with the courage the situation demanded, yet unable to keep a tremor of sympathy out of her voice, "now that your country has risen up again, and takes her place once more among the best."

"I thank you for saying so — yes, I should be more happy; but, *ecco*, Miss

Trelawny, we are not as we would. I have my senses, is it not true? I am not a child to stretch out my hands for what is beyond reach? Yet also, alas! I am that fool,—I am that child. My country?—I forget what I meant to say."

"You are not well," said Diana, troubled. "It is this hideous din. Oh no, I meant this beautiful music. You will be better when it is over."

"Nay," he said, the moisture coming into his eyes. "I like it; it makes a solitude. It might be that there was no one else in the world."

All this was nothing. If Mr Hunstanton had heard it, he would have said that Pandolfini was in one of his queer moods, and would have divined nothing of what lay below; but to most women this inference of adoration is more seductive than the most violent protestations. Even Diana

felt herself yield a little to the charm. She had to make an effort to resist and escape from this fascination.

"And happily, here we are at the end," she said. "Listen—here comes the last burst."

"Will you tell me?" said poor Pandolfini, paying no attention to the interruption; "it will be very kind. Will you tell me to my own self, *à me stesso*, before you go away?"

"It will be your turn to pay us a visit in England," she said, rising; and she turned and looked at him with a smile which was very sweet and friendly, though so calm. "Then I will show you my country as you have shown me yours," she added. How kind she was! almost affectionate, confiding; looking at him as if he had been an old friend—she who had known him a few weeks only. But, alas! the moon in the

sky was not more serene than Diana. She went forward to the singers, adding in the same breath, "Is it over so soon? You have given us a very pleasant half-hour" (was it by their singing?). "Won't you take something, and begin again?"

"Tea is the worst thing for the voice," said Mrs Winthrop, "though I am dying for a cup of tea. No more to-night, dear Miss Trelawny. I am sure we have bored you quite enough: though it is amusing to those who sing, I am always sorry for the audience. We must not try you any more."

"I have liked it," said Diana; and he thought she gave a humorous half-glance towards himself, as if to indicate how it was that she had liked it. As for Pandolfini, he could not bear the contact of the gay little crowd. He went into one of the deep windows, and after a moment stole

out into the balcony outside. He was not calm. If Diana had liked this brief retirement from her little world and its busy affairs only to plunge into them again—to pour out tea for Mrs Winthrop, and condole with the tenor on the cold which affected his voice—the Italian was not so philosophical. His frame quivered with all that he had said and all that he had not said. Had he betrayed himself? In every other kind of sentiment two people are on easier ground; but in love, except when they understand each other completely, how are they ever to understand each other? A woman cannot be kind without being more than kind, or a man make himself intelligible without those last explanations which one way or another are final—knitting the two together, or cutting them adrift for ever. Alas! there seemed no likelihood with that calm Diana of any knitting to-

gether: and he would not be cut adrift. No; he would take her at her word. He would be patient—nay, passive, tenacious—as the English like a man to be. He would be silent, resisting all temptation to speak even as he had spoken to-night. He would give up the ways of his own race and take to hers, concealing every sentiment; he would be reticent, self-controlled, everything that an Italian is not by nature. He would take the benefit of every moment here, and enjoy her society as if he did not love her. Yes; that is what he would do—take the good of her, as if she were nothing to him but an acquaintance, and never risk that subdued happiness by any revelation of deeper feeling. And then when all was had that could be had here, he would do as she had said—he would go to England, and there be happy, or at least a little happy, again. And who could tell? If he could

manage to be so wise as this, so self-controlled, so English, who could tell what might happen? She might be in some great danger from which he could rescue her; she might fall into some great strait or misfortune in which he might be of use. He did not, perhaps, immediately realise the drowning, or the fire, or the runaway horses which might form the extremity which would be his opportunity, as a youth might have done; but when a man is under the dominion of one of the primitive emotions, does not that reverse the distinctions of youth and age?

It was the most youthful foolish notion, transparent as gossamer, which thus sprang up within him, and which he cherished with such tenderness. He stood on the balcony with his back turned to the world outside: the soft infinite sky of a spring night, the dewy sense of moisture in the air, the gleam

of the Arno between its banks below, and the voices of the passers-by, in which there was generally a dreamy attraction for him —all this was of less importance to Pandolfini to-night than the lighted interior, with those groups of careless *forestieri* laughing and carrying on their chatter under that solemn cavalier of the Sogni, his own ancestor, who looked on so gravely, seeing the Northern hordes come and go. A momentary contempt and almost hatred for them seized Pandolfini, though he was an Anglomane. What did they want here with their curiosity and their levity?

"Le case di Italia son fatte per noi," he said to himself; then laughed at himself for the doggerel, and so brought his mind down as well as he could from these thoughts to the common platitudes, to Mr Hunstanton, who appealed to him about a discussion which had taken place in the

Italian parliament, and to Colonel Winthrop, who claimed his opinion as an impartial person as to the relative intelligence of the English and Americans. He stepped in from the balcony with a smile on his face, and gave them his reply. His heart was thrilling and quivering with the effort, but he made no sign. Was not this the first symptom that he had conquered himself, that he was as strong as an Englishman, and had surmounted that impatience of suffering, that desire for demonstration which is in the Italian blood? Would she think so? or had she divined what he meant, or ever thought enough about him to wonder? This was the most exciting question of all.

CHAPTER IX.

WARNINGS AND CONSULTATIONS.

Mrs Hunstanton lingered after the visitors had gone away. She made a determined stand even against Mrs Norton and Sophy, and outstayed them in spite of all their efforts. She said, with something of that breathlessness which betrays mental excitement, "I want to say a word to you, Diana. I want to warn you. Spectators always see more than the chief actors, and I have been a spectator all the evening. You must not play with edge-tools."

"*I* play with edge-tools?" said Diana; "are there any in my way?"

"My dear," said the elder lady, who was not addicted to phrases of affection, "I wish I could let you have a peep from my point of view without saying a word: but that is a thing which cannot be done. Diana—I don't know if you have observed it,—but poor Pandolfini——"

Involuntarily, unawares, Diana raised her hand to stop the warning with which she had been threatened, and the colour rose in her face, flushing over cheeks and forehead, to her great distress and shame. But what could she do? Some women cannot help blushing, and those who are thus affected generally consider it as the most foolish and unpleasant of personal peculiarities. She tried to look unconscious, calmly indifferent, but the effort was entirely destroyed by this odious blush.

"Mr Pandolfini?" she said, with an attempt at cheerful light-heartedness. "I

hope it is not he who is your edge-tool. It does not seem to me a happy simile."

"Oh, Diana," cried Mrs Hunstanton, too eager to be careful, "don't treat a man's happiness or misery so lightly! I never questioned you on such subjects, but a woman does not come to your age without knowing something of it. Don't take his heart out of his hand and fling it to the dogs. Don't——"

"I?" cried Diana, aghast. She grew pale and then red again, and the tears came to her eyes. "Am I such a monster? or is it only you who are rhetorical? What have I to do with Mr Pandolfini's heart?"

"You cannot deceive me, Diana," said her friend. "You blushed—you know very well what I mean. Men may not see such things—but women, they understand."

"We have no right to speak of a gentleman we know so little—or at least whom *I*

know so little—in this way," said Diana, very gravely. "It is an injury to him. You are kind—you mean him well—but even with that we have no right to discuss——"

"I don't wish to discuss him, Diana. If there was any chance for him, poor man—oh no, you need not shake your head; I know well enough there is no chance for him; but don't torture him at least," cried Mrs Hunstanton, getting up hastily, "this I *may* say——"

"It is the thing you ought least to say," Diana said, accepting her good-night kiss perhaps more coldly than usual, for though she was perfectly innocent, she dared not dispute the fact pointed out to her. "No, I am not angry: but why should you accuse me so? Do I torture any one? You have made me very uncomfortable. If it is true, I shall have

to break up and leave this nice place, which pleased me, and go back with you to England."

"You are afraid of yourself," cried Mrs Hunstanton.

"I!"——Diana did not say any more. Yes; she was too proud. It was not like a woman to be so determined, so immovable: and yet a woman whose colour went and came, whose eyes filled so quickly, who was so sensitive and easily moved, could she be hard? Mrs Hunstanton did not quite know what she wished. She was a little proud of Diana—among all the girls who married, the one unmarrying woman, placed upon a pedestal, a virgin princess dispensing good things to all, and above the common weaknesses. One such, once in a way, pleased her imagination and her *esprit de corps*. And if Diana had willingly stepped down from

her pedestal, a sense of humiliation would have filled her friend's mind. But then poor Pandolfini! She was quick of wit and quick of speech, and would have been as ready as anybody to turn upon him, and ask who was he that he should have the Una, the peerless woman, he a penniless foreigner with nothing but a fine name? Probably had Diana melted, all this wilful lady's impatient soul would have risen indignant at the idea of the English lady of the manor consenting to turn herself into a Madame Pandolfini. But all the same, as Diana had no such intention, her heart melted over the hopeless lover. Poor fellow! how good he was, how kind, how friendly! It was hard that by a mere accident, so to speak, because Diana had taken it into her head so suddenly to come here, that his whole life should be ruined for him.

How hard it was that such things should be! As Mrs Hunstanton went up-stairs to her own floor she could not help remembering with some virulence that it was that absurd little Sophy's sham cough which had brought Diana here, and done all the mischief. Little ridiculous creature, whom Diana would spoil so, and raise altogether out of her sphere! Mrs Hunstanton was quite sure that it was entirely Sophy's fault (and her aunt's: the aunt was on the whole, being older, more ridiculous and more to be blamed than Sophy) that this misfortune had happened; though after all, she added to herself, how could Pandolfini expect that Diana was to be kept out of Italy, and shut up, so to speak, in England on his account, lest he should come to harm? That was out of the question too. Thus it will be seen the argument on her side

was inconsistent, and indeed contradictory, as most such arguments must always be.

At the same time a very different sort of conversation was going on in another room in this same Palazzo dei Sogni. As they went out, Mr Hunstanton had seized Pandolfini by the arm. "Come up-stairs and smoke a cigar with me: the night is young," he said; "and there are lots of things I want to talk to you about. Now there are so many ladies on hand, I never see you. Come, you shall have some syrup or other, and I'll have soda—and something—and a friendly cigar. What a business it is to be overdone with ladies! One never knows the comfort of a steady-going wife of one's own—that is acquainted with one's tastes and never bothers one—till a lot of women are let loose upon you. Diana there, Sophy here—a man does not

know if he is standing on his head or his heels."

"Pah! you like it," said the Italian, with a smile.

"Do I? Well, I don't know but what I do. I like something going on. I like a little commotion and life, and I am rather fond, I confess, of helping things forward, and acting a friend's part when I can. Yes, I'm very glad to be of use. You now, my dear fellow, if I could help you to a good wife."

Pandolfini turned pale. Was it sacrilege this good easy Englishman was talking? The idea seemed too profane, too terrible to be even contradicted. He pretended not to have heard, and took up the 'Galignani' which lay in Mr Hunstanton's private room — the room where he was supposed to write business letters, and do all his graver duties, but in which

there was always a limp novel in evidence, from the press of Michel Levy, or Baron Tauchnitz, and where 'Galignani' was the tutelary god.

"Sit down, and let us talk. You should come over to England, Pandolfini. The change would do you good. I like change, for my part. What is the good of staying for ever in one corner of the world, as if you were a vegetable and had roots? We say it is a grievance that we have to leave home every winter on Reginald's account, and I suppose I grumble like other people; but no doubt, on the whole, I like it. There's the hunting — of course one misses all that; but then I don't hunt, so it matters less: change is always agreeable. And then you have got used to our little society. One abuses the women; but they are always pleasant enough. The worst is, one has a little too much of

them in the country. Well, not so constantly as here; but they are our nearest neighbours, and *toujours perdrix*, you know."

"Is it that you mean to persuade me to come, or not to come?" said Pandolfini, laughing.

"My dear fellow, how can you doubt? Of course we shall be delighted to see you, both I and my wife. We always feel together, she and I. Of course you will think me an old fool and all that for speaking with so little enthusiasm. I am past the age of *les grandes passions;* but a good wife is a very good thing, I can tell you, Pandolfini. It is astonishing how many worries a man is spared when he has somebody always by him who knows his ways, and sees that he is comfortable. Many a great calamity is easier put up with than having your tastes

disregarded, and your customs broken in upon."

"This may be very true, my good Hunstanton, but why to me—why say it to me? I have no — wife." His voice changed a little, with a tone which would have been very instructive to the lady spoken of, but which conveyed no particular information to her husband. Mr Hunstanton rubbed his hands: then he took his cigar out of his mouth in his energy, and puffed a large mouthful of smoke into his companion's face.

"That is exactly the question—exactly the question. My dear fellow, that is just what I wanted to say to you. You ought to have a wife."

Pandolfini gave a quick look up into his friend's eyes. What he thought or hoped he might find there who can tell? Many things were possible to his Italian

ideas that no Englishman would have thought possible. From whom might this suggestion come? His heart gave a wild leap upward, then sank with a sudden plunge and chill. What a fool, what a miserable vain fool he was! She to hold out a little finger, a corner of her handkerchief, to him or any man! His eyes fell, and his heart; he shook his head.

"Come, come, Pandolfini! that is the way with all you foreign fellows. You are as afraid of marriage as if it were purgatory. You have had full time to have your fling surely. I don't mean to insinuate anything against you. So far as I know, you have always been the most irreproachable of men. But supposing that you hadn't, why, you have had time enough to have your fling. How old are you, forty? Well, then, it is time to range yourself as the French say. An

English wife would be the making of you——"

"Hunstanton," cried the Italian, "all this that you are saying is as blasphemy. Is it to me you speak of ranging myself, of accepting unwillingly marriage, of having an English wife offered to me like a piece of useful furniture? It is that you do not know me—do not know anything about me—notwithstanding *buon amico*, that you are my best friend."

Mr Hunstanton looked at him with complacent yet humorous eyes. "Aha!" he said, "didn't I divine it! I knew, of course, how the wind was blowing. Bravo, Pandolfini! so you are hit, eh? I knew it, man! I saw it sooner than you did yourself."

Pandolfini looked at the light-hearted yet sympathetic Englishman with a glow upon his dark face of more profound emo-

tion than Mr Hunstanton knew anything about. He held out his hands in the fulness of his heart. Instinct told him that this was not the man to whom to speak of Diana—although the Englishman was fond of Diana too in his way. But his heart melted to the friend who had divined his love. Mr Hunstanton, too, was touched by a confession so frank yet so silent. He got up and patted his friend on the shoulder. "To be sure," he said, his voice even trembling a little, "you mustn't have any shyness with an old man. I divined it all the time."

There was a little pause, during which this delightful and effusive confidant resumed his seat. He kept silence by sheer force of the emotion which he saw in the other's face, though it was almost unintelligible to him. Why should he take it so very seriously? Mr Hunstanton was

on the very eve of bursting forth when Pandolfini himself began—

"But to what good? She is more young, more rich, more highly gifted than I. What hope have I to win her! She with all the world at her feet! I—nobody. Ah, it is not want of seeing. I see well—not what you say, my good friend, but what all your poets have said. That is what a woman is—a woman of the English. But, *amico mio*, do not let us deceive ourselves. What hope is there for such a one as I?"

"Hope! why, every hope in the world," cried the cheerful counsellor. "Talk about the poets: what is it that Shakespeare says? Shakespeare, you know, the very chief of them—

> 'She is a woman, therefore to be wooed;
> She is a woman, therefore to be won.'

Tut! why should you be discouraged. Don't you know our proverb, that 'Faint heart never won fair lady'? Cheer up, man, and try. You can but lose at the worst, and then if you win——"

Pandolfini sat and looked at him with glowing eyes. He was gazing at Hunstanton; but he seemed to see Diana: not as she had been that evening, seated calmly, like a queen, in the centre of so many people who looked up to her—but as she appeared when he saw her first, when she shone upon him suddenly, with her black veil about her head, and when all the bells chimed Diana. What a revelation that had been to him! he did not even know her, nor did he know how, without knowing, he could be able to divine her as he felt he had done. He fell into a musing, his eyes all alit with

the glow of passion and visionary happiness. He knew there was no hope for him: who was he that she should descend from her heights, and take him by the hand? The idea was too wonderful, too entrancing, to have any possibility in it; but it brought such a gleam of happiness to his mind as made him forget everything —even its folly. He paid no attention to Hunstanton gazing at him,—the substantial Englishman became as a mist, as a dream, to Pandolfini,—what he really saw was Diana, the revelation of that new unthought-of face rising upon him suddenly out of dimness and nothing! What a night that had been!—what a time of strange witchery ever since! He did not know how it had passed, or what he had done in it—was it not all Diana from beginning to end?

Mr Hunstanton was kind. After a min-

ute or two he saw that the look which was apparently bent upon himself was a visionary gaze, seeing only into some land of dreams. He broke up the fascination of that musing by a hearty honest laugh, full of genuine enjoyment. "Are you so far gone as that?" he cried; "then, upon my word, Pandolfini, some one must interfere. If you are afraid to take it into your own hands, I'll speak for you if you like. You may be sure I am not afraid. It isn't our English way: but I'll do it in a moment. Is that what you would like? We're leaving soon, as I told you, and there is not much time to lose."

"Oh, my best friend!" cried the Italian, with sudden eagerness. Then he paused. "No, Hunstanton, I dare not. Let me have the little time that remains to me. I can at least do as does your curate. I

understand him. He, too, has not any hope; how should he, or I either? but I would not be sent away from her: banished for the little time that remains. No! let me keep what I have, lest I should get less and not more."

"Stuff!" said Mr Hunstanton. "The curate, Bill Snodgrass! that's a different case altogether. Look here now, Pandolfini: you are ridiculously over-humble; there is no such difference as you suppose. Now, look here! You have some confidence in me, I know, and if ever one man wished to help another, I am that man. Will you leave the matter in my hands? Oh, don't you fear. I shan't compromise you if things look badly. *I'll feel my way.* I shan't go a step farther than I see allowable. You shan't be banished, and so forth. Though that's all nonsense. Will you leave it to me?"

Pandolfini fixed his eyes this time really upon Hunstanton's face. "You are too honest to betray me," he said, wistfully; "you would not ruin me by over-boldness, by going too far."

"Who? I? Of course I should not. I have plenty of prudence, though you may not think so; besides, I know a few things which are not to be communicated outside my wife's chamber. Oh, trust to me, — I know what I am doing! You don't need to be afraid."

"But I am," said the other. "Hunstanton, Hunstanton, my good friend, let things remain as they are. I have not the courage."

"Stuff!" said Mr Hunstanton, getting up and rubbing his hands. "I tell you I know a thing or two. Betray what my wife tells me — never! — not if I were drawn by wild horses; but I know what

I know. You had better leave it in my hands."

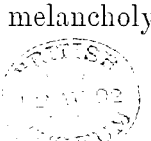
Pandolfini searched the cheerful countenance before him with his eyes. He watched those noddings of the head, those little emphatic gestures of self-confidence and sincerity. Was it possible that this man could be in Diana's confidence? No: but then his wife: that was a different matter: was it—could it be possible? He got up at last, and went to him with a certain solemnity. "Hunstanton," he said, "good friend, if you have the power to say a word for me, to recommend me, to lay me most humble at her feet,"—he paused, his voice quivering,—"then I will indeed put myself in your hands."

"That's right — that is exactly what you ought to do. But you must not be so tremendously humble," said Mr Hunstanton. "Yes, yes, my dear fellow, I'll

undertake it; but don't be down-hearted. If you are not as happy a fellow as any in Christendom by this time to-morrow night——"

"You—think so? *Dio mio!* You—think so?" said the Italian. His heart was too full to say any more. He wrung his friend's hand, and snatched up his hat and went away with scarcely another word, stumbling down the long staircase, which was as black as night, his mind too distracted to think of anything. As he passed Diana's door the glimmer of light which showed underneath stopped him, as if it had carried a message, a word of encouragement. He stopped short in spite of himself, and a wild fancy seized him. It was all he could do to keep himself from rushing into her presence, confessing everything, asking—ah! what was it that he could ask? Would she be but favourable

— kind — nay, something more? Should he make the plunge himself without waiting for Hunstanton, and if such an unimaginable bliss could be, have it a day earlier? The impulse made him giddy, so strong was it, turning his brain round and round; but as he stood there, with his hand uplifted almost in the act of ringing the bell, Diana's factotum, all unaware of who was standing outside, came to the door within and began to bar and bolt and shut up for the night. Pandolfini's hand dropped as if he had been shot. He turned and made his way, without once pausing to take breath, into the open air beneath, on the side of Arno. The lamps twinkled reflected in the water, the stars from the sky; there was a quiver and tremor in the night itself, a little soft wistful melancholy breeze. Might this be



the last night for him, the end of all sweet and hopeful days? or was it, could it be, only the tender beginning of a long heaven to come?

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