INNOCENT:

A TALE OF MODERN LIFE.

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&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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INNOCENT:

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CHAPTER I.

THE OLD HOUSE.

THE Eastwoods lived in an old house in one of the south-western suburbs of London. It was one of those houses which, dating only from the prosaic age of Queen Anne, have come to be picturesque in their way—which they were never intended to be—and are comfortable, which they were intended to be, to a degree rarely attained by all our modern efforts. What advances we have made since then in every way! And yet all Belgravia did not hold a house so thoroughly good for living in, so pleasant, so modest, so dignified, and so refined, as the big brick house, partly whitewashed, partly retaining its native red, lichened all over with brown and yellow mosses, in which, at the outset of this

history, Mrs. Eastwood lived with her children. It had been built by the Eastwoods of the time, more than a century and a half ago. It had given shelter to various generations since then—their mortal inn and lodging, the everlasting dwelling-place of their memory. They had left layers, so to speak, of old furniture, from the japanned screens and cabinets of the founder, to the hideous haircloth and mahogany of George IV.; and pictures and knick-knacks, and precious old china for which collectors would have given its weight in gold. All these riches were not shown off to advantage, as they might have been. You stumbled on them in corners; you found them in out-of-the-way cupboards, in rooms that were rarely used. In short, you could not take a walk on a wet day about this delightful house without finding something out that you had not seen before. For my own part I prefer this to the modern device of making a museum or china-shop of one's drawing-room. The drawing-room was a place to live in at The Elms. It had a hundred prettinesses about, none of which had been bought within the memory of any of the young people, except, indeed, a few foolish knick-knacks belonging to Ellinor—for what girl worth calling such was ever without knick-knacks? But its supreme use

was to be lived in, and for this it was infinitely well adapted. Its only drawback that I know—and that many people thought a great advantage—was that, being close to London, you saw nothing from the windows that you might not have seen a hundred miles deep in the country. The drawing-room windows looked out upon a great green lawn, set in old trees. In winter, when the trees had lost their leaves, bits of other old houses, red and mossy, looked in through the bare branches; but in spring the farther end of the lawn was carpeted with primroses, and canopied with foliage, and the long avenue of elms at one side, and the narrower path on the other under the lime-trees, which was called the Lady's Walk, might have graced a squire's house anywhere. Both of these ended in a high paling; but I defy you to have found that out when elms and limes alike were in their glory of summer array.

After having said so much about the house, I may introduce you to its inhabitants. Mrs. Eastwood was a widow, and had four children, all as yet at home under the maternal roof. The eldest son was in a public office; the second, Richard, commonly called Dick, was at home "reading" for one of those examinations which occupy all our youth

now-a-days. The third boy, who bore the magnificent name of Plantagenet, usually, I am grieved to say, shortened into Jenny, was still at Eton. One only remains to be accounted for, and that was Ellinor. She was but one, counted according to ordinary arithmetic; but she was as good as three additional at least, reckoning by her importance in the household. "If you count girls, there are seven of us; but some people don't count girls. I'm one," said one of *Mr. Punch's* delightful little boys in the old days of Leech. Ellinor Eastwood might have adapted this saying with perfect propriety to her own circumstances. The boys might or might not be counted; but to enter once into the house without hearing, seeing, divining the girl in it was impossible. Not that she was a remarkable young woman in any way. I don't know if she could justly be called clever; and she certainly was not more perfectly educated than usual—and does not everybody say that all women are badly educated? Her brothers knew twenty times as much as she did. They had all been at Eton; and Frederick, the eldest, was a University man, and had taken a very good class, though not the highest; and Dick was costing his mother a fortune in "coaches," and was required by the conditions of his examination to be

a perfect mine of knowledge; they ought by all rules to have been as superior to their sister intellectually and mentally as daylight is to darkness. But they were not. I don't venture to explain how it was; perhaps the reader may in his or her experience have met with similar cases, though I allow that they go against a good many theories. The household was a young household altogether. Mrs. Eastwood herself was under fifty, which, for a woman who has had neither bad health nor trouble in her life, is quite a youthful age. Her eldest son was six-and-twenty. There had never appeared a very great difference between them; for Frederick had always been the most serious member of the family. His name of itself was a proof of this. While all the others were addressed by a perpetually varying host of diminutives and pet names, Frederick had always remained Frederick. I need not point out how different this is from "Fred." He was the only member of the household who had as yet brought any trouble or anxiety to it, but he was by far the most proper and dignified person in the house. The rest were very youthful indeed, varying, as we have said, from the light-hearted though sober-visaged youthfulness of seven-and-forty to the tricksey boyhood of sixteen. It was a house,

accordingly, in which there was always something going on. The family were well off, and they were popular; they were rich enough to give frequent and pleasant little entertainments, and they had never acquired that painful habit of asking, "Can we afford it?" which is so dreadful a drawback to social pleasures. I do not intend to imply by this that there was any recklessness or extravagance in this well-ordered house. On the contrary, Mrs. Eastwood's bills were paid as by clockwork, with a regularity which was vexatious to all the tradesmen she employed; but neither she nor her children—blessed privilege!—knew what it was to be poor, and they had none of the habits of that struggling condition. That ghost which haunts the doors of the less comfortably endowed, which hovers by them in the very streets, and is always waiting round some corner—that black spectre of indebtedness or scarcity had never been seen at The Elms. There was a cheerful security of enough, about the house, which is more delightful than wealth. To be sure, there are great moral qualities involved in the material comfort of having enough, into which we need not enter. The comfort of the Eastwoods was a matter of habit. They lived as they had always lived. It never occurred to them to start on a

different *pied*, or struggle to a higher level. What higher level could they want? They were gentlefolks, and well connected; no sort of *parvenu* glitter could have done anything for them, even had they thought of it; therefore it was no particular credit to them to be content and satisfied. The morality of the matter was passive in their case—it was habitual, it was natural, not a matter of resolution or thought.

And yet there had been one break in this simple and uncomplicated state of affairs. Four years before the date at which this history begins, an event had occurred to which the family still looked back with a sort of superstition,—a mingled feeling of awe, regret, and pride, such as might move the descendants of some hero who had abdicated a throne at the call of duty. The year in which Frederick took his degree, and left Oxford, Mrs. Eastwood had *put down her carriage*. I dare not print such words in ordinary type. She said very little about the reasons for this very serious proceeding; but it cannot be denied that there was a grandeur and pathos in the incident, which gave it a place in what may be called the mythology of the family. Nobody attempted to explain how it was, or why it was. It gave a touch of elevating tragedy

and mystery to the comfortable home-life, which was so pleasant and free from care. When now and then a sympathizing friend would say, "You must miss your carriage," Mrs. Eastwood was always prompt to disclaim any need for pity. "I have always been an excellent walker," she said cheerily. She would not receive any condolences, and yet even she got a certain subtle pleasure, without knowing it, out of the renunciation. It was the hardest thing she had ever been called upon to do in her life, and how could she help being a little, a very little, proud of it? But, to be sure, this sentiment was quite unconscious. It was the only unexplained event in her innocent life. Ellinor, of course, half by instinct, half by reason ef that ineffable communion between a mother and an only daughter, which makes the one conscious of all that passes within and without the other almost without words, knew exactly how this great family event had come about; but no one else knew, not even the most intimate friends of the house.

The cause, however, was nothing much out of the course of nature. Frederick, the eldest son and hope, he of whom everybody declared that he was his mother's stay and support, as good as the head of the family, had suddenly burst in her room one morning

before she was up, like a sudden avalanche. He came to tell her, in the first place, that he had made up his mind not to go into the Church, for which he had been educated, and in which he had the best of prospects; and in the second place, that he was deeply in debt, and was going out to Australia by the next ship to repent and make up his deficiencies. Fancy having all this poured into your ears of a cold spring morning in your peaceful bed, when you woke up with the consciousness that to-day would be as yesterday, and, perhaps, still more tranquil and pleasant. Mrs. Eastwood was stricken dumb with consternation. It was the first time that trouble in this shape had ever visited her. Grief she had known—but that curtain of gentle goodness and well-seeming which covers the surface of life had never before been rudely rent before her eyes, revealing the abyss below. And the shock was all the greater that it was Frederick who gave it; he who had been her innocent child just the other day, and who was still her serious boy, never the one to get into mischief. The surprise was so overwhelming that it almost deadened her sense of pain; and then, before she could fully realize what had happened, the real importance of the event was still further confused by the fact, that instead of judging

the culprit on his real demerits, she had to pray and plead with him to give up his mad resolution, to beg him not to throw his life away after his money. So urgent did this become that she gradually forgot all about the blame attaching to him, and could think of nothing but those terrible threats about Australia, which gradually became the central fact of the catastrophe. To do him justice, Frederick was perfectly sincere, and had no thought of the admirable effect to be produced by his obstinate determination. Where is the family that does not know such scenes? The result was that the carriage was "put down," the debts paid, Australia averted; and after a short time Mr. Frederick Eastwood gained, after a severe examination, his present appointment, and all again went merry as marriage bells. I don't know whether the examination was in reality severe; but at least Mrs. Eastwood thought so, which pleased her, and did nobody any harm; and as time went on she found to her entire satisfaction that every thing had been for the best, and that Providence had brought good out of evil. In the first place, it was "noble" of Frederick, when he found he could not conscientiously enter the Church, to scorn all mercenary motives, and not to be tempted by the excellent living which he knew

awaited him. And then what a comfort and blessing it was to have him at home, instead of away down in Somersetshire, and only paying his family a visit two or three times in a year! Thus the fault faded out of sight altogether by the crowding of the circumstances round it; and Frederick himself, in contemplating (for he was always serious) the providential way in which his life had been arranged for him in a new groove, forgot that the first step in this arrangement had been a very reprehensible one on his own part, and came to regard the "putting down" of the carriage as the rest did—as a tremendous and mysterious family event, calling forth an intense pride and melancholy, but no individual sense of guilt or responsibility so far as he was personally concerned. "I don't like to take you out in a fly, Nelly," Mrs. Eastwood would sometimes say, as she gave a last touch to Ellinor's ribbons, and breathed a soft little sigh. "As if I cared!" cried the girl: "and besides, you can say, like Lady Dobson, that you never take your horses out at night." Now Lady Dobson was very rich, and in trade, and a standing joke in the Eastwood circle; and the party went off very merry in the fly, with never another thought of the carriage which had been "put down."

Light-hearted folk! That sudden tempest of trouble and terror which had driven Frederick into the Sealing-Wax Office, and the ladies into Mr. Sutton's neat flys, gave, I think, on the whole, a zest to their happiness.

The drawing-room at The Elms was a large room, with a rounded end occupied by a great bow window, which opened like a door into a pretty conservatory, always gay with flowers. Opposite the fire-place were three other long and large windows, cut to the floor, from which you looked out over the long stretch of greensward embosomed in great trees which has been already described. In summer, the flower beds which were cut in the grass close under the windows were ablaze with brilliant colour; but in the meantime, on the afternoon when this story opens, nothing was visible but an interrupted golden line of crocus defining each bed, and depending upon the sun to make the definition successful. When the day was bright the border bristled all round in close array with spikes of gold; but on this particular day it was gloomy, and the line was straggling and broken. On a damp February afternoon the strongest attraction is generallv indoors; and the room was bright enough to satisfy the most difficult critic. Mrs. Eastwood

had, as every mother of a family ought to have, her particular chair, with her particular little table and footstool, a detached and commanding position, a genial domestic throne, with the supremacy of which no one ever interfered. There was room for any one who wanted counsel to draw a chair by its side, and plenty of room for a big boy to stretch out his lazy length on the rug at its feet, resting a curly head, it might be, on the mother's footstool. Mrs. Eastwood was seated here in her black gown with violet ribbons, which was her compromise between the world and her widowhood. Sometimes she went the length of grey and red. I don't know what innocent prejudice she had to the effect that grey and red betokened still some recondite style of mourning; but such was her prejudice. She would have felt a blue ribbon to be profane. Need I say that she was plump, and had perhaps a little more colour than when she was twenty? But there were few wrinkles upon her pleasant face, and no clouds upon her forehead. She had known grief, innocent and holy, but no trouble of that wearing kind which saps the strength and steals the courage out of life, except that one of which the reader has been told; and that, as he has also been informed, had turned out for the best.

Ellinor was the only other member of the family

present, except, indeed, a certain small Skye terrier, known by the name of Winks, who was a very important member of the family. As Winks, however, for the present is asleep coiled up in an easy chair, and happily unobservant of what is going on, we may leave him for an after occasion, and pass on to the young lady of the house. What can we say about her? Dear and gentle reader, you know half-a-hundred just like Nelly. She had brown hair, bright, dancing, brown eyes, and a nose which, thanks to Mr. Tennyson, we do not require to describe as *retroussé*. It was "tip-tilted, like the petal of a flower." As there was not a straight line about her anywhere, this delicate little turn was appropriate. Although, however, it is true that there was no one straight line about the girl, the combination of a hundred soft curves produced a perfect pose of figure, light, firm, and elastic, like—well, like most girls of twenty. What can one say more? Nelly had no settled place like her mother. She was not restless, nor fidgetty, but she was everywhere at once. I don't know why it was necessary that she should be always in motion—for she never crossed the room or went from one table to another without a reason for it—but somehow there was a perpetual play of movement and variety

in every room where she was. Even when she was absorbed in the tranquillity of needlework, the motion of her hand kept things going. She was like a brook: a soft atmosphere of sound and movement—always soft, always pleasant—belonged to her by nature; but, like the brook, she tranquillized the surrounding scenery; or like a bird, making the quietness seem more complete by its flitting from one branch to another, and delicious trying over of its favourite notes. Nelly was not alarmingly good, nor perfect in any way I know of; but she fulfilled this mission of the girl, which I fear, among greater aims, is falling a little into disrepute—she filled the whole house with her youth, her brightness, her gaiety, her overflowing life. No great demands of any kind had yet been made upon her. Whether she would be capable of responding to them when they came, no one could tell; but in the meantime she fulfilled her primitive use with the most thorough completeness. She was the life of the house.

Mrs. Eastwood had brought in some letters with her to the drawing-room. They had been delivered at luncheon, and as none looked very pressing, they had been suffered to wait. This happy household was in no anxiety about its letters. That continual

fear of bad news which afflicts most of us had no place in the bosom of the easy soul who had but one of her children absent from her, and he within half-an-hour by railway. She went over them at leisure, reading here and there a few words aloud.

"Fancy, Nelly, Claude Somerville is going to be married at last," she said. "I wonder if his people will think her good enough; but indeed they will never think any one good enough; and poor little Mary Martin is going out as a governess. Now, how much better if Claude had married her, and saved such a sad experiment!"

"But did they ever care for each other?" asked Nelly, with open eyes.

"No, I don't think they did. But what a nice arrangement it would have been! Whereas the girl he is going to marry is an heiress," said Mrs. Eastwood, "and has no need of him, so to speak. Dear me! I do not mean to speak against Providence; but I should like sometimes to interfere.—Listen! Poor little Mary bears up very bravely. She pretends to make light of it; but what a change it will be from her home, and her father who spoilt her?"

"Mamma, let us have her here on a long visit,"

cried Nelly. "I am sure, if she chose, she might spend her life among her friends."

"She is a very independent little thing," said Mrs. Eastwood doubtfully. "Frederick and she were once rather good friends; but you may write to her if you like, Nelly. It will always be kind. The Claude Somervilles are going to Italy for their wedding trip. Dear me! why can't people stay at home? one hears of nothing but Italy. And, speaking of that, here is an Italian postmark. I wonder who it comes from."

A few minutes passed, and Mrs. Eastwood made no further communication. "Where is it from?" Ellinor asked twice, not caring to be kept in suspense, for the correspondence of the house, like other things, was in common. Her mother, however, made no reply. She uttered various half articulate exclamations; "Dear me! dear me! Poor man; has it really come to that!" she murmured as she read. "What is it, mamma?" said Ellinor. Mrs. Eastwood read it all over, cried out, "Good gracious, Nelly!" and then, turning back to the first page, read it over again. When Nelly found it impossible to bear this suspense any longer, she rose and went behind her mother's chair, and looked over her shoulder: "Is it bad news?" she cried,

looking at the cramped lines which she could not make out. "Dear! dear me! dear me! what shall I do, Nelly?" said Mrs. Eastwood, wringing her hands; and then she added, "Don't write to Mary Martin, my dear, here is some one to be looked to of our own."

CHAPTER II.

THE NEWS, AND HOW IT WAS RECEIVED.

Mrs. Eastwood had scarcely uttered these mysterious and affecting words, when a roll of wheels, a resounding knock, a peal at the outer door announced visitors. "Oh, call Brownlow, Nelly, quick, before the door is opened!" she said. "Oh, Brownlow, stop a moment; I have just heard of a death in the family. I don't think I can see any one; I don't think that I ought to be able to see any one, Nelly?"

"Who is it, mamma?" cried Nelly, taking possession of the letter. Mrs. Eastwood took out her handkerchief and put it lightly to her eyes.

"I don't mean that I was fond of him," she said, "or could be, for I did not know him, scarcely—but still it is a shock. It is my brother-in-law, Nelly, Mr. Vane—whom you have heard of. I wonder now, who it is at the door? If it is Mrs. Everard,

Brownlow, you can let her in; but if it is Lady Dobson, or Miss Hill, or any other of those people, say I have just heard of a death in the family. Now run! it must be some one of importance, for there is another knock at the door."

"Mr. Vane—why he is not even a relation!" cried Nelly. "There! Brownlow is sending the people away. My step-aunt's husband, whom none of us ever saw——"

"It would be more civil to call him your step-uncle, Nelly. People generally do—especially as he is dead now, poor man, and never can take anything upon him. Oh! dear, why, it was Mrs. Barclay, and her brother, Sir Alexis—people I really wanted to see. How unfortunate! Brownlow, I am sure I said particularly, Lady Dobson, or Miss Hill, or that kind of person——"

"You said Mrs. Everard was to come in, mum, and no one else," said Brownlow, standing very stiffly erect with his tray, and the card on it, in his hand.

"That is how it always happens," said Nelly, "when you say you are not at home. The nicest people always get sent away: the bores come at other times, and are admitted as a matter of course. Not to say that one should always tell the truth; it

is the best policy, like honesty, and other good things."

"Nelly, you forget yourself," said Mrs. Eastwood. "When I say not at home, everybody understands what is meant. But in the present instance there is no fib. Of course, now we must keep it up for to-day, at least. You can say, 'Not a near relation,' Brownlow; 'nothing to draw down the blinds for, but very unexpected and a shock.' That is enough. Poor man! it is true I never saw him but twice, and my father never forgave poor Isabella for marrying him. Poor Isabella! But that is not all, dear. Give me the letter again."

"I am reading it, mamma," said Nelly, and she began to spell it out aloud, stumbling over the crabbed Italian, and somewhat mazed by mingled ignorance and wonder. "Here is something about a girl, a young lady. Who is this young lady, and what did you mean when you said some one of our very own?"

"I have been a wicked woman," said Mrs. Eastwood. "When poor Isabella died, I never asked about the baby; I took it for granted the baby died too. And I did hate the man so, Nelly; he killed her; I am sure he killed her. And here has the poor baby been living all the time! I am a wicked

woman. I might have been of some use, and taken her away from that dreadful man."

"But she seems to have liked the dreadful man. It says here that she cannot be consoled. Poor thing! Don't you know anything about her, mamma?" cried Nelly. Here Mrs. Eastwood took out her handkerchief once more, and this time cried in earnest with grief and shame.

"I am a hard-hearted, bad woman!" she said. "Don't contradict me, Nelly. A girl that is my own flesh and blood; and I never even inquired after her —did not know of her existence——"

"Well, mamma, I think I will give you absolution," said Nelly. "If you did not know of her existence, how could you inquire after her? Did poor Aunt Isabella die when she was born?"

"That is the worst of it all," said Mrs. Eastwood. "I must make a clean breast of it. I must not deceive myself any more. Yes, I did know of the poor child's existence. She must have been six or seven when Isabella died. The child had the fever too, and I persuaded myself she must have gone with her mother. For you see, Mr. Vane—poor man, he is dead; we must not speak any harm of him—was so very disagreeable in his letters. I know I ought

to have inquired; but I had got to dislike him so much, and almost to be afraid of him——"

"I think it was not quite right of you," said Nelly, with the gravity of a judge.

"I know it was not," said the culprit, penitent. "Many a time I have said to myself, I would write, but always put it off again. However, it is not too late now to make amends to her; and as for him——. Give me the letter, Nelly. Oh! to think he should be dead—such a man as that."

"Well, surely, mamma, he is no great loss, if he was such a man."

"Not to us; oh no, not to us! Not to any one except himself; but for himself! Think, Nelly. However, we are not called upon to judge him, thank Heaven! And as for the poor child—the poor little girl——"

"It is a long time since Aunt Isabella died," said Nelly. "How old is the little girl now?"

Mrs. Eastwood had to make a great effort of recollection. She had many landmarks all through her life from which to date, and after a comparison of these, and some trouble in fixing the exact one that answered, she at length decided that her sister's death had taken place the year that Frederick had his fever, which was when he was sixteen. It is un-

necessary for us to go into the details by which she proved her calculation—as that he grew out of all his clothes while he was ill, and had nothing to put on till his new mourning arrived, which was a melancholy business for an invalid. By this means, however, the fact was established, that "the poor little girl" must be at least sixteen, a startling conclusion, for which neither of the ladies were prepared.

"As old as Jenny," said Ellinor, pondering, with unusual gravity upon her face.

"But then she is a girl, dear, not a boy, remember," said Mrs. Eastwood. "Jenny is a dear boy, but two of him in the house would be trying—in London. That is the worst of London. When boys are at home for the holidays they have so little scope, poor fellows. I wonder if she has had any education, poor child!"

"I wonder," said Nelly, still very grave. "Mamma, must this new cousin come here?"

"Where else could she go, Nelly? We must be very kind to her. Besides, she will be a companion for you. It will be very delightful, I don't doubt, to have her," said Mrs. Eastwood, with a certain quaver and hesitation in her voice.

Nelly made no immediate reply. "It will be very odd," she said, after a pause, "to have another girl in

the house—a girl not so far off one's own age. Dear, what an unpleasant sort of creature I must be! I don't feel quite so sure that I shall like it. Perhaps she will be much nicer than I am; perhaps people will like her better. I am dreadfully afraid, mamma, I am not good enough to be quite happy about it. If she had been six instead of sixteen——"

"Nelly, don't say anything, dear. She is our own flesh and blood. You would be good to any stranger. As for being nicer than you, my Nelly!—But poor child, poor child, without either father or mother, without a friend to stand by her—inconsolable in a strange country——"

"But, mamma," said Nelly, scarcely able to keep from crying in sympathy, "it cannot be a strange country to her if she has lived there all her life."

"That does not matter, dear; nothing can change the fact," said Mrs. Eastwood. "I have been in Italy, and I know how English people live. They hold themselves aloof. Though they live there all their lives, it is always a strange country to them. And he was not the sort of man to make friends. I dare say she has been brought up by some old servant or other, and allowed to run wild." Here Mrs. Eastwood paused and sighed. She was the kindest woman in the world, but the idea of a girl of

sixteen, with no manners or education, suddenly thrown upon her hands, a new member of her family, brought up under circumstances so different, and no doubt unlike them in every way, was not without its painful side. And she was angry with herself for seeing this, and grieved to think that she had so little natural affection or Christian charity. "Our whole hearts ought to go out towards her, poor thing," she added, with profound compunction. "She has nobody else in the world to look to; and, Nelly, whatever may be our first momentary feeling, of course there can be no real hesitation——"

"Of course," said Nelly, springing to her feet. "There is Mrs. Everard's knock this time, and now I know you will tell her all about it. What room must she have? the little green room, or the room in the wing, or——"

"Dear," said Mrs. Eastwood coaxingly, "the kindest and the warmest would be the little room, off yours—close to us both—to make the poor child feel at home."

"I knew that was what you would say," cried Nelly, half laughing, half crying; "it is exactly like you, mamma; not only take her in, but take her into the very centre of the nest, between you and me."

"To warm her, poor child," said the inconsistent

mother, laughing and crying too; and Nelly ran off, stumbling in her way against Mrs. Everard, her mother's friend, whom the rest of the family were not fond of. "Do not knock me down, Ellinor," said that lady, giving Nelly a kiss, which she received without enthusiasm. Where was Nelly going? Straight up stairs without a pause to the little room which, already in her own mind, she too had destined to her unknown cousin. She went and looked at it with her head on one side, contemplating the little bed, which was decked with faded chintz, and the paper, which was somewhat dingy, and the carpet, which was so worn as to bear little trace of its original pattern. "This will never do," Nelly said to herself. Her imagination, which was a very lively and sprightly imagination, instantly set off on a voyage of discovery through the house to make up what was wanting. She seized, always in her thoughts, upon here a picture, and there a set of shelves, and rooted out from the lumber-room the tiniest of easy chairs, and made up her mind as to the hangings. I do not mean to say that this was all pure kindness. To tell the truth, Nelly liked the job. The arrangement of the room, and its conversion out of a dingy receptacle for a nursery maid to a bower for a young lady, was the most delightful

occupation to her. Did not some one say that lady had lately set herself up in business as a house decorator? Ellinor Eastwood would have been her apprentice, her journeywoman, with all her heart.

It will be apparent from this that though the first idea of the new arrival startled both mother and daughter, the orphan was not likely to have a cold or unkindly reception. So much the reverse indeed was this to the real case, that by the time Mrs. Eastwood had confided all to her friend she herself was in high excitement and expectation of her unknown niece. Mrs. Everard had condoled with her on the burden, the responsibility, the trouble, every one of which words added to the force of the revulsion in her kindly and simple soul. "God forgive me, Nelly," she said, when her daughter reappeared in the twilight, "if I thought my own sister's child a burden, or shrank from the responsibility of taking care of my own flesh and blood. It seemed to hurt me when she said such things. She must have thought that was how I felt about it; when, heaven knows, the very reverse——"

"It was just like her, mamma," said Nelly.

"My dear, none of you are just to poor Mrs. Everard," said the mother, driven back upon herself. She dared not grumble ever so little at this friend of

her bosom without giving occasion, so to speak, to the Adversary to blaspheme. Therefore for the sake of peace she gulped down a great many of her friend's opinions without venturing to say how much she disagreed with them. The two were sitting there, consulting over the fire, when Frederick came in. There were no lights in the room, the shutters were not closed, nor even the blinds drawn, and the trees were dimly discernible like processions of ghosts in the dim air outside. That still world outside, looking in through the window, was somewhat eerie and dreary; when it caught Mrs. Eastwood's eye she was apt to get nervous, and declare that there was somebody in the grounds, and that she saw a face looking in. But this evening she had other things to think of. Frederick, however, as he came in, felt a shadow of his mother's superstitions and alarms. The glimmering dark outside seemed to him full of possible dangers. "Why don't you have the lamps lighted, and shut up the windows?" he said. "I can't understand your liking for the firelight, mother. One can't see to do anything, and anybody that chooses can see in."

"We don't want to do anything, and we don't care who sees us," said Nelly, who was sometimes saucy to her elder brother.

"Don't wrangle, children: we were discussing something which will startle you very much, Frederick, as it did me. It will make quite a change in everything. Perhaps Frederick will feel it least, being out all day; but we must all feel it," said Mrs. Eastwood. Frederick seated himself with his face to the window with a certain air of endurance. He did not like the firelight flashing over him, and revealing what he might happen to be thinking. Frederick liked to keep his thoughts to himself; to tell just as much as he liked, and no more. He put his hands into his pockets, and gave a half perceptible shrug to his shoulders. He did not expect to be at all startled. "A change in the fashion, I suppose," he said to himself. He was supposed to be very fond of home, and a most domestic young man; and this was one of the ways in which he indemnified himself for the good character which he took pains to keep up.

They told him the story from beginning to end, and he was not startled; but he was interested, which was a great deal more than he expected to be. When the lamp was brought in he got the letter; but did not make very much of that, for to Ellinor's great gratification he could not read it. It was written in Italian, as we have said. Now, Mrs.

Eastwood was the only person in the house who knew Italian, though Nelly herself could spell it out. The mother was rather proud of her accomplishment. She had lived in Italy in her youth, and had never ceased to regard that fact as one of the great things in her life. It was with a thrill of pleasure that she read the letter over, translating it word by word. And it was something to have moved Frederick to such interest. He entered into the discussion afterwards with warmth, and gave his advice with that practical good sense which his mother always admired, though she was not unaware that it sometimes failed him in his own affairs. "She cannot come here by herself," he said; "some one must go and fetch her. You can't allow a girl of that age to travel alone."

"That is quite true, Frederick," said Mrs. Eastwood; "how odd I should never have thought of it before! Of course, she could not travel alone. Dear, dear, what must we do? I cannot go myself, and leave you all to your own devices. Could I send Brownlow, I wonder; or old Alice——?"

"Brownlow would never find his way to Pisa. He would break down long before he got there. And old Alice, what good could she do—an old woman?"

"She travelled with me," said Mrs. Eastwood,

with modest pride. "Wherever I went she went. She learned a little of the language too. She would take very good care of her. Whom else can I send? Dick is too young, and too busy about his examination."

"If you will pay me well, I don't mind going myself," said Frederick, stroking his moustache, and thus concealing a smile which lurked about the corners of his mouth.

"You, Frederick? It is very good of you to think of it. I never thought of you. What a pity we cannot make a party, and all go!" said Mrs. Eastwood. "To be sure that would cost a good deal. I would pay your expenses, of course, my dear, if you could make up your mind to go. That would, no doubt, be the nicest way of all. Yes; and though it is a melancholy occasion, it would be a little change for you too. You have been looking rather pale lately, Frederick."

"Yes, I have been looking pale," he said, with a little laugh, "and feeling pale. I'll go. I don't care much for the melancholy of the occasion, and I should like the change. To be sure, I am not much like old Alice; if the little girl wants a nursemaid I might be awkward——"

"She is sixteen," said Mrs. Eastwood. Nelly

made no remark; but she watched her brother with a scrutiny he did not quite like.

"Do you see anything extraordinary about me, Nell, that you stare at me like that?" he said, with a little irritation.

"Oh, nothing extraordinary," said Ellinor. There was a frequent bickering between the two, which made the mother uncomfortable sometimes. "I was thinking you must want a change very much to be so ready to officiate as a nursemaid."

"I do want a change," he said.

"Don't wrangle, my dear children," said their mother; "what is the use of wrangling? You have always done it since you were babies. Nelly, I wish you were not so fond of having the last word."

"I did not have the last word this time," said Nelly hastily, under her breath.

"For, if you will think of it, it is very good of Frederick to bestow so much interest on a poor lonely little girl. Neither you nor I, Nelly, though we are women, and ought to have more feeling, ever thought of going to fetch her. The thing is, can you get leave, Frederick? You had your two months in the autumn, and then you had Christmas, and you have been out of town very often, you know, for three days. Can you have leave again so

soon? You must take care not to hurt yourself in the office."

"Oh, I can manage; I am not afraid of the office," he said; but at this moment Brownlow rung the bell solemnly, meaning that it was time to dress. When they sat down to dinner together, four of them—for Dick had come in in the meantime—they were as handsome a young family party as could be seen. The table was bright with such flowers as were to be had; well lighted, well served. Perhaps of all the party Frederick was the most strictly handsome. He had a somewhat long face, with a melancholy look, which a great many people found interesting—a Charles I. look some ladies said; and he cultivated a small beard, which was slightly peaked, and kept up this resemblance. His features were very regular: and his fine dark brown hair longer than men usually wear it. He was very particular in his dress, and had delicate hands, shapely and white. He looked like a man to whom something would happen, the same ladies said who found out his resemblance to Charles I. There was one thing about him, however, that few people remarked at first sight; for he was aware of it, and did his best to conceal the defect of which he was conscious. He was not fond of meeting a direct

look. This did not show itself by any vulgar shiftiness of look, or downright evasion of other people's eyes. He faced the world boldly enough, forcing himself to do it. There was, however, a subtle hesitation, a dislike to do it, which affected people strangely who found this peculiarity out; it affected them with a certain vague doubtfulness, not strong enough to be called suspicion. This failing it was, undefined and undefinable, which attracted Nelly's eyes so often to her brother's face, and produced the "wrangling" which Mrs. Eastwood protested against. Nelly had, without quite knowing it, a wondering curiosity about Frederick; though he was her brother, she had not found him out.

"What's the new girl's name?" said Dick, who was exactly like all the other young men going in for examinations who abound in English society, and perhaps scarcely impress the general mind so much as their universal information gives them a right to do. He was not great in conversation, and he was fond of asking questions. Some people thought it was an admirable omen of his future success. If there was a new point to be found out in an exhausted topic, a new detail or particular (for Dick was very practical) which no one had investigated, one of his questions was sure to hit the mark. And

it was wonderful, seeing the interest all young persons take in proper names, that this important inquiry had been left to him. "You talk of her as the little girl, and the cousin, and so forth; ain't she possessed of a name?"

"To be sure; what *is* her name?" cried Nelly promptly.

Mrs. Eastwood went back into the recesses of her memory. She knew it was a great family name in the branch of the Vanes to which her brother-in-law belonged. It was something very unlike him; that she remembered: very much unlike him; for she recollected quite well thinking so when she heard it first. Not Angel; oh, no, though that was pretty, and quite the reverse of the father. No. Now she recollected. Innocent—that was the name.

"Innocent!" they all said, repeating it one after another all round the table. It impressed the family somehow, and made Mrs. Eastwood—I cannot tell you exactly for what reason—cry a little. There was something that went to her kind heart in the name.

And two days after Frederick started for the Continent, to bring the orphan home.

CHAPTER III.

THE FAMILY.

A BRIGHT spring morning, sharp and cold, but with floods of sunshine everywhere—sunshine on the grass, turning the delicate rime into a network of pearls, and glittering along all the bare branches, where the brown buds were beginning to swell—colder than autumn, almost colder than winter, but with a different sentiment in the air. Spring cold is like the poverty of a poor man who has had a fortune left him—better days are coming; the trees felt this already, though their buds were pinched, and Nelly felt it as she went out with her garden gloves on, and a pair of scissors. What did she expect to find in the garden, do you ask? Nothing in the garden, where the crocuses had scarcely awakened to the fact that the sun was up and calling them; but away at the end of the lawn,

among the roots of that transept of lime-trees which crossed the avenue of big elms, there were hosts of hardy little snowdrops peeping up among the half-frozen grass, and growing in handfuls as Nature bade them. By what sweet piece of good fortune this came to be, I cannot tell; but so it was. Nelly herself, in a jacket trimmed with white fur, was too bright to be like her snowdrops. She ran up and down the long avenue to warm her delicate little toes. It was a better way than sitting over the fire. In the little open space before the garden door, Dick, with a book in his coat pocket, was doing what he could to inform the mind of Winks. Dick was supposed to get up at seven to improve his own mind, and, I presume, he believed that the book in his pocket did him some good by mere contact, if nothing else. He had read, at most, one page of it, at the expense of I don't know how many yawns, but now his soul was set on the more congenial task of teaching Winks to carry a musket and stand on guard. Winks looked at the stick which had fallen from his unwilling paws, sniffing at it with a certain cynical disbelief in the supposed weapon. He was a very dark-coloured Skye, almost black, and had a way of grinning at Dick with all his white teeth displayed from his black lips, in a

satirical smile which incensed his instructor greatly. Winks had as great objections to being instructed as Dick had himself, but being above those prudential reasons which induced his young master to smother his feelings, the four-footed neophyte had distinctly the advantage. He did not believe in the feigned fire-arm, and words could not have expressed the good-humoured disdain with which he wagged his tail. "You think this is a gun, I suppose," Winks's tail said; "but I who am your intellectual superior am not to be taken in. Take up that bit of wood in my paws as if I was a mountebank! Not if I know it." "Sit up, sir, sit up," said Dick in a passion. Winks only smiled the more and wagged his tail. But the lesson, though it amused his cynical humour, began to bore him. All at once he put his head on one side, and pricked up his ears, responding to some imaginary call. The pantomime was far cleverer than anything Dick was capable of. "I think I hear my mistress calling me," Winks said in the plainest English; but he was too clever to escape at once. He paused, contemplative, consulting heaven and earth. "Did I hear my mistress call?" Then suddenly once more came the imaginary summons. "Distressed, I am sure, beyond all measure, to leave you," the polite dog said, with a final

wag of his tail, triumphant, yet deprecating. "Confound the little brute!" cried Dick, indignant; and Winks chuckled as he ran off on three legs, pretending to be all eagerness. "Confound the little beast!" repeated the boy; "Nelly, come here, and don't dance about in that aggravating way;—just when I thought he had got hold of a new trick!"

"Winks is a great deal too clever to do tricks," said Nelly.

"Yes, he is as knowing as I am," said innocent Dick. "I wonder, now, if there is any truth in that stuff about transmigration. He must have been an actor, that brute. I don't believe my mother called a bit. I don't believe she is down-stairs yet—cunning little beast! What a jolly lot of snowdrops, Nelly! Are you going in? It's not nine yet. Come round the walk, I want to speak to you. Oh, what an awful bore is this exam.!" said Dick, with a deep sigh. "Now I put it to you, Nell, in the spirit of fairness, how can a fellow be expected to do mathematics before breakfast? It is bad enough when you have been worked up to it, and supported; but at eight o'clock in the morning, without so much as a cup of coffee! What are men supposed to be made of? I am sure it was never so in the old times.

"Much you know about it," said Nelly. "When I was at school, and much younger than you, I had to get up and practise for an hour and a half before breakfast—cold fingers and cold keys—and not even a fire."

"Oh, as for that," said Dick, "of course I never minded getting up at Eton; all the other fellows did it, and for one thing, the masters were punished just as much as we were, and looked just as blue. But when you are all of you in your comfortable beds, and only me at work!"

"If that was all, I should not mind in the least getting up and sitting with you," said Nelly; "but then we should only chatter, and no work would be done. And if you work hard, you know it will soon be over."

"Soon over? yes, till the next one," said Dick the disconsolate; "and then India at the end. There's Frederick now, a lazy beggar, comes down at ten o'clock, and everybody thinks it quite right. Why should there be such a difference between him and me? You're a girl and don't count; but why should he be in clover at the Sealing Wax Office, while I am to be sent to India?"

"Frederick will never get rich in the Sealing Wax Office; but you may in India. Besides, you know,"

said Nelly, who was impressionable on this point, though she did not altogether trust her elder brother, "he would have been in the Church had he not been too conscientious. Quantities of men go into the Church without thinking what they are doing; but Frederick had scruples—he had doubts even on some points——"

"Much anybody would care if I had doubts," said Dick. "If I were to set up opinions, Nell——"

But this was more than Nelly's gravity could stand. The idea of Dick having opinions, and the injured look with which he announced the probable indifference of the world to them, sent his sister off into that *fou rire* which no one can stop. "I will race you to the end of the walk," she said, trying to subdue herself; and, undismayed by the indifference thus shown to his metaphysical difficulties, Dick accepted the challenge. He allowed her to dart past him with all a boy's contempt. He regarded her, indeed, with something of the same sentiment with which Winks had regarded him. "Girls spend all their strength at the first outset," Dick said composedly, going steadily on with his squared elbows. "They're like greased lightning for ten yards or so, and then they're done—like you, Nell," he said, passing her when she paused, panting to take

breath. She had made a hard fight for it, however. She had run to within a few yards of the goal before she allowed herself to be beaten. Dick immediately began a lecture to her upon the deficiency of feminine performances, which was perhaps too technical for these pages, but so like many lectures on the same subject that the reader will have little difficulty in imagining it. "You never can 'stay,'" was the conclusion, made with much patronizing good-humour. Altogether it was apparent that Dick's general opinion of his sister coincided wonderfully with Winks' opinion of himself. Great wits jump.

"Miss Ellinor, your mamma has been a-waiting breakfast this half-hour," said Brownlow solemnly, addressing them from the end of the walk. Brownlow was large and stout, and filled up the vista formed by the branches. They had known his sway all their lives, and they laughed at him between themselves; but the young Eastwoods had not yet learned to disobey Brownlow. They put themselves in motion with the utmost docility. "We are coming directly," said Nelly, running to pick up her basket with the snowdrops. Even Frederick did instinctively what Brownlow told him. The brother and sister went on to the house, following the large black shadow which moved with dignity

before them. "What an awful old bore he is," said Dick: "look here, Nell, what will you bet that I couldn't hit that big red ear of his with this chestnut? One, two, three——"

"Oh, don't, Dick, for heaven's sake!" said Nelly, catching his hand: "though he is an old bore. I wonder how it is that we have none but old servants? Mamma prefers them, I suppose; though Frederick, I know, would like another cook, and I,—oh, no, I couldn't part with old Alice. What a wretch I am to think of it! But she never can help one to a new way of doing one's hair."

"I always do my hair exactly the same," said Dick. "I never require any one to help me."

"Oh, you!" said Nelly taking her revenge; "who cares how a boy looks?" And thus they went in, breathing youth, and fun, and nonsense, and mischief. Mrs. Eastwood stood warming her hands by the fire, but Dick and Nelly put themselves on the other side of the table. Their young blood was dancing, their young limbs too light to be touched by the cold.

"I wonder where Frederick will be by this time; I wonder when he will reach Pisa," said the mother. "I suppose it is not to be expected that a young man would go right through Paris without stop-

ping. But when I think of that poor little thing all alone——"

"The wind blew nice and strong last night," said Dick: "it would be pleasant in the Channel. I say, mamma, I hope Frederick liked it. How queer he would look this morning! What a thing it is not to be able to stand a breeze at sea! You should have seen us off the Needles in the last equinoctial, in old Summerdale's yacht."

"Don't tell me about it," said Mrs. Eastwood, closing her eyes and setting down her tea-cup. "Some of these days you will hear that Mr. Summerdale and his yacht have gone to the bottom: and I am sure, though I would not be uncharitable to any man, I think he deserves it: carrying boys away in a storm without the knowledge of their people. I thought I should have died."

"I was a good bit more like dying, and I did not mind," cried Dick. "It was glorious. The noise, so that you couldn't hear yourself talk, and the excitement, and the confusion, and the danger! Hadn't we just a squeak for it? It was gloriously jolly," cried Dick, rubbing his hands at the recollection. He looked so wickedly pleased with the escapade that his mother could not help snubbing him on the spot.

"I hope you have got a great deal of work done this morning. Alice tells me you got up directly when you were called. And you must remember, Dick, how very short the time is getting," she said, in her softest tones. "I would not for the world deprive you of a single advantage; but seven-and-sixpence an hour is a very great deal to pay unless you take the full advantage of it. And now I shall have another child to provide for;" Mrs. Eastwood added, sighing faintly. Poor Dick's random mood was over. He said something about mathematics in general which was not complimentary to that lofty science.

"If it was to be of any use to a fellow after I should not mind," he said. "It is the doing it all for no good that riles one. If I were to be mathematical master somewhere, or head accountant, or even a bookkeeping fellow——. You need not cry 'Oh, oh!' You ain't in Parliament, Nell, and never can be; that's a comfort. Girls ought to talk of things they understand. I don't interfere with your fiddle-de-jigs. That's what discourages a fellow. Besides, mathematics are horribly hard; ladies that never opened a Euclid," said Dick, with dignity, "are quite incapable of forming an idea."

"They tell the best in the examination," said

Mrs. Eastwood. "When you have passed you will have no more trouble with them. But we must not forget how many marks there are for mathematics; and you must not be discouraged, Dick. But you know, children, if we are to have a new member in the family, we shall require to think of economy more than ever. I do not see anything we can actually put down," the mother said, with deliberation, and a sigh to the memory of the carriage. "The only thing I could think of was the fires in our bedrooms, and really that would not be good for your healths. But we must be generally economical. And the very first principle of economy is making the best use of what we have. So recollect, Dick."

"I'm going, mamma," he said, and pulled the book out of his coat pocket which had been keeping him company all the morning. Mrs. Eastwood followed him to the door with her kind eyes.

"I really think, though he is such a harum-scarum, that he is doing his work, poor boy," she said, with that fond maternal confidence which is often so indifferently deserved.

"Yes, yes, mamma," cried Nelly, with some impatience, not feeling all the interest in the subject her mother did. "But never mind Dick, he'll do

very well, I daresay. Come and see what I want to have done to the little room."

The Elms was an old-fashioned house. It was built, as houses in England are rarely built now-a-days, in those suites of rooms which are so general on the Continent. Mrs. Eastwood's room occupied the whole width of the wing. It had an alcove, which was like an inner room, for the bed, and abundance of space for reading-tables and writing-tables, and sofas and book-cases in the rest of the spacious chamber, which was like a French room in every way, with its dressing-closet opening from the alcove, and all the less beautiful accessories of the toilet kept well out of sight. Ellinor's room opened from her mother's, and opening from that again was the little room which was to be prepared for the new-comer. Already it was all pulled to pieces by Nelly's commands, and under her supervision; and a brisk little workwoman sat in Nelly's own chamber surrounded by billows of bright new chintz, with a running pattern of rose buds and fern leaves. A tall old woman, in a black gown and cap, stood beside this artist, advising, it seemed, and disapproving. Ellinor stopped with the anxious and indeed servile politeness of fear to speak to this personage. "How kind of you, Alice, to come and help," she said; "I hope you like

the chintz. Don't you think we shall make the room look nice, after all, when it has been papered and cleaned?"

"There's nothing to be said against the room," said Alice, in a Scotch accent, and with a solemnity of tone that spoke more than words.

"And then we shall all be together. It will be very handy for every thing," said Nelly, with a sickly smile, trying to bear up; "all the ladies of the family——"

"I would like to speak a word to your mamma about that," said Alice. She pronounced the word "mammaw," and somehow those broad vowels added tenfold weight—or so, at least, Ellinor thought—to the speech.

"Mamma has gone into the little room," said Nelly, with an effort. Mrs. Eastwood was a very persuadable woman, and she looked still more persuadable than she was. Most people thought they themselves could influence her to anything, unless, indeed, some one else had forestalled them; and, to tell the truth, even her own family attributed to Mrs. Everard, or, failing her, to Alice, every thing in their mother's conduct which was not attributable to their own sage advices. It required a more subtle observer than Nelly to make out that her mother had

in reality a great deal of her own way; therefore she was deeply alarmed by Alice's unfriendly looks, and followed her into the little room with but slightly disguised terror.

"Alice is in a bad humour," she whispered to her mother; "You won't mind what she says? She thinks the new paper and the chintz are extravagant. Don't listen to her, mamma."

"So they are," said Mrs. Eastwood, shaking her head. She was fond of pretty paper and pretty chintz, and of change and novelty. She liked furnishing a room almost as well as her daughter did, and she thought she had "taste." Therefore she had defences against any attack on that side of the question, which Ellinor had not dreamt of. However, even Nelly was startled and taken aback by the unexpected line taken by Alice, who looked as if she might have something very important to say.

"You remember Miss Isabel, mem?" was what she said, looking her mistress full in the face.

"Dear me, Alice, what a question! Remember my sister?" cried Mrs. Eastwood, turning abruptly away from the paper and chintz.

"It's a queer question to ask," said Alice with a grim smile; "but dinna go too fast. You mind your sister, and yet you are going to put her child—

her only child—here in a room next to your own, next to Miss Ellinor's? Between mother and daughter? That's where you place Miss Isabel's bairn?"

"Alice!" cried Mrs. Eastwood, almost angrily. She looked at Nelly's wondering face and then at her maid with a half-frightened, half-threatening gesture. She was annoyed, but she was startled too.

"I say it before Miss Ellinor that you may not do it with your eyes shut," said Alice. "I'm only a servant, with no right to interfere; but I cannot stand by, and no say a word. I'm no in favour of it," she cried, turning round. "It would be best to provide for her, and no bring her home; but if you will bring her home—and, mem, you are always wilful, though nobody thinks so—put her in any place but here."

"You are dreadfully prejudiced, Alice—dreadfully prejudiced!"

"Maybe I am; and, mem, you like your own way. We are none of us perfect. But your sister Isabel's bairn, the child of an ill father to the boot, should never come into my house. Maybe you think, mem, that the features of the mind are no transmitted? Poor leddy! Poor leddy! There's enough of her

in your blood already without searching out of your way to find more."

Mrs. Eastwood grew crimson to her hair. "If you think any of my children resemble my sister, Alice, I can assure you you are very much mistaken," she said, walking up and down the little room in her agitation. "Nelly, look here, you would think she meant something very dreadful. Your poor Aunt Isabella was very secret in her way, and liked to make a mystery. She got me into some trouble when I was a girl through it. That was all. Why it should be remembered against her child, or change my natural affections, I can't imagine. Oh, I know you mean well, Alice, you mean well; but that does not make it a bit more pleasant. Put down those curtains and things, Nelly, put them down. I hate so much fuss. There is plenty of time. You are always so hasty and premature in every thing. I am going to speak to cook. Don't trouble me about this any more."

"It is all your doing, Alice," said Ellinor, as her mother went away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FRIENDS OF THE FAMILY.

THIS mysterious hint did not dwell upon Ellinor's mind as it might have done in the mind of a young person less occupied. I am afraid she was of a superficial way of thinking at this period of her existence, and rather apt to believe that people who made themselves unpleasant, or suggested uncomfortable mysteries were "in a bad humour," or "put out about something;" which, indeed, is a very excellent and safe explanation of many of the unpleasant speeches we make to each other, but yet not always to be depended upon. Mrs. Eastwood was "put out" for the rest of the day, and would give no heed to any of Nelly's preparations; but, like the light-hearted soul she was, had thrown off the yoke by next morning. "Why should I take up Alice's opinions?" she said half to herself.

"Why, indeed?" cried Nelly, eager to assist in the emancipation.

"Alice is a good servant," Mrs. Eastwood continued; "most trustworthy, and as fond of you all as if you were her own" ("Sometimes she takes an odd way of showing it," interpolated Nelly), "and a great comfort to have about one; but she has a very narrow old-fashioned way of looking at things; and why should I take up her superstitions, and act upon them?"

This speech was received with so much applause by her daughter, that Mrs. Eastwood immediately plunged into all the preparations which she had checked the day before; and the ladies had a shopping expedition that very morning, and bought a great many things they had not thought of to make the room pretty. When people have "taste" and set their hearts upon making a room pretty, the operation is apt to become rather an expensive one; but this I must say, that mother and daughter most thoroughly enjoyed the work, and got at least value for their money in the pleasure it gave them. You will say that this was done more with the view of pleasing themselves than of showing regard to the poor little orphan who was to profit by all the luxuries provided; but human nature, so far as I know it, is a very complicated business, and has

few impulses which are perfectly single and unmixed in their motives. They cudgelled their brains to think what she would like. They summoned up before them a picture of an art-loving, beauty-mad, Italian-born girl, unable to live without pictures and brightness. They went and roamed through all the Arundel Society collections to look for something from Pisa that would remind her of her home. They sacrificed a Raphael print which had been hung in Mrs. Eastwood's own room, to her supposed necessities. Nelly made a careful selection of several *morceaux* of china, such as went to her own heart, to decorate the mantelshelf. I don't deny they were like two overgrown schoolgirls over a bigger kind of doll's house; but if you can be hard upon them for this admixture, I confess I cannot. When the room was finished, they went and looked at it three or four times in a day admiring it. They did not know anything about the future inmate, what sort of soul it might be who was coming to share their nest, to be received into their most intimate companionship. They decked the room according to a preconceived impression of her character; and then they drew another more definite sketch of her character in accordance with the room. Thus they created their Innocent, these two women; and how

far she resembled the real Innocent the reader will shortly see.

Their life, however, in the meantime was not all engrossed in this occupation. The Eastwoods were a popular family. They "went out" a good deal, even in the dead season of the year, when fashion is not, and nobody, so to speak, is in town. There are a very tolerable amount of people in town even in November and December. There are all the law people of every degree; there are all the people in public offices, especially those who are married. Among these two classes there are, the readers will perhaps not be surprised to hear, many, very many, excellent, highly-bred, well-connected persons who actually *live in London.* I am aware that in fashionable literature this fact is scarcely admitted, and everybody who is anybody is believed to visit town only during the season. But the great majority of the English nation consists of people who work more or less for their living, and of these a large number are always in London. The society of the Eastwoods consisted of this class. To be sure, Nelly had appeared at Lady Altamont's ball, in the very best of society, the year she came out; and invitations did still arrive now and then during the season from that supernal sphere. But these occa-

sional flights into the higher heavens did not interfere with the natural society which surrounded the Eastwoods for at least nine months of the year, from November, say, to July. Here were Nelly's young friends, and Mrs. Eastwood's old ones; the advisers of the elder lady and the lovers of the younger. As for advisers, Mrs. Eastwood was very well off. She had a great many of them, and each fitted with his or her office. Mrs. Everard was, as it were, adviser-in-chief, privy councillor, keeper of the conscience to her friend, who told her almost, if not quite, everything in which she was concerned. Under this great domestic officer there was Mr. Parchemin, once a great Chamber counsel, noted for his penetration into delicate cases of all kinds, who had retired into profound study of the art of investment, which he practised only for the benefit of his friends. He was for the finance department. The Rector of the parish, who had once been a highly successful master in a public school, was her general adviser in respect to "the boys," selecting "coaches" for Dick, and "keeping an eye" upon him, and "taking an interest" in Jenny during the holidays. Mrs. Eastwood's third counsellor had, I am sorry to say, interested motives. He was a certain Major Railton, in one of the Scientific Corps, and was

handy man to the household—for a consideration, which was Nelly. He had the hardest work of all the three—advice was less wanted from him than assistance. He never went so far as his club, poor man, or entered Bond Street, without a commission. He recommended tradespeople, and superintended, or at least inspected, all the repairs done on the old house, besides suggesting improvements, which had to be carried out under his eye. Lastly, there was Mrs. Eastwood's religious adviser, or rather advisers; there were two of them, and they were both ladies, —one, a sister, belonging to one of the many sisterhoods now existing in the English Church; and the other an old lady from the north of Ireland, with all the Protestantism peculiar to that privileged region. With this body of defenders Mrs. Eastwood moved through life, not so heavily burdened after all as might be supposed. She had a ready way of relieving herself when she felt the yoke. Though she religiously asked their advice on all their special topics, and would even go so far as to acquiesce in their views, and thank them with tears in her eyes for being so good to her, she generally after all took her own way, which simplified matters amazingly. Since this was the case even with her privy councillor, the friend of her bosom, it is not to be

wondered at if the others were used in the same way. Mr. Parchemin was the one whose advice she took most steadily, for she was deeply conscious that she knew nothing of business; and Mr. Brotherton, the clergyman, who was the patron saint of the boys, was probably the one she minded least, for an exactly opposite reason. But the curious thing was, that even in neglecting their advice, she never alienated her counsellors—I suspect because our vanity is more entirely flattered by being consulted than our pride is hurt by having our counsel tacitly rejected. So much for the elder lady's share. Nelly, on her side, had a host of friends of her own age, with whom she was very popular, but no one who was exactly Pythias to her Damon, for the reason that she was old-fashioned enough to make her mother her chief companion. Let us clear the stage, however, for something more important than a female Pythias. Nelly had—who can doubt it?—or her right to admission into these pages would have been very slight, a lover, for whom the trumpets are now preparing to sound.

Let us pause, however, for one moment to note a fact which is certainly curious. We all know the statistics that prove beyond possibility of doubt, that there are more women than men in the world—

or, at least, in the English world—and that, in the natural course of events, only three-fourths, or four-fifths, or some other mysterious proportion, of Englishwomen can ever attain the supreme glory and felicity of being married. Now, I do not dare to contradict figures. I have too much respect—not to say awe—of them. I only wish to ask, in all humility, how does it then happen that a great many women are offered the choice of two or three husbands, and that almost every nice young girl one knows has to shape her ways warily in certain complications of circumstances, so as to keep everything smooth between some two, at least, who devote to her the homage of their attentions? I do not expect that any statistician will take the trouble to answer this question, but it is one deeply calculated to increase the mingled faith, incredulity, terror, and contempt with which I, like most people, regard that inexorable science. Nelly Eastwood was one of these anomalies and practical contradictions to all received law. She had no idea that she was flying in the face of statistics, or doing her best to stultify the most beautiful lines of figures. Major Railton, of whom we have already spoken, was over thirty, which Nelly, not quite twenty, thought rather old; but the other pretendant for Nelly's favour was not

old. He was one of the class which has taken the place now-a-days of the knights and captains, the heroes of the period. Not a conquering soldier or bold adventurer—a young barrister lately called to exercise that noble faculty, and prove black to be white and white black to the satisfaction of a British jury; *tant soit peu* journalist, ready with his pen, ready with his tongue; up, as the slang goes, to anything. His name was Molyneux, and his position as a briefless barrister was much modified by the fact that he was the son of the well-known Mr. Molyneux, whose fame and success at the bar had already indicated him as one of the next new judges as soon as any piece of judicial ermine fell vacant. This changed in the most wonderful way the position of Ernest Molyneux, upon whose prospects no mother could frown, though indeed he had nothing, and earned just enough to pay his tailor's bills. Major Railton, too, was somewhat literary, as indeed most men are now-a-days. When anything was going on in the military world, he was good enough to communicate it to the public through the medium of the *Daily Treasury*. He had even been sent out by that paper on one or two occasions as its special correspondent. Naturally he took a view of professional matters entirely opposed to the

view taken by the correspondent of the *Jupiter*. The major's productions were chiefly descriptive, and interspersed with anecdote. The barrister's were metaphysical, and of a very superior mental quality. He was fond of theology, when he could get at it, and of settling everything over again on a new basis. These were the two gentlemen who happened to meet in the drawing-room at The Elms, on one of these chilly afternoons, at the fire-light hour. This fashion of sitting without lights was one which both of them rather objected to, though they dared not express their sentiments freely, as on a former occasion Frederick Eastwood had not hesitated to do. On a little table which stood before the fire was the tea-tray, with its sparkling china and little quaint old silver tea-pot, which glittered, too, in the ruddy light. This was the highest light in the darkling scene. Major Railton was seated quite in the shadow, near Mrs. Eastwood, to whom he had been discoursing, in his capacity as out-door adviser, about the state of the coachhouse. Young Molyneux was moving about the centre of the room, in the way some men have, talking to Nelly, and looking at any chance book or curious thing that might fall in his way. They had been hearing the story of the new cousin with polite interest, varying

according to the nature of the men, and the intimacy and interest in the house which their respective positions enabled them to show.

"The stables are the worst," said the major. "In one corner the rain is positively coming in; not to speak of the uninhabitable nature of the place, if you should want to use it, the property is positively deteriorated. It really must not be allowed to fall out of repair."

"There is no chance of my wanting to use it, major; but, of course, if, as you say, the property is injured——. I am sure," said Mrs. Eastwood, "it is a great nuisance to be your own landlord; other people, I find, have all these things done for them."

"But other people pay rent, and may be turned out at a year's notice," said the major.

"Oh, indeed, nobody is so foolish as to turn out a good tenant. Indeed, it is a very equivocal advantage to live in your own house. Constant taxes, constant repairs, and though everybody knows I have put down my carriage, obliged to spend money on my stables! That," said Mrs. Eastwood emphatically, "is what I call an irony of fate."

"It is bad, it must be allowed," said Molyneux bursting in; his ear had been caught by the last words, which she pronounced more loudly than

usual, with a true sense of the injury done her. "It is like a story I heard the other day of an unfortunate Austrian whose château was destroyed in the war. Just about the time the last fire smouldered out, he got his bill from the great furniture man at Vienna for the redecoration. It had just been finished before the Prussian guns went at it. There's irony for you! I don't suppose your friend Bismarck, Railton, will be so civil as to pay the bill."

"Nobody will pay my bill, I am sure," said Mrs. Eastwood, not quite relishing the introduction of a misfortune which overshadowed her own. "What a comfort it is, to be sure, that there is no more fighting in Italy. Frederick, I think, ought to be in Pisa by this time, and next week I hope we may have him back. What a difference in travelling since my day! Then we went in our own carriages from Marseilles, going round the coast, and taking weeks to it. Nelly, don't you think we might have lights?"

"Presently, mamma; don't you want to know about my new cousin, a new young lady coming out of the unknown?" said Nelly. "If I visited in a house where any one so very new was about to appear, I should be dying of curiosity. Mr. Molyneux, you are full of imagination, or at least so the

newspapers say; help me to make out what she will be like. Born in Italy; sixteen; named Innocent. Here are the facts. Now tell me what you think, and then you shall have my idea."

"I hope she will be like her relations, whom we know," said Major Railton gallantly: "and then the firmament will have another star."

"That is pretty, but it is vague," said Nelly, "and I have heard something like it before. Mr. Molyneux——"

"Who said I was full of imagination?" said Molyneux, feeling entitled to draw a chair near her. "Now if there is one thing I pride myself on, it is that subordination of fancy to reason which is characteristic, Miss Eastwood, of a well-regulated mind. Girls of sixteen are of two classes, so far as I have observed: honest bread-and-butter, which I rather like on the whole—or the shy and sentimental, which, when it is not too thin, has its attractions also. Miss Innocent, being Italian, &c., will probably belong to the last class. Now for your idea. I have said my say."

"My idea," said Nelly solemnly, turning her face towards him in the glow of the fire-light, which lighted up the soft round of her cheek, and fluttered about her pretty figure as if caressing her, "is this:

I have been reading up 'Aurora Leigh.' Have you read 'Aurora Leigh'? Perhaps you do not condescend to anything merely English, and written by a woman——"

"Pardon, this is criticism and accusation, not your idea."

"I will send Birkson to-morrow," said the major in his corner, "he is the man I always employ. He can give an estimate at least, and I will cast an eye over it the next time I see you. I fear you must do it, though I hate all expense that can be spared."

"And such unnecessary expense," sighed Mrs. Eastwood.

"Well, then," resumed Nelly, flushing with excitement, "this is how it will be—it is constantly so in books, and I suppose you writers ought to know. She will be beautiful, she will be clever, far cleverer than anybody here. She will flash upon us in our dull little house like a princess. Mamma and I will be quenched altogether. She will be the centre of everything. When you come to call, you will all make a circle round her to hear her talk, or to hear her sing, or just to look at her, she will be so lovely. Probably she will sing like an angel,—everybody does who comes from Italy. Her father will have taught her all sorts of out-of-the-way things,—Greek

and Latin, and astrology, and I don't know what. Poor mamma and I will try to keep her down, you know, and be something still in our own house."

"Why, Nelly, what wild nonsense are you talking? Do stop your romancing, and ring for the lights."

"Presently, mamma! We will be unkind to her, we will leave her at home when we go out, we will make her sit up in the old schoolroom. I hope we will have strength of mind to give her enough to eat. But whatever we do, she will shine like a star, as Major Railton beautifully says. She will outshine us in goodness as well as in everything else. She will cast us into the shade; we shall feel ourselves the meanest, and the wretchedest, and the stupidest, and the ugliest——"

"Nelly, Nelly, are you going crazy? What can you mean?"

"There's imagination for you!" cried Molyneux; "invention, the most daring fancy. I did not know you were a poet. 'Aurora Leigh' is nothing to it, nor even 'Cinderella.' Now, I confess my curiosity is awakened. When is this course of cruelty to begin?"

"Yes, mamma, it is getting quite night," cried Nelly, springing up. "We have been left long enough in the dark, haven't we? Have you settled

about the stables? Oh, Major Railton, if you would be so very good! It is only a book I want. A book is a simple sort of commission. Now please tell me if it is troublesome, for of course I could order it at Clarke's; but then it would not come for a week. We are supposed to be in London here, but it is a week's post to Regent Street."

"What is the good of me but to run errands?" said the gallant major, changing his seat in the corner for another chair more near to Nelly. "I like it. Good heavens! I beg your pardon, Winks, how was I to see you were there?"

Winks jumped down out of the chair on which he had been lying, in the highest dudgeon; he took no notice of the criminal. Too much a gentleman to say anything uncivil beyond the momentary snap and snarl which betrayed his disinclination to be sat upon, a thing abhorrent both to dogs and men, he hobbled to the rug, holding up one paw with a demonstration of patient suffering, which might have melted the hardest heart. It was Winks' favourite paw which he never ran upon under any circumstances; but this was a little fact which he did not mention. He took it to the matting and licked it, and made much of it, with a heroic abstinence from any complaint. The major went down

on his knees, and felt the injured limb carefully, with every expression of penitence. "The bone is not hurt, I assure you," he said tenderly, half to Winks and half to his mistress. The sufferer turned his head aside during this examination, to conceal, I believe, the smile upon his countenance.

"He is a little humbug," said Mrs. Eastwood, but she was relieved to know there was not much the matter. As for young Molyneux, he took a base advantage of the incident.

"Railton is getting rather stout," he whispered aside to Nelly, "I don't wonder Winks did not like it. He is broadening, one can't deny it. Look what a shadow he throws, blotting out you and me together." And indeed, the excellent major, foreshortened by the firelight, did throw a portentous shade up to the very ceiling. And Nelly laughed out like a foolish girl, unable to restrain herself, and could give no account of her laughter; but declared it was because of Winks, who was an accomplished actor, and had taken the major in. "Winks, come, I am going up-stairs," she cried; upon which the invalid bounded from the rug, nearly upsetting the major. And then Brownlow came in with the two lamps, and the hour of reception was over. Major Railton, however, lingered still for a last word about

the stables, while young Molyneux was forced to go away. To have a settled appointment, so to speak, about the house in which dwells the young lady of your affections is an unquestionable advantage. It secures the last word.

"Nelly, how could you talk in that wild way?" cried Mrs. Eastwood when both were gone. "There is nothing men like so much as to think that women are jealous of each other. It flatters their vanity. They will think you meant every word of all that nonsense, and a pretty account they will give of us to all our friends."

"I did mean it," said Nelly, "I was quite in earnest. If you will read 'Aurora Leigh' as I have been doing——"

"Aurora Fiddlestick," cried Mrs. Eastwood, which, after all, was no argument; "don't let me hear any more such nonsense. As if any girl that ever was born could alter one's position in one's own house! I am surprised at you, Ellinor. Make haste now and dress; we are much later than usual in consequence of your foolish talk. I suppose I must go to this fresh expense about the stables after what the major says," she added, with care on her brow; "though I am sure Frederick will no more be able to keep horses when I die than I am now. And I

don't see why I should keep them up for remote osterity—my great-grandson, perhaps, who, if he is able to afford it at all, should be able to build stables for himself. I don't think I will do it, Nelly. I will send for old Sclater to-morrow, and have the roof looked to. These men talk as if we were made of money, especially men who have the public money to fall back upon. It is very pleasant, I don't doubt, to see work done and places kept up when you never have any bills to pay."

This little speech was delivered partly on the stairs as Mrs. Eastwood went up to dress, followed by her daughter. Nelly, I am afraid, was not much interested about the stables, and made no reply; but she put her head into the little room before she began to dress, and contemplated it, admiring yet doubtful. She had been reading "Aurora Leigh" all the morning, and the poetry had gone to Nelly's head, as poetry is apt to do when one is twenty. She wondered if English nature, as represented by the elms and the lime trees, with no hills at all, not even a green slope for a background, would seem as tame to her cousin as English scenery in general had done to Aurora. Nelly herself had never yet been farther than Paris, and had seen no scenery to speak of. The blue spring sky and the primrose-covered grass

—the play of sunshine and shadow farther on in the year through the silken green of the limes—the moonlight pouring down the avenue—filled her own heart with a flood of soft delight. That was because she knew no better, she argued humbly with herself; but the other, who had seen Alps and Apennines, and snowy peaks and Italian skies! "I wonder if she will think us tame too," Nelly said to herself with a little shiver, as she went back to her own room and applied herself to the work of dressing. She reflected that in books the stranger, the orphan, the dependent, generally has it all her own way; but that, at the same time, there was something to be said on the other side for the tame, stay-at-home people, who did their best to satisfy the poetic nature, even if they did not succeed. Perhaps Miss Leigh herself, Aurora's aunt, who had not bargained for a poet, might have had her story too. On the whole, Nelly, having completed the little room, was somewhat depressed about its inmate. It was pretty, but she had not been able to give quite the ideal effect she had intended. In furnishing and decoration, as well as other matters, the highest ideal is not always the one that succeeds best.

CHAPTER V.

FREDERICK'S WAY.

Frederick Eastwood had leave for a fortnight from his office. He was not hardworked, as a rule. Leave was dispensed freely enough, without any very profound investigation into the urgent affairs which demanded it. The men at the Sealing Wax Office were something like their contemporaries of the Household Brigade, and were allowed much leisure to make up for the severe mental strain which their duties, so long as they lasted, imposed upon them. Therefore he had not much difficulty in getting free at this important family crisis. He left home the evening before his fortnight began, with a very pretty cheque in his purse which his mother had given him. Mrs. Eastwood's opinion was that, as Frederick was sacrificing himself to family duty, Frederick ought to have a recompense.

"You can buy yourself something with the rest," she said, smiling upon him with that confidence of being liberal and trustful which, perhaps because it is contrary to so many of her superstitions, always makes a woman pleased with herself.

"There are pretty alabaster things at Pisa," said Nelly; "you may buy us all something if you like."

Frederick shut up his pocket-book, as in other days men used to button their pockets. He went out of the house hastily, resolving to do neither one thing nor the other. They closed the door upon him tranquilly, feeling that it was Frederick's way, and that they knew precisely how he would conduct himself on this expedition. But the truth is that no soul more utterly unknown to that excellent family went out of all London that day. They knew absolutely nothing about him. The anticipations which made his eyes glow as soon as he was safe in his Hansom, and could look as he liked, would have been absolutely incomprehensible to his family. Could they have seen into his mind, they would have refused to believe in the reality of what they saw. I hope it may be in my power to reveal to the reader with less difficulty what Frederick Eastwood really was. He had a fine exterior—dainty, and delicate, and refined. To see him, you would have imagined his faults to be

faults of the mind; high temper, perhaps, irresolution and weakness in critical circumstances, intentions which were fundamentally good though often mistaken, and a wrong-headed obstinacy and self-opinion when he did decide upon any thing, which is quite compatible with irresolution in great matters. This is what the cursory observer would have supposed him to be; and this is what his family thought of him. He was not clever in managing his own affairs, they knew; he was undecided about matters which required firmness, and obstinate about trifles. He had no idea of the magnitudes of differing objects, but would insist upon some trifling point in an argument while he yielded the great ones. All these faults, real or supposed, were in harmony with his looks, and with the impression he made upon most people who met him. A Charles the First sort of man—wrong-headed, melancholy, virtuous, meaning the very best, but not always able to carry out his meaning, and now and then betrayed into subterfuge by very indecision. This was the manner in which he was regarded by his friends.

I am afraid this was not, however, at all the real state of affairs. It is difficult to describe the true condition of his mind without using what the newspapers call vulgar expressions, and without venturing

upon ground little known to or studied by the writer of this history. I do not know after what fashion the artisan enjoys himself when, after a long spell of respectability, his wife informs me, weeping or indignant, that he has gone off "on the spree;" and still less do I know what experiences are gone through by a young gentleman of quality when, obeying the same impulse, he also breaks loose from decorum and plunges into occasional dissipation. There are other pens in plenty which can inform the curious reader; but for my part, though I may guess, I do not know. Frederick Eastwood, however, though he was rather a fine gentleman than otherwise, was as much subject to this influence as any undisciplined working man with good wages and rampant senses. This was the secret, the mystery, and, by consequence, the centre of his life. His training, his wishes, his pride, all the traditions of his own and his family's history, bound him to the only career which is not ruin for men in his condition—a life in accordance with the ordinary rules of virtue and respectability. He had not any of the great qualities which make society pardon an occasional aberration; nor was he rich enough to be vicious decorously, even had that been possible. Besides, he did not want to be permanently vicious,

nor, indeed, to sin at all if he could have helped it. He felt the importance of character as highly as any man could feel it, and clung to his good repute with a tenacity all the more desperate that he alone was aware how much he now and then put it in peril. But that other impulse was as a fire within him—that impulse to burst away from all routine and self-control—to throw every restraint to the winds, and follow for a brief delirious interval only the wild suggestions of the senses, wherever they might lead him. Where they did lead him I have no intention of following. But this was the key to the somewhat strange and incomprehensible aspect which he presented to his fellows. He never got into mischief sociably with his contemporaries. They thought him on the whole rather a Puritan; though there were inevitable echoes of something against him wandering vaguely about his club and among the men who had been with him at the University. But all that was known and seen of his life was so spotless and respectable that the whisper of hostility was hushed. The question why a young man man so blameless should be often so moody, and always so uncommunicative, had been solved in the feminine world in the most romantic manner, by the theory that he was like Charles the First. But men did not

take up this notion so readily. There were various strange "ways" about him which were very mysterious to his friends: a certain secrecy, in itself carefully concealed, and watchfulness, as of a man about whom something might some day be found out. When his fever fit was coming on, he would grow restless, shifty, anxious, declining his ordinary engagements, shutting himself up in his own room, morose with his family, and impatient of all usual intercourse. A headache, or a cold, or some other slight ailment, was the reason easily accepted by the innocent people about him—and at the very nick of time some invitation would arrive for a week's shooting, or other agreeable occupation, which would "set him up," everybody thought. Whether he was resisting the devil at these preliminary moments, or merely concocting plans by which he might get free and secure the opportunity of self-indulgence, I cannot tell. I believe, strange as it may seem to say it, that he was doing both.

But the devil got the best of the argument, as he generally does when what are called "the passions" are excited, and the craving for enjoyment, to which some natures are so susceptible, sets in. This curious by-way of the human mind is one which a great many of us have been forced to study much against our will: when all the desires of the mind

seem set upon the better way, and sore repentance, religious feeling, and rational conviction of the fatal character of the indulgence, seem certainly to promise victory, but are all upset at the critical moment by that irresistible sense of the pleasure within reach, which overcomes at once all spiritual and all prudential considerations. Frederick Eastwood reasoned with himself, condemned himself, understood the whole situation; he even prayed, with tears, against the besetting sin, about the character of which he could have no doubt. But all the time that hankering after the delight of it lay in the background; with a corner of his mental eye, so to speak, he saw how best to attain the gratification, and with a rush snatched it. Recollections of the sweetness of it last time would flash across his mind, even at the very height of his resolution to avoid it next time. He knew all that could be said about those apples of Sodom, which are so beautiful to look at, but are as ashes in the mouth. This is one of the set things which preachers and sinners are alike ready to say together; but the fact is that a great many people like the taste of the ashes, as Frederick did. The pleasure of anticipating that mouthful had more force upon him than all the arguments which, with hot zeal, he had so often used to himself.

He had been wavering on the very edge of down-

fall when this mission to bring home Innocent came, as it were, in his way. He accepted it as—we cannot say a godsend, or a gift from heaven—but as an almost supernatural provision for his necessities, a kind of counter-providence, if we may use the word. So strange are the vagaries of human nature, that Frederick felt a sort of pious thankfulness steal over him when he saw before him this opportunity for a break-out which would be unsuspected by his friends. This time it would require no scheming, no fictitious invitation; which was one of the reasons why he went off with such exhilarated feelings. He bore the Channel far better than Dick could have believed, being supported by his pleasurable anticipations, and arrived in Paris in a delightful turmoil of expectation. He was free! He could do what he liked—go where he liked! He had some money of his own in his pocket, and the letter of credit his mother had given him. Plenty of money, no restraint, and in Paris! He settled himself in an hotel not too much frequented by English, and made up his mind really to enjoy himself, and take the good of his opportunities, for a week at least.

He went into it with a plunge, just as his less elevated contemporary would go "on the spree." But, fortunately or unfortunately, there is no conceal-

ment about the latter process. It is received as a kind of painful necessity by the poor women who suffer most by it; and the record does not put the culprit at any great moral disadvantage. It is otherwise in the higher classes. Frederick went everywhere where he ought not to go; did everything that was most unbecoming and inappropriate. He did not get intoxicated, but he drank a great deal of champagne, and kept himself in a state of reckless excitement from day to day; and he got into the very cream of bad company—the company of people who shocked all his prejudices and revolted his good taste, but yet swept him along on that wild tide of pleasure, which was what he wanted. He had got a fortnight's leave, to accomplish the journey to Pisa and back, to console his little cousin, and win her confidence, and bring her kindly home. It was, however, ten days after he had left London when he woke up from his wild dream in Paris, his money all but exhausted, his frame worn out, his faculty of enjoyment at an end. That was not a pleasant waking, as may be readily supposed. He came to himself among the husks of his pleasures, and cursed them, and repented. He had done it a great many times before.

This time, however, there were unfortunate com-

plications. He had still a long journey to make, and no time to do it in; and he had heavy expenses of travelling still to encounter, and no money to pay them. What was he to do? Cursing those husks of pleasure is one thing, and re-making them into the gold they represent is quite another. He did not dare to write to his mother, and show her that he was still in Paris. He would rather die, he thought, than compromise the position which was everything to him, or betray the secret of his life. Yet he must go on somehow, and accomplish his mission. With a racking headache and a despairing heart he began to count up his remaining coins, and calculate the time necessary for his journey. Time and money alike would just suffice to take him to Pisa. He had but realized this fact, without drawing any conclusion from it, when some one knocked at his door. He was in a second-rate hotel, but occupied its best room—a chamber all gorgeous with mirrors and marble tables and bronze candelabra. He hurriedly drew the curtains of the alcove, which held his bed, and in a querulous tone bade his visitor enter. To his disgust and confusion he saw, when the door opened, the only Englishman whom he had encountered—a middle-aged man, in sporting costume and with boisterous manners, who had joined Frederick's

party (always against his will) on various occasions, and now came forward with horrible cordiality, holding out a red, fat hand, which seemed to the unfortunate prodigal the greasiest and dirtiest that he had ever shaken. He touched this paw reluctantly, with a repugnance in which some alarm and a sense of the necessity of giving nobody offence was mingled. He did not know who the man was. Had he been in other circumstances he would have repudiated his acquaintance haughtily; but at present he had the painful consciousness upon him that he was in everybody's power.

"Well, sir, how are you after last night?" said his visitor. "Hope you find yourself tolerably well after that *p'tey soupey?* It's played the very deuce with me, though I ought to be seasoned. You young ones have all the odds in your favour. Thought you'd feel yourself pulled up hard this morning, after the champagne—and the bill. Ha, ha! the bill; that's the worst fun of it all; barring that, sir, this sort of life would be too pleasant to be true. The bill keeps us in mind that we're mortal, hey?"

"I don't feel myself in any danger of forgetting that fact," said Frederick stiffly.

He intended to answer with dignity and distance, but his mingled dislike to and fear of his visitor in-

troduced a complaining, querulous tone into his voice. He seemed, even to himself, to be whimpering over a hard fate, instead of uttering a mere morality with the loftiness of a superior. And somehow, as he spoke, he looked at the table, where "Bradshaw" lay spread out beside the unhappy remains of his money, the few miserable gold pieces which he had left. The man gave a suppressed whistle at this sight.

"So bad as that?" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Mr. Eastwood, I've been keeping my eye upon you. I mean well, if I'm a little rough; and if you won't ask me to sit down, I'll take it upon myself to do so, if you'll excuse me; for I haven't yet got over the effects of last night. I know your name?—yes, sir. It's a good name, and I take an interest in all that bear it. Related to Sir Geoffrey, I don't doubt, Mr. Frederick Eastwood? There's how I know, sir. Picked it up the other night, after you'd been dining; and, if you'll believe me, I've taken an interest in you ever since."

"You are very good, I am sure—though you have so much the advantage of me," said Frederick, more stiff than ever, yet afraid to show his resentment; for the fellow, as he called him in his heart, held out in his fat hand a card, bearing his respectable name

at full, with the most immaculate of addresses—that of the Junior Minerva Club. Even his home address would have been less terrible. There are dozens of "Elms" about London, but only one Junior Minerva. He looked at the card with a dismay which he could not conceal. He stood upright by his chair, not following the example of his visitor. He would have liked to kick him down-stairs, or to thrust him out of the window; but he dared not do it. It seemed to his feverish eyes that this man held his reputation, his character, everything that he cared for in the world within his greasy hands.

"I'm naturally interested," his visitor went on, "for I was born and bred up on the Eastwood estates, near to Sterborne, if you know it. Very glad to see you, sir, when you come in my direction. To be sure I have the advantage of you. My name is Batty—Charles Batty—at your service. I drive a good trade in the way of horses by times, though I call myself an auctioneer, and don't refuse no jobs as will pay. Bless you, I'd buy libraries as soon as yearlings, and get my profit out of them, though it's slower. Mr. Eastwood, sir, knowing the respectable family you come from, and all your excellent connexions, and your address at your club, &c., &c., I should not say, sir, but what I might also be of use to you."

Misery, we are told, makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows. So does that modern form of misery called impecuniosity, which has its agonies more sharp than any primitive form of privation or pain. It is one of the worst penalties of the want of money, that the subject of that fatal want feels such eagerness to anticipate help that he is ready to look for it in the most unlikely places, and in his extremity will stretch his hand out in the dark to meet anybody's grasp. This rash eagerness of desperation specially belongs to the exhausted state of mind and purse in which Frederick now found himself. He was past all calculation of probabilities, ready to seize upon any shadow of aid, however attained. Insensibly he slid into his chair, and a faint gleam of hope and light seemed to diffuse itself in the dull air around him. He took a rapid survey of the situation. His repugnance for the man who sat opposite to him, watching his movements, was not in any degree lessened; but he reflected that anyhow he had betrayed himself to this man. Stranger and *vaurien* though he seemed, he held the character of the accomplished Frederick Eastwood in his hands; and every principle of self-preservation, and of that respect for the world's opinion which was his curse and his punishment, moved him to try what means

he could of bringing some advantage out of this now inevitable evil. He seated himself with a sigh of impatience and wretchedness, sheathing his sword, so to speak.

"The truth is, I am in a scrape, and I don't see my way out of it," he said.

"Tell me all about it, Mr. Eastwood, I'll find a way out of it," said Batty, rubbing his greasy hands.

I suppose they were greasy hands. At all events, it was this particular which dwelt on Frederick's memory and revolted his fine feelings. Ugh! the thought made him sick years after. In the meantime, however, he had no time to be nice.

"The fact is," he said, with hesitation, "that I was on my way to Italy on business——" Here he paused, remembering what Batty had said of an interest in the Eastwoods. "On family business. I had something to do—of importance; and I have been—detained here."

This euphemism delighted his companion. He gave a horse-laugh, which affected Frederick's nerves. "Yes; you have been—detained here: I understand. By Jove, you *are* fun," said this appreciative listener.

Frederick took no notice of the vulgar outburst.

Now that he had business in hand he could be clear enough. He laid bare his necessities to this strange and novel adviser. There is no telling—as men in Frederick Eastwood's condition easily find out—in what strange regions money, and the inclination to lend it, may be found it. Nothing could be less promising than this coarse Englishman, who had thrust himself into the young man's path so much against his will; and yet in this unlikely quarter salvation was to be found. We need not concern ourselves here about Mr. Batty's motives.

"I thought you looked too much a swell to be a commercial gent, sir, he exclaimed later; but when I picked up that card you might have knocked me down with a feather. Eastwoods has always been the height of quality in my eyes. I have been born and bred on their lands; and as for good-will to serve 'em—here's a way to prove it."

Frederick was no neophyte, to put the unbounded confidence of a boy in these fine speeches; but he knew that there are a great many kinds of money-lenders, and that there are people in the world who are to be influenced, even to the supreme length of opening their purses, by a good name and a well-known address. Besides, after all, there was no great risk attendant upon Batty's generosity. A

man in a public office—a man with a character—is not likely to allow himself to be ruined for a matter of fifty pounds, especially when he has a mother full of innocent credulity to fall back upon. Thus the bargain was made, which was to Frederick, as soon as it became certain, an insignificant transaction. The moment he had signed the note and got the money, his despair of an hour ago seemed incredible to him, and all his objections to Batty recurred in double force.

"If you are ever down my way, I'll hope you'll eat a bit of mutton with me," said the hospitable usurer: "not *salmis* and *vol-à-vent*, Mr. Eastwood, for we ain't up to that; but sound English mutton, with a glass of good wine to wash it down. And I'll show you a stable that will make your mouth water."

Frederick, who had become stiff again, bowed and thanked him from a mountain-top of superiority—and it was Batty's hope to spend another evening in his society which determined him on the virtuous step of quitting Paris that night.

What was his brain busy about as he rolled out of the wicked, seductive city, where all vice betakes itself with the hope of being tempted, in that chill spring evening, between the lamps and the stars?

His head was confused with all he had passed through. The fumes of his "pleasures" were still in it, mingled with the disgust which is inevitable, but which floats away still more quickly than the fumes of the "pleasures." The thrill of his hair-breadth escape was also vibrating through him; but a man of Frederick Eastwood's habits soon gets used to that thrill of escape. He was concocting and putting in order a reasonable way of accounting for his acquaintance with such a man as Batty, should it ever become known to his friends. All at once, while he was arranging his bargain with Batty, this had flashed upon his mind. He would not conceal that, having a day or two to pass in Paris, he had determined on going to a purely French hotel, to escape the mass of travelling English who fill up every corner; with the view of seeing Frenchmen as they are, he had gone to this obscure hostelrie; and there, by an odd chance, he had found this rough Englishman stranded, not knowing the language—thrown, as it were, upon his charity. "A scamp, of course, and thoroughly objectionable; but what could one do?" Frederick said to himself, as he made up his story. His story seemed to himself so satisfactory that it really accounted for the acquaintance, even to his own mind. He recalled

to recollection that he had been obliged to interpret for his unpleasant compatriot, and the fiction gradually consolidated into fact. He believed it himself long before he had reached the Marseilles steamboat which was the next step in his hurried way.

CHAPTER VI.

PISA.

Frederick had left Paris between the lamps and the stars, as I have said, on a chilly night, when the darkness and confusion in his own mind agreed better with the mist and rolling steam that made a cloud about the train as it dashed into the darkness, than with the serene celestial lights which tried in vain to penetrate that veil of vapour. He came into the harbour at Leghorn again between stars and lamps, but this time in the blue-green dawn of an Italian spring morning, too early for any stir except that which attended the arrival of the steamer. Do people still have that long *promenade sur l'eau* through the green sea basin from point to point before they are allowed to land, and be subjected to the final examination at the Dogana? I suppose all that has been changed with so many other things,

with the abolition of passports, and other hindrances to the traveller.

Frederick Eastwood did not now feel so hurried as when he was in Paris. He had arranged how he was to write home, and to telegraph to the office, begging for the extra week's leave which was inevitable. He wrote his mother a long letter, telling her how he had been seized with "unpleasant symptoms" in Paris, but would not send her word of it lest he should alarm her; how he had managed to come on to Leghorn, taking the journey easily, and really had not suffered as he feared he would; how, on the whole, he was much better; how he intended to proceed to Pisa in the evening after a rest; and how within a week they might expect to see him back with his cousin. "Don't be uneasy about me," he said, "I am really a great deal better. I feel sure I shall now get home quite comfortably; but, as you remarked before I left, I was not well when I started—too much confinement, I suppose"——I don't attempt to explain this other fiction which he put forth with perfect gravity, and without much feeling of guiltiness. "Unpleasant symptoms" might mean anything, and I fear that from schoolboy days the excuses given at home are not judged by a very

high standard of truthfulness. Frederick's conscience did not trouble him much on this subject. He telegraphed to his chief at the office, announcing his detention by illness, without entering into any particulars as to where that illness had occurred, and claiming so many days' extension of leave as would re-establish his health for the journey home. He felt ill enough, it must be allowed, after all he had gone through—ill enough almost to feel justified in the report he gave of his ailing condition—"seedy," as he would have called it, to the last degree. He could not eat anything, he slept badly, his lips were parched, his hand hot and tremulous, and his looks bore him unimpeachable testimony, better than a medical certificate. Yet he felt rather happy in his unhappiness, as he rested and tried to eat a little *minestra* at the hotel at Leghorn. It was not so good as the *bouillon* he would have got in Paris, or the beef-tea at home, but it was all he was capable of. In the evening he proceeded on his short railway journey to Pisa—and on the way his mind, if not his body, mended rapidly. It was again dark when he arrived. He went to one of the hotels on the Lung' Arno, and took a feeble walk in the evening to see the place, though so little could be seen. He had never been in Italy before,

and though the circumstances were such as to damp enthusiasm, there was in Frederick's mind a certain new-born freshness of a man returned to the paths of duty which we can compare to nothing but the feelings of one recovering from an illness. It was over: he felt languid, weak, but good. He had turned his back alike on temptation and upon sin. He was convalescent. Now there is no real moral excellence in being convalescent even after a fever; but that sufferer must have had unkindly tending and little love about him in his malady, who does not feel that it is good of him to get better, and that he has done something for which all his friends are justly grateful to him. Frederick, though he had no friends to be grateful, felt precisely in this condition. He felt *good.* In Paris he had felt miserable, mournful, and what he called penitent—that is, he had felt that pleasure carried too far ends by becoming unpleasant and that it costs very dear, and that the amount of satisfaction to be got out of it is scarcely proportioned to the outlay. This mood had lasted during the greater part of his journey. But after a man has so accounted for his misfortunes as Frederick had done, and has got the means of beginning again, and feels himself clear of the toils for the time being, such a mood does not last very long; and by

the time he reached Pisa he had got fully into the convalescent state, and felt good. While his dinner was preparing he took a walk down by the side of the Arno, in which once more the stars above and the lamps below were reflecting themselves with serene composure, the lights of heaven asserting no proud superiority over the lights of earth; and then turned aside to that wonderful group of buildings of which everybody has heard. Nothing in all Italy belongs to our childhood like that leaning tower. Frederick looked up at it, bending towards him through the darkness, and recollected pictures in books at home which his mother had shown him of evenings when he stood by her knee in pinafores, before "life" began. His reminiscences gave the softest domestic turn to his mind, and made him feel still more good than before. Even in the dark there were still some beggars about, flitting out of corners at the sight of the stranger, and he emptied his pocket among them, giving them francs and half francs with a wild liberality which increased tenfold the numbers of these waiters upon Providence next evening in the Piazza del Duomo. There were fitful gleams of moonlight coming now and then from out a mass of clouds, and sending broad beams of momentary

glory behind and between the different buildings. Frederick was awed and impressed, as well as touched and softened. This was like the higher light of religious feeling coming in to elevate the domestic piety to which his heart had been suddenly opened by recollection. Thus impressed and ameliorated the convalescent walked back to his hotel to dinner, and was able to eat something, the reader will be glad to hear.

It was late, and he did not feel disposed to break the almost holy calm of his feelings after so many agitations, by making any effort to see his cousin that evening. He looked up at the tall houses as he went along, wondering if perhaps one of the faint lights he saw might be hers, but he was content to remain in this state of doubt till next day. One night could make little difference. When he had finished the meal, which was slight, but more satisfactory than anything he had been able to have since he left Paris, he made inquiries of the genial Italian waiter as to the position of the Palazzo Scaramucci, and whether anything was known of its English inhabitants. Antonio indicated to him exactly where the house was, and was eager to add that he knew the servant of the English gentleman who had died there. "Figure to yourself," he said,

"that mademoiselle, his daughter, is all alone in that house of the dead." The conversation was carried on in French, and Antonio was eloquent. He gave the stranger instantly a sketch of the girl thus left without any one to take care of her. "Letters have come from the friends in England, but no one has arrived," said Antonio. "What kind of hearts can they have, blessed Madonna! Niccolo does not know what will become of the poor young lady. The forestieri here are kind to her, but what is that when she is left all alone by her friends? Monsieur perhaps may know some of her friends? She is a beautiful young lady, but strange, neither like the English meeses, nor the Italian signorine, and Niccolo says——"

"Did you say she was beautiful!" said Frederick. This was a particular which it was impossible to hear without a certain interest.

"She will be beautiful when she is older, when she has more *embonpoint*," said Antonio. "But she is not English in her beauty, nor in anything else. Niccolo says she will sit for days together and never speak. She had a very strange father. He is buried in the English cemetery, so I believe all must be right. But in my opinion, though monsieur may think it droll, the old Englishman was *tant soit peu sorcier!*"

"*Sorcier?*" said Frederick, with a languid smile.

"Of course monsieur thinks it droll—but for my part I believe he has thrown a spell over mademoiselle. No one can melt her. She sheds no tear, Niccolo says. She listens to the English ladies without replying a word. The only Christian thing about her is that she goes often to Sta. Maria della Spina, the little, little, very little church which monsieur may have remarked; and as she is Protestant, I suppose that must be a sin. Perhaps, if monsieur knows any of the English in Pisa, he will be able to see this strange and beautiful young girl——"

"Perhaps," said Frederick, taking the key of his bedroom and the candle from Antonio's hand. He did not choose to say that he was the lingering messenger whom her friends had sent for Innocent. But his mind was compassionately moved towards her. Beauty is always a point in everybody's favour, and the sense of power and protection in himself was pleasant to him. It quite completed, if anything had been wanted to do so, the rehabilitation of Frederick Eastwood in Frederick Eastwood's own eyes. What a change his appearance would make in the position of this deserted young creature, whose melancholy soul no doubt only wanted the

touch of his kindness and compassion to rouse it into warmer life! "Poor child!" he said to himself almost tenderly, as he went to bed. He would be a brother to her, and to do them justice at home, they would be good to the poor girl. Yet somehow he could not but feel that his own influence, as the first to go to her, would do most for Innocent. The thought diffused a pleasant warmth and revival about his heart.

Pisa is not a cheerful place. It has neither the beauty of situation, nor the brightness of aspect, nor even the larger historical interest which belongs to Florence, its near neighbour and whilom rival. It has fallen out of the race, as a town may do as well as an individual. But, on the other hand, it has no keen ice-wind to sweep its streets like those that chill the very blood in your veins in the deep ravines cut through lofty blocks of houses which form the Florentine streets. The equable temperature of Pisa hangs about it like a cloud, stilling the life in it that it may never grow loud enough to disturb the invalids who set up their tents in those old palaces. They have a little society among themselves, gentle, monotonous, and dull, such as befits invalids. A great many English people are in that subdued winter population, people who are, or are

supposed to be, *poitrinaires*, and people in attendance upon these sufferers, and finally, people who go because other people go, without either knowing or caring about the special advantages of the place. An English doctor and his wife, and an English clergyman and his wife, are generally to be found in all such places, and most usually these excellent persons do all they can to reduce the little colony of English, living in the midst of the quaint old foreign town, into the aspect of a village or small country place in England, where everybody talks of everybody, and knows his or her domestic grievances by heart. Mr. Vane, when he came to Pisa to die, had sought the assistance of the doctor, but not of the clergyman; so it was Mrs. Drainham, and not Mrs. St. John, who had taken Innocent in hand when her father died, and had tried to make something of the forlorn girl. Though Frederick of course knew nothing about this, two letters had been despatched but a few days before to Mrs. Eastwood and another relation, adjuring them to come to the help of the young stranger. The doctor had himself written in a business-like way to Sir Edmund Vane, but Mrs. Drainham had taken Mrs. Eastwood in hand, and had written her what both herself and the doctor felt to be a very touching

letter. The author of this affecting composition had been reading it over to some select friends on the very evening on which Frederick arrived in Pisa. Dr. and Mrs. Drainham lived on the first floor of the Casa Piccolomini, on the sunny side of the Arno, in a very imposing apartment, where they often assembled round them a little society "in a very quiet way," for the doctor himself was something of an invalid, and practised in Pisa as much for his own health as for that of his patients. They were people who were generally understood to be well off, an opinion which it is good for everybody, and especially for professional people, to cultivate about themselves. Every Wednesday and Saturday, tea and thin bread and butter, cut exactly as bread and butter is in England, were to be had from eight till eleven in the Drainhams' handsome drawing-room. On the evening in question the English colony at Pisa was very well represented in this modest assembly. There was Mr. and Mrs. St. John, accompanied by a gentle young English curate with pulmonary symptoms, who was staying with them, and giving the benefit of his services when he felt able for it. There was old Mr. Worsley and his pretty daughters, one of whom was suffering from bronchitis, and the other from *ennui*, the latter the more

deadly malady of the two. The healthy portion of the population was rather in the background, and not held in much estimation. Mr. St. John himself, who now weighed nearly sixteen stone, had come to Pisa also with pulmonary symptoms, and was fond of citing himself as an instance of the cures effected by its wonderful equability of temperature. "But a winter in England would kill me still. I could never survive a winter in England," he would say, tapping his ample bosom with his hand, and coughing to show that he had not quite lost the habit. On this particular occasion he uttered these words, which were very frequently on his lips, in order to console and encourage poor little Mrs. O'Carroll, the wife of a gigantic Irishman, who had broken all his bones one after another in riding across country, and who stood gaunt and tall in a corner conversing with the doctor, with red spots upon his high cheek-bones, and a hollow circle round his big eyes, which did not promise such a comfortable termination.

"Oh, then, and you'll tell Harry," said the anxious woman, with the mellow tones of her country. "You'll tell him all about it, Mr. Singin dear, and what you took, and how you lived?"

"There is nothing to tell, my dear lady," said the clergyman. "Pisa air, and a regular life, and taking

care never to be out late or early, and nourishing food as much as I could take. But the air is the great thing. There is a serenity and equability in this Italian climate.

"Ah, then!" cried poor Mrs. O'Carroll, "to get him to take care is all the battle. He never was ill in his life, and he won't allow he's ill, not if I were to preach to him night and day."

The only persons present who had no uncomfortable symptoms were two ladies who sometimes dominated the party, and sometimes were snubbed and cast into the shade, according to the influence which prevailed. These were the two Miss Boldings, ladies in the earlier half of middle-age, one of whom studied Art, while the other studied Italy; women of perfect independence, and perfect robustness, who when Mr. St. John was not there, carried matters with a high hand, and dismissed the question of health as unworthy to occupy the first place in the conversation. "You think a great deal too much about your lungs," Miss Bolding would say. "Let them alone, and they will come all right. Don't fuss about your health. Pisa is no better than any other place, and no worse. Don't think about it. Occupy yourself with something. Neither I nor Maria ever take the smallest trouble about our

healths, and what is the consequence? We have never ailed anything since we had the measles. Don't mind Mr. St. John, that's his hobby. If you'll meet me to-morrow morning in the Campo Santo—unless you are afraid——"

"Oh, no, not at all afraid," said the gentle curate, with a flush of youthful shyness and wounded pride. All these conversations were interrupted by Mrs. Drainham, who called at once to Miss Bolding for her advice, and to Mrs. O'Carroll for sympathy.

"I want you to tell me whether you think I have done right," she said, with much humility. "I am so anxious about poor Miss Vane. I have just written a letter to her aunt, though with much hesitation, for I have not your gift in writing, dear Mrs. St. John. Would you mind just listening to what I have said? If I had your approval I should feel encouraged after having sent it. It is very badly expressed, I am afraid, but it comes from the heart," said Mrs. Drainham, casting an appealing glance round her. She had pretty eyes, and was rather apt to give appealing glances. The audience gave a vague murmur of assent and applause, and Mr. St. John added, in a bold and round voice, his certainty of approval.

"It will be an excellent letter, that I don't doubt

for a moment," said the clergyman; and on this encouragement Mrs. Drainham proceeded to read it, her husband standing behind her, feeling his own pulse, with a benevolent and complacent smile. And indeed the letter was more than excellent, it was eloquent. It appealed to the feelings of the distant aunt in the most touching way. It bade her remember the sister with whom no doubt her own childhood had been passed, and oh! to extend her motherly protection over that dear sister's orphan child; and it brought forward many religious, as well as natural, arguments to soften the heart of poor Innocent's nearest relation. In short it was just such a letter as was calculated to bring tears into Mrs. St. John's eyes, and which drove Mrs. Eastwood half frantic with indignation when she read it. "Does this woman think I am an unnatural wretch to want all this talking to?" poor Mrs. Eastwood asked, half crying with anger and wounded feeling. But the company in the Casa Piccolomini thought it a beautiful letter. They thought the relations must be hardened indeed if they could resist such an appeal as that.

"I am sure the aunt must be a dreadful woman," said Clara Worsley, "or she would have come by this time. Will you take me to see her to-morrow,

dear Mrs. Drainham? After that letter everybody ought to take an interest in her——"

"You have expressed all our feelings, my dear," said Mrs. St. John, pressing the hand of the doctor's wife with mingled admiration and envy. "I doubt very much if I could have done it half as well."

"Oh, that from you!" said Mrs. Drainham, with enthusiasm, for Mrs. St. John was literary, and the highest authority on matters of style.

"But I hear the girl is a very odd girl," said Miss Bolding. "Doctor, what did her father die of? Are they wrong in their heads? I knew a Vane once, of a west country family, who were all very queer. I wonder if they were the same Vanes. Devonshire, I think, or Somersetshire, I am not sure which——"

"They are a Devonshire family," said Dr. Drainham. "And there is nothing wrong about their brains. He died of general break-up, Miss Bolding, a high-tempered man who had lived hard. I have met him about Italy in all sorts of places. The poor girl has been oddly brought up, that is all."

"I fear without any sort of religious training, which accounts for a great deal," said Mr. St. John.

"Not without some sort of religion," said Miss Maria Bolding. "She is constantly coming over to

the little Church of the Spina, the toy church as my sister calls it. A perfect little gem; I prefer it myself to the Duomo. The girl has good taste, and she is wonderfully pretty. Not the Raphael style perhaps, but just such a face as Leonardo would have given anything for. I called her the Leonardo before I knew who she was."

"Don't you think, my dear, you take rather a superficial view of the matter?" said Mrs. St. John. "Think what a terrible thing to be said of an English girl—that all she knows of religion is to be constantly in the Church of the Spina! It is bad enough for the poor Italians who know no better——"

"You must go and see her, Martha," said Mr. St. John, coughing. "I have had a delicacy about it, as her poor father declined to see me. Yes, he declined to see me, poor man," he added, shaking his head mournfully, with a sigh. "I don't like to mention it, but such was the case. I fear he was sadly deficient, sadly deficient——"

"If he is the Vane I suppose him to be," said Mr. Worsley, in a hoarse voice, "he was as great a scamp as I ever met in my life. A man you saw everywhere—well connected, and all that. A fellow that played high, and ruined every man that had anything to do with him. And died poor, of course;

all those scapegraces do," said the comfortable invalid, putting his hand instinctively into his pocket.

"But his poor child. Whatever he was, we must not let that detract from our interest in the poor girl," said Mrs. Drainham. "I have tried hard to get her to talk to me, to open her heart and to have confidence in me as a true friend. You would think she did not understand the meaning of the words."

"Have you heard that poor Lady Florence Stockport has arrived, with that delicate boy of hers?" said Mrs. St. John: and then Miss Worsley began to consult with Mrs. Drainham about the music at church, and whether Miss Metcalfe, who played the harmonium, could not be induced to give up in favour of young Mr. Blackburn, who had taken a musical degree at Oxford, and written a cantata, and meant to spend the spring months in Pisa.

"It would make such a difference to our little service," said Miss Worsley; "and don't you think, with all the attractions of the Roman Catholic ritual around us, we ought to do everything we can to improve our services?"

Thus the general tide of the conversation flowed on, and Innocent was remitted back into obscurity.

All this took place on the evening when Frederick Eastwood arrived in Pisa. From his chamber, where

he was already asleep, and from the windows of the Casa Piccolomini, might have been seen the faint light in the third-floor windows which marked where the lonely girl was sitting. She was all by herself, and she did not know, as Mrs. Drainham said, what the meaning of the word friend was. But I must turn this page, and make a new beginning before I can tell you what manner of lonely soul this poor Innocent was.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PALAZZO SCARAMUCCI.

A LONG, bare room, the walls painted in distemper, with a running border of leaves and flowers, and the same design running across the rafters overhead; three huge windows, with small panes, draped with old brocaded hangings round the top, but without either blinds or curtains to shut out the cloudy glimpses of the sky; very sparely furnished; some old cabinets and rococo tables by the walls, some old settees and chairs, which had once been handsome; the floor tiled with red triangular tiles, with pieces of carpet before the sofas. At one end a stove, which opened to show the little fire, erected upon a stone slab like a door-step, and with an ugly piece of black tube going almost horizontally into the wall, had been added for the advantage of the English forestieri, who insisted—benighted northern

people—upon such accessories of what they called comfort. Another old rug, faded out of its natural brightness into sweet secondary tints of colour, had been laid before this impromptu fireplace; but the aspect of the place was cold, chilling the spectator to the bone. One or two dark portraits, painted on panels, hung on the walls; they were very grim and very old; for this was the *terzo piano*, let at a cheap rate, and with few elegancies to boast of. Near the stove, on a little marble-topped table, stood the tall lamp, with its two unshaded wicks blazing somewhat wildly, for it had not been trimmed for some time. The oil in it, however, one good, cheap luxury, which even the poor may have in Italy, was so sweet and pure that the air was quite untainted. On a little tray was a long loaf of the brown, very dry bread of the country, a plate of green salad, and a thin flask of common red wine—a pretty supper to look at, but scarcely appetizing fare for a delicate appetite. At the first glance there seemed to be no one in the room to benefit by these preparations, but after a while you could perceive in the recess of one of the windows a shadowy figure, leaning up in a corner, with its head against the pane looking out. All that could be seen from that window was the cloudy sky, and some occasional gleams of moonlight, which

threw silver lines upon the dark floor, and—when you looked down, as into a well—the Arno, flowing far below, with the stars, and clouds, and fitful moon, all reflected in it; and on its very edge the little Church of Sta. Maria della Spina, with all its tiny pinnacles tipped with silver. She who looked out from this high window could not be looking for any one; the people below were as specks hurrying along in the cold, with cloaks twisted over their shoulders. The watcher was nearer the heavens than the earth. She stood there so long, and was so motionless, that gradually the blazing light, blown about softly by some draught from door or window, the little table with the salad and the wine-flask, became the centre of the still life, and the human shadow in the window counted for nothing. No breath or sound betrayed that something was there more alive than the light of the lamp or the glimmer of the wood embers, which, indeed, fell now and then in white ashes, and broke the utter silence of the place.

This silence, however, was much more effectually broken by the entrance of a stout, middle-aged Italian, with a cloak over one of his shoulders, and the *cache-nez* in his hand in which he was about to muffle his features when he went out. He looked

round and round the large room, apparently unable to see the figure in the window, and then, with an impatient exclamation, went to the table, and snuffed the blazing wicks and trimmed the lamp. "Just like her, just like her," he said to himself, "gazing somewhere; never eating, never considering that one must live. If I were to add a slice of salami—though the child is fastidious, she does not eat salami—"

"I am here, Niccolo," said a voice from the window.

"So I supposed, signorina; I knew you must be in some corner. May I be permitted to remark that life is not supported by the eyes, but by the mouth? If you will not eat the *cena* I have prepared for you, what can I do? I cannot take you on my knees and feed you like a baby. Oh, I have done it; I have been obliged to do it, when I had the poor padrone's authority to sustain me, before now."

"Niccolo," said the voice, "I shall not want anything more to-night. If you are ready you may go."

"Oh yes, I may go," said Niccolo fretfully, "not knowing whether I may not find you a little heap of cinders in the morning, or fallen down in the window and frozen to death, Madonna Santissima!

without the power to raise yourself up. If you would but have Philomena to stay with you, at least, in case you should want anything."

"I want nothing," said the girl. She came out of the window, advancing a few steps, but still keeping quite out of the cheerful circle of the light."

"No, the signorina wants nothing, the signorina will soon not want anything but a hole in the heretic cemetery beside her father; and when one goes sinfully out of the world by one's own wickedness, besides being a Protestant and believing nothing, what can one look for? If I were the signorina I should take very good care as long as I could, not to die, and put myself in the power of those beings with the prongs that you see in the Campo Santo. I should take very great trouble, for my part, not to die."

Upon this she came out altogether out of the darkness, and approached the fire. "Do you think that not eating kills people?" she asked. "I cannot eat, I have no appetite, but I do not wish to die."

"At least, under any circumstances, one can drink a little wine," said Niccolo, with disapproving dignity; "no effort is necessary to swallow a little wine. Signorina, I have put everything in order.

I will leave the key with Luigi down-stairs, that the Philomena may enter in the morning without disturbing you. I now wait only to bid you a *felicissimina notte. Buona notte,* my little mistress—sleep well; and the Madonna and the saints take care of you, poor child!"

This little outburst was not unusual. The girl extended her hand to him with a smile, and Niccolo kissed it. Then throwing his cloak over his other shoulder, and wrapping it round him, he left her in her solitude. The guests at the Casa Piccolomini were dispersing at the same time, escorting each other, and escorted by their servants through the still streets. As Niccolo closed the great door after him, the sound seemed to reverberate through the blackness of the great staircase, down which he plunged, darkling, groping his way by the walls. Mr. Worsley, who lived on the first floor, had a coil of green wax-taper in his pocket, which he lighted, to guide himself and his daughter to the door. They were a little afraid when they heard the footsteps stumbling down, not having been able to divest themselves of the idea that stiletto-thrusts were the natural accompaniments of a dark staircase. And with his cloak doubled over his left shoulder and his red *cache-nez* hiding his countenance, Niccolo looked

dangerous, more like killing his man in a corner than watching with the tenderness of a woman over the wayward child whom he had just left with an ache in his honest heart.

All alone in the house! The *appartamento* was not so large as that of Mr. Worsley down-stairs, for it was divided into two, as being adapted for cheaper lodgers. Besides this large *salone*, however, there was an antechamber, of which while Mr. Vane was alive he made a dining-room; and then a long stone passage, echoing and dreary, through which the solitary girl had to pass to her bedroom, another terrible stone room, floored with tiles, at the other end of the house. She had to pass her father's room by the way, and another gaping empty chamber, full of the furniture which, with Italian superstition, had been turned out of the chamber of death. She was not afraid. She had been used to such constant solitude that it seemed natural to her. While her father was alive she had been as solitary as she was now, and it did not seem to her, as it did to everybody else, that his mere presence in the house made so much difference. She had been brought up in a Spartan-Italian fashion, to bear the cold and heat as things inevitable. She put her feet upon the stone slab, which did duty as a hearth,

more from custom than for the warmth, which she scarcely thought of. A small scaldino stood under the table, full of fresh embers, which Niccolo had brought with him from the kitchen; but though she was cold she did not take it up and warm her hands over it, as a thorough Italian would have done. She was half Italian only, and half English, rejecting many habits of both nations. She had a small cloak of faded velvet drawn round her shoulders, old and cut after no fashion that had prevailed within the memory of man. It had come, I believe, originally from a painter's studio, but it was warm and kept her alive in the penetrating cold. Kind Mrs. Eastwood, in her luxurious chamber, was wondering at that moment how the poor child would brave an English winter, and if "the little room" would be warm enough, with its soft carpets and close-drawn curtains, and cheery fire. If she could have seen the Italian girl with her old mantle on her shoulders and the scaldino at the foot of her chair!

I am afraid I am describing too much, which is a fatal weakness for an historian to fall into; but yet, of course, the gentle reader who does not scorn that delightful title would prefer to hear what this solitary girl was like. She had a straight, slim figure, too slim for beauty, though that defect of youth is one

which it is easy to forgive. Her hair was dark and soft, and hung about her face, framing it with a soft fold, very slightly undulating at the ends, though not in anything that could be called a curl. I must warn my dear friend and gentlest auditor, that this sounds a great deal better in words, and looks a great deal better in a picture, than it does in reality; for a girl of sixteen with hair thus hanging about her, neither curled nor dressed, is apt to be an objectionable young person, inclining to untidiness, and to look like a colt, unkempt and untrimmed. But Innocent was a neglected girl, who had never known any better. She did not strike you at the first glance as beautiful. She had no colour, and even had been called sallow by some observers. The chief beauty that struck the beholder was the perfect shape of her face, a pure oval, with the chin somewhat accentuated as in the pictures of Leonardo da Vinci, and the eyes somewhat long in shape. Miss Bolding was right when she called the girl a Leonardo. She wanted the crisp hair, and that subtle, sidelong sweetness in the eyes, which is so characteristic of that great master; but otherwise the character of her face was the same—somewhat long, and with all the softness of youth in the prolonged and perfect curve of the colourless cheek.

The eyes were heavy-lidded; they were not "well-opened eyes." Only in moments of emotion did she raise the heavy lids freely, and flash the full light of her look upon you. At the present moment those lids were doubly heavy with dreams. The lips, which were thin, and rather straight, without curves, were closed upon each other with the closeness of meditation; her hair fell into the hollow of her neck, on either side, and lay in a half ring and careless twist upon her shoulder. A very simple black dress, without trimmings, appeared under the velvet cloak; these were the days before the Watteau fashion became popular, when dresses were made with but one skirt, and long, sweeping over the wearer's feet. Such was her costume and her appearance. She took a little of the wine from the flask, and a morsel of the dry brown bread, and swallowed them as it seemed with great difficulty, bending over the fire in the stove, which began to sink into white ashes. Silence, cold, solitude, all around; and here in the empty house, in the empty world, this solitary creature, so young and forlorn. But she was not afraid. After a while she rose quite calmly, and lifted the long stalk of the lamp, and went away through the long echoing, ghostly passage. She saw nothing, feared nothing; her imagination

was not at liberty, it was absorbed about other things.

Next morning it was more cheerful in the great *salone;* there was light, at least, which was much, and I think there was sunshine; but the gentle reader will forgive me if I confess that I have forgotten whether the Palazzo Scaramucci was on the sunny or the shady side. At all events, there was daylight, and a blue, clear, shining sky, and the sight of sunshine outside if not its actual presence. When Mrs. Drainham, who was really concerned about the girl, came to see her before twelve next morning, she found her seated by the same little table which had held her lamp on the previous night, with a little dish of polenta before her, and again the dry brown bread and the small flask of wine. It seemed the strangest, most distasteful breakfast to the Englishwoman. "Oh, my dear," she cried, "do send away that mess, and have a nice cup of tea. Wouldn't you enjoy a nice cup of tea? If you will come with me, my maid will make you one directly—and perhaps an egg and a little delicate bread and butter. I don't wonder that you have no appetite, my poor child."

"I like polenta," said Innocent, playing with her spoon, "and I don't like tea."

This seemed immoral to Mrs. Drainham. "If you go to England, my dear, you must not say you have been in the habit of having wine for breakfast," she said; "it would be thought so very strange for a young girl."

Innocent made no immediate answer. With a perverse impulse she poured out a little of the nostralé wine, the commonest and cheapest, and diluted it with water. I do not, I confess, think it was an attractive beverage. "Probably I shall never be in England," she said in a very low tone.

"Oh, you must go to England; that is one thing there can be no doubt of. What are you to do here, poor child? Friends have been raised up to you here, but it is not likely that people who are not connected with you would continue—and the apartment, you know," continued Mrs. Drainham, in her eagerness to prove what was self-apparent, "must be let. The marchese is very poor, and he could not be expected to lie out of his money, and Niccolo must find another situation. Everything, in short, is at a standstill until you go away."

Something hot rushed to the girl's eyes—but if they were tears it was so unusual to shed them, that they rushed back again after an ineffectual effort to get forth. She made no answer. She had learned

ere now, young as she was, the benefit of taking refuge in silence. Mrs. Drainham had drawn a chair near her, and sat looking at her, with eyes full of a curiosity not unmixed with disapproval. Mrs. Drainham, in short, disapproved of everything about her, her loose hair, her odd dress, her old velvet cloak, even the polenta on the tray before her, and the coloured water she was drinking. "What will they do with her in England?" she asked herself in dismay; but then *her* responsibility, at least, would be over, and her mind relieved.

"You have never been at school, my dear, I suppose?"

"No."

"Nor learned anything? But you must have had some resources; you must be able to do something? Needlework at least, or tapestry, or something to amuse yourself with? You must have been very lonely in your papa's time, as I hear he never saw any one. And you could not sit all the day with your hands before you; you must have been able to do something?" Mrs. Drainham cried, impressed almost against her will by the silence of her companion.

"I can read," said Innocent.

"And no more? I hope your aunt, Mrs. East-

wood, is well off. It would be dreadful indeed if your relations were not well off. Girls in your position frequently have to go out as governesses. I don't want to be unkind; but, my dear, it is for your advantage that you should look your circumstances in the face. Most girls of your age (you are past sixteen?) would have thought of that already. Suppose, for instance, that you were compelled to try and work for your own living. Now, what would you do?"

The suggestion was so strange that Innocent lifted her eyelids, and turned a wondering look upon her questioner; but apparently perceiving that nothing was to be made of it, cast them down again, with a slight shrug of her shoulders, and made no reply. "Why should I take the trouble to talk?" she seemed to say, which was not very civil to Mrs. Drainham, nor encouraging to that lady's benevolence, it must be allowed.

"You never thought of that view of the matter?" said the persevering woman. "But you ought to think of it. Few people, unless they are very rich, are disposed to take all the responsibility of a girl like you. They might help you, and be kind to you; but they would most likely think it was right and best that you should contribute at least to your own support."

"I do not know what you mean," said Innocent, looking at her with mingled wonder and resentment. She pushed away her little tray from her, and in sheer bewilderment took up the scaldino, putting it in her lap, and holding her hands over it. This was another thing upon which the doctor's wife, as she herself avowed, could not look with any toleration. She made a little gesture of distress, as if she would have put it away.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, my dear, don't let me see you with that odious thing on your knee! An English girl keeps her hands warm with doing something or other. You will find nothing of that sort in England. There your time will be all filled up in a rational way. There is always something going on, and you will find no time to nurse your hands in your lap. Of course, there is a great deal that will be very novel. Put down that scaldino, dear. I can't bear to see you with it. It is such an odd thing for an English girl to do."

"Am I an English girl?" said Innocent dreamily. She did not respond to what was said to her. "She never gives you a reasonable answer," Mrs. Drainham said afterwards, with an impatience for which it was not difficult to account.

It was just then that the tinkling bell at the door pealed, and Niccolo after some parley admitted a

stranger. Niccolo recognized the name at once, though no English visitor could have recognized it had he heard it from Niccolo's lips. "Signor Estvode," he said, looking in at the door, and pausing, with the true instinct of an Italian servant, to watch the effect of the announcement. Innocent started to her feet, in her haste dropping instinctively from her shoulders her old velvet mantle, and Mrs. Drainham sat and stared with genuine British composure, without any thought of politeness. Frederick came in, looking (as he was) something of an invalid still. He was pale; he had that look of convalescence we have already referred to on his interesting countenance. He came forward, holding out both his hands to the girl, who stood devouring him with her eyes, which for once were fully opened. She could not say anything; she could scarcely breathe. Many speculations had crossed her mind as to the kind of messenger who might arrive. This young man, looking not unlike one of the heroes of her dreams, pale, melancholy, yet smiling, holding out his hands to her, made such a sudden lodgment in the girl's inexperienced heart as I can neither define nor account for. The chances are that his mother, who was much kinder than Frederick, would have made no impression at all upon Innocent.

She looked at him with her eyes all aglow and shining, with a sudden glad contraction and then expansion of her heart. She put down the scaldino, and went a step forward. "You are my little cousin," said Frederick, in a voice which the natural impulse of kindness and the pleasant sense of beneficence made melodious. He looked at her with no criticism in his eyes, rather with admiration and pleasure. The girl paused all aglow, on tiptoe, her sudden impulse betraying itself in every line of her slim figure. Then she obeyed that impulse, poor, forlorn child. She threw herself forward, took the outstretched hands, and bent down and kissed them in her pretty Italian way. "Yes, I am Innocent," she said; "Oh, take me away! take me away!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COUSINS.

THIS little scene was odd and somewhat embarrassing to a young Englishman utterly unaccustomed to have his hand kissed; but I think it highly probable that Frederick would have felt much less objection to it had it not been for the presence of that Gorgon of British propriety, which kept staring at him with an expression of shocked and suspicious watchfulness from the other side of the stove. He laughed with the embarrassment common to his nation under the circumstances. There is nothing so awkward, so unhappy and unready as an Englishman who is called upon to show any natural feeling of the softer kind before strangers. Why we all, and we alone, should feel that we are ridiculous when our hearts are touched, I cannot tell; but so it is. Frederick Eastwood was affected by the eager

passion of his welcome; but with Mrs. Drainham's eyes upon him, he could do nothing but laugh. The primitive-minded girl, who was not aware of this tacit necessity, shrunk back into herself when, as she thought, he laughed at her. But the spectator felt that it was the right thing to do, and her disapproval softened. She indicated a chair to the new comer with a little wave of her hand.

"Dear child," she said in a caressing tone, "you must moderate your feelings. We all understand you; we all excuse you; but these are not English ways. Sit down a little, while I talk to you and to this gentleman. Mr. Eastwood, I think?—so far as one can understand an Italian's version of the name we were expecting to hear—"

"Yes," said Frederick, "I should have arrived a week ago, but for—indisposition. I am glad to find my cousin in such good hands."

Here they paused, and looked at each other, with sentiments which were not unfriendly, but a certain English community of feeling that made them sensible of the necessity of some sort of preliminary antagonism before the one agreed to accept the other as the person he claimed to be. Mrs. Drainham was a pretty woman, though it was appointed to her at this moment to act the Gorgon's part.

And Frederick, with his peaked beard and melancholy eyes, was a handsome young man. The tone of the British matron perceptibly softened, as she took in at a glance the various evidences before her that the new comer was "a gentleman"—all-expressive and all-embracing phrase. She even laughed a little in her turn, and coloured very becomingly as she executed the sterner part of her duty.

"I am afraid you will think me impertinent," she said; "and I feel ridiculous; but as my husband and I have taken a great interest in Miss Vane, would you pardon me for asking if you have—any credentials—or authority? I am sure I beg your pardon. You will understand what I mean——"

Then they both laughed together, which advanced matters still farther.

"I have a letter from my mother to my cousin," he said. "I might have got a certificate of identity, had I thought she was so well guarded. And here is my card," he added, taking it out smilingly.

It was the card Batty had found in the Paris hotel, which was the first one that came to his hand. He knew it by a crease in the corner, and pushed it back again with a little shudder which he could not account for: for indeed the Batty episode had faded into unimportance already. The card, how-

ever, was given and accepted with a gracious smile and bow. That celestial address, the "Junior Minerva," impressed Mrs. Drainham, as it had impressed Frederick's less desirable acquaintance. A little conversation of the most amicable character ensued, winding up by an invitation to dinner for that evening.

"And you will come too, my dear," said the doctor's wife, "though it is a thing you could not do in ordinary circumstances. Nobody could reflect upon you for departing from the usual rules in your position. I will ask no one to meet you. Mr. Eastwood will bring you to us at seven o'clock."

Innocent had listened to this conversation vaguely, in a kind of stupor, feeling as if they spoke a language of which she had never before heard a word. Greek would have been as intelligible to her. It even hurt her vaguely that they seemed to understand each other in the language which she could not understand. She had been thrust back upon herself, which is always painful—thrust back after, as she thought, a gleam of new life and a new world, into the old dreary world, much drearier than ever by the contrast, though it was but momentary. The visionary intensity of a mind living in its own sensations almost annihilates space and time; and though

it was but half an hour since Frederick Eastwood came upon the scene at all, there was room enough in that half-hour to make the girl feel the force of two revolutions—the one from her dreary solitude into a new sphere of brightness, tenderness, companionship, which was as a revelation of Heaven to her; and the other, a dreary circle back again, out of the light, out of the society, out of the strange delightful newness which seemed to have changed her being all in a moment. The one was a sudden sun-rising, the other an equally sudden eclipse. She had been raised up to heaven and then suddenly tossed down again. The amount of emotion involved was quite excessive and extravagant, out of all keeping with the momentary character of the incidents; but Innocent was not aware of this, nor could have believed how utterly unimportant to the others was the half-hour which subjected her to such vicissitudes of feeling as she had never before felt in her life. She made no reply to Mrs. Drainham's invitation, which, indeed, she scarcely comprehended. She did not understand the civilities with which her two companions parted, Frederick accompanying Mrs. Drainham to the door. What she imagined was that he had thus gone away without taking any further notice of her, and that all was over, and

the new hope to which she seemed to have a right, taken from her. She sat in a stupor watching them go away, fingering the folds of the old velvet cloak, which she had picked up mechanically from the floor, and feeling a mingled chill—of her shoulders from the want of her mantle, and of her heart from this strange desertion—which made her shiver all over, and gave her that nervous and passionate impulse to cry, which children and women are so seldom able to resist, but which poor Innocent had been victorious over often, tears being among the things which her father turned into highest ridicule. She had ceased almost to be able to weep—forgotten the way; the natural emotions had been frozen in their fountains. But the thrill of new existence of which she had been conscious had broken those frozen chains, and she began to struggle with a hysterical passion which roused all her pride and all her spirit to conquer it. No doubt, she thought, this new cousin, like her father, would despise the weakness which women indulged in. Innocent despised herself for being a woman, and she would have died sooner than yield to what she supposed to be a purely feminine impulse. She was struggling thus with herself, fighting the hardest battle she had fought since the time when goaded by his

ridicule she had rushed upon her father like a little tiger, beating him with her baby fist, choking with suppressed passion, when the door opened again, and Frederick came in once more. She gazed at him with her breast heaving, and her eyes dilated in the fierceness of her struggle to keep off the tears. And if he had laughed, or treated her emotion lightly, Innocent would have conquered. But Frederick's heart was really touched. He felt benevolent, paternal, full of patronage and kindness. He went up to her, and laid his hand caressingly on her head.

"My little cousin, we must make friends now that woman is gone," he said, smiling upon her.

Poor child, she knew nothing of self-control, scarcely anything of right and wrong. She threw out her arms and clung to him, in a simple effort of nature to grasp at something; and fell into such a passion of sobs and cries on his bosom as frightened him. But yet what was more natural? She had just lost her father; she had no one in the world to turn to, except this new relation who belonged to her. She had been undergoing an unnatural repression, concealing her feelings in that stupor which grief so often brings. Frederick thought he understood it all, and it affected him, though he

was glad there was no one else in the room. He put his arm round her, and even kissed the cheek which was partially visible, and said all the kind things he could think of. It lasted so long that, not being very strong himself, he began to totter a little under the unexpected burden, and would gladly have freed himself and sat down by her. But Innocent had been carried away by the tide, and could not stop herself. This was the beginning of their acquaintance. There were no preliminaries. She had never "given way" in her life before, except on the occasion we have already referred to —and heaven knows what strange processes were going on in the girl's half-developed, much-suppressed nature, as for the first time she gave her tears and emotion way.

When the hysterical sobbing came to an end, Innocent lifted her head from his breast, and looked at him, still holding him by the arms. She looked up suddenly, half beseeching him not to despise her, half daring him to do so; but there was no scorn in Frederick's eyes. He was very sorry for her.

"My poor child!" he said, smoothing the ruffled hair upon her forehead.

Then a sudden flush came to her face, and

light to her eyes. She released him as suddenly as she had clutched him. She sank back gently into her chair, with a shy, deprecating smile.

"I could not help it," she said, putting out her hand. She wanted to retain some hold of him, to be sure that he would not melt quite away like one of the dreams.

As for Frederick, though his first feeling, I confess, was great thankfulness at being permitted to sit down, he had no objection to have his hand held by those soft, long fingers, or to bear the eager look of eyes which shone upon him with a kind of worship. He told her how he had been coming to her for a long time, but had been detained—how he had come to take her home—how they must start next day if possible, and travel as quickly as possible, and how his mother and sister were awaiting her anxiously, hoping to make her happy, and to comfort her in her trouble. Innocent leant back in her chair, and smiled and listened. She made no reply. It did not seem necessary to make any reply. She held his hand fast and let him talk to her, not caring much what he said. I don't know if her intelligence was much developed at this period of her life. She understood what he was saying, but it was as a song to her, or a story that he was

telling. She did not mind how long she listened, but it required no personal response—took no personal hold of her. The picture he made of The Elms, and his mother and sister, produced no sort of effect upon her mind. She was satsfiied. Everything was unreal and vague except the one tangible fact, that he was sitting beside her, and that she was holding his hand. It was not love at first sight. The child did not know, and never inquired what it was. She had got some one—some one belonging to her like other people, some one who did not sneer or ridicule, but smiled at her: who called her name softly: who found no fault. She was altogether transported by this wonderful sensation. She wanted no more; no mothers nor sisters, no change, no conditions such as make life possible. She knew nothing about all that. Her understanding had nothing to do with the question. It was barely developed, not equal to any strain; and in this matter it seemed quite possible to do without it, whether she understood or not did not matter. She was happy; she wanted nothing more.

"Must you go away?" she cried with a start, holding his hand closer, as he moved.

"Not to leave you," he said; "But if we go away to-morrow—Can you go to-morrow, Innocent?"

"I will go when you go," she said.

"My dear cousin, you must be less vague. Can you be ready? Can you have your packing done, and all your little affairs settled? Where is your maid? She will know best."

"I have no maid. I have nothing to pack. I am ready now whenever you please; only you must not leave me. You must never leave me," she cried, clasping her hands round his arm.

"I have no intention of leaving you," he said, half flattered, half embarrassed, "till I have taken you to my mother. It is my mother whom you are going to—my mother—I told you—and Ellinor——"

"Will you leave me when we get there?" the girl asked eagerly, still holding him. Yes, it was flattering; but possibly it might become a bore.

"No, no," he said, "I live there too. I am not going to leave you. But my mother will be the chief person then—my mother and Nelly, not me. They are ladies, they will be your chief friends and companions——"

"I would rather have you; I know you; and I don't like women," said the girl. "Listen! Could not we live somewhere without letting them know? I can cook some dishes—very good maccaroni; and I can cook birds. I could do what you wanted, and and make your *spese*. This would be far better than

going to live with your mother. I do not like women."

She warmed as she spoke, turning to face him, with her hand still clasping his arm.

"You must not say such things," he said.

"Why? This is the first time you have said 'you must not.' My father says women are all bad—not some here and there, like men. I am one, but I cannot help it. I always try to be different. I would not do the things they do—nor look like them if I could help it. Are you rich?"

"No," said Frederick, becoming bewildered. He had risen up, but she detained him, with her two hands holding his arm.

"That is a pity. We were never rich. If you had been rich we might have taken Niccolo, who could have done everything—he is so clever. We might have stayed here. Stop!" she said suddenly, "there is a little cloud coming up over your face. Do not let it. Smile. You smiled when you came in first, and I knew that it was you, and was so happy."

"My poor child! Why were you happy?"

"Because I knew it was you," she said vehemently. "And now you talk of your mother. I do not want to go to your mother. Let me stay with you."

"Listen, Innocent," he said, with a shade of impatience stealing over him. "There is no possibility of questioning where you are to go. You must go to my mother. I live there too. I cannot afford to have a house for myself. You must learn to be fond of my mother, and do whatever she wishes. Now let me go, please. I am going out to see the place. If we leave to-morrow I may not have another opportunity. Come, come, you must let me go.

She was looking up into his face, studying it intently, as if it were a book, a close penetrating gaze, before which his eyes somewhat wavered, hesitating to meet hers. An idea that she would find him out if she gazed thus into the depths of his soul, crossed his mind, and made him half angry, half afraid. Perhaps she divined this feeling; for she let his arm go, slowly, sliding her hands away from it, with a half caressing, half apologetic motion. She smiled as she thus released him, but said nothing. There was something pretty in the act by which she set him free—a mingling of resignation and entreaty that at once amused and touched him. Go, if you will—it seemed to say—but yet stay with me! It was hard to resist the moral restraint after the physical was withdrawn. But Frederick reflected that to spend this, his only day in a strange new

place—in Italy—shut up *tête-à-tête* with a girl who was a stranger to him, though she was his cousin, would be extremely ridiculous. Yet he could not leave her abruptly. He stroked her soft hair once more paternally as he stood by her.

"I will come back in time to take you out to this lady's to dinner," he said. "I suppose they have been kind to you? And in the meantime you must see after your packing. I have no doubt you will find a great many things to do. I am sorry you have not a maid to help you. Have you wraps for the journey? You will want something warm."

She took up her old velvet mantle with a startled look, and turned it round in her hands, looking at it. It was a garment to delight the very soul of a painter; but, alas! it was not such a garment as Frederick Eastwood, who was not a painter, could walk about by the side of, or travel with.

"Is that all you have?" he asked, with a little dismay.

"I have a shawl," said Innocent, looking at him with astonished eyes.

"Ah! I must speak to Mrs. Drainham about it," he said, with some impatience. "Good-bye for the moment. Will you dress, and be quite ready when I come back? and then we can have a talk about

our start to-morrow, and all our arrangements. I am sure if you are to be ready in time there is not a moment to lose."

Ready in time! The words seemed to echo about poor Innocent's ears when he was gone. Ready for what? For going out with him in the evening to the house of the lady who found fault with her; who had come to her and talked and talked so much, that the girl neither tried nor wished to understand. Ready! She sat and tried to think what it meant. She had but the black frock she wore—no other—with its little black frill of crape about her neck; no edge of white, such as people wear in England. She could smooth her hair and put on a locket, or her mother's brooch; but that was all she could do. The packing she never thought of. Niccolo had been nurse and valet combined. He had always arranged everything, and told her what to do. She sat for a long time quite still, pondering over the mourning with a strange happiness, and a still stranger poignant pain in her agitated breast. Then she rose, and putting her cloak round her—the poor cloak which she was afraid *he* had despised—she went down the long stairs and across the road to the tiny little church upon the edge of the Arno. Nobody who has been in Pisa will forget Santa Maria

della Spina. I do not know whether its tiny size took the girl's fancy, or if the richness of the elaborate architecture pleased her, for she had no such clearly developed ideas about art as her relations in England gave her credit for. Perhaps after all it was but a child's fancy for the dim, decorated religious place, which, notwitshtanding its mystery and silence, and the awe which hung about it, was not so big as the great bare *salone* in which she sat at home. She went in, crossing herself according to the custom which she had seen all her life, mechanically, without any thought of the meaning of that sign, and held out her hand to give the holy water to a peasant woman who entered along with her, mechanically too, as she might have offered any habitual courtesy. This poor girl had scarcely been taught anything, except what her eyes taught her. She went in according to her custom, and knelt for a minute on a chair, and then, turning it round, sat down with her face to the altar. I think what she said under her breath was simply the Lord's Prayer, nothing more. It was very brief and mechanical too, and when she sat down I cannot pretend that her thoughts were of a religious kind. They were possessed by the occurrences of the morning. Her heart was in a

tumult, rising and falling like the waves of the sea. The dead stillness with which the day before she had sat in the same place, full of a certain dumb, wistful quiet—almost stupor of mind, had passed away from her. Life had come along with the new living figure which had placed itself in the foreground of her picture. Her heart beat with the vibration of her first strange childish happiness at the sight of her cousin, but in the very midst of this there came a sting of sharp wonder and pain, that acute, surprised disappointment which women are apt to feel when the man whose company they themselves prefer to everything shows himself capable of going away from them, and preferring some kind of pleasure separate from them to that which can be had in their society. "If he was glad to find me, if he came so far for me, why could not he have stayed with me?" Innocent was not sufficiently advanced either in intellectual or emotional life to put such a question into words, but it was vaguely in her mind, filling her in her childish inexperience with a pain almost as great as the new pleasure which had come with her new friend. The morning masses were all over; there was no service going on, no candles lighted upon the altar, which glimmered with all its tall white tapers through the gloom.

Everything was silent; now and then a half-seen figure stealing in, dropping down to say a prayer or two, and with mysterious genuflexion gliding away again. A few people, like Innocent, sat in different corners quite still, with their eyes towards the altar; they were chiefly old people, worn old women and benumbed old men, doing nothing, perhaps thinking nothing, glad only, like the forlorn child, of the peacefulness, the stillness, the religiousness about. Here and there was one, who, with clasped hands and rapt face, gazed up at some dark picture on the wall, and "wrestled" like Jacob; but the most part showed little emotion of any kind; they found a shelter perhaps for their confused thoughts, perhaps only for the torpor of their worn-out faculties. But anyhow, they were the better for being there, and so was Innocent. She sat quite still for a long time, rather the subject of her thoughts than exercising any control over them, and then she turned her chair round again, and knelt and said the Lord's Prayer, and went away.

She went to Mrs. Drainham's with her cousin as mechanically as she had said her prayers. Her appearance was strange enough on that strange evening, which she passed as in a dream. With an idea that ornament was necessary, and perhaps not without

some pleasure in the novelty of having the little morocco box full of trinkets, which her father had always kept in his own hands, handed over to her keeping, she had put on a trinket which took her fancy, and which was attached to a little chain. It was a very brilliant ornament indeed, set with emeralds and rubies, in a quaint design, the background of which was formed by small diamonds. The effect of this upon her very simple black frock may be conceived. Mrs. Drainham was scandalized, yet impressed. Impossible not to look upon a girl possessed of such a jewel with some additional respect—and yet the impropriety, the unappropriateness of wearing it at such a time was almost "past speaking of," Mrs. Drainham felt.

"You should wear nothing but jet ornaments with such deep mourning," she said. "A plain gold locket might have done if you have no jet; but this, my dear, is quite out of character. You must try and recollect these things when you go among your relations. They will wonder that you know so little. They might perhaps think it heartless of you. Was it your mother's? It is very pretty. You must take great care of such an ornament as this; but you must be sure never to wear it when you are in mourning." This was said when she was alone in

the drawing-room with Innocent after dinner. And then she, too, began to inquire into the packing and the wraps for the journey. She gave Innocent a great deal of advice, which I fear was quite lost upon her, and offered to go next day to "see to" her preparations. The girl sat much as she had sat in the Church of the Spina, with her hands crossed on her lap, listening vaguely. She did not know what to say, and her attention wandered often, as the stream of counsel flowed on. She had done no packing still, and had no idea what to do about the wraps; and Frederick scarcely seemed to belong to her, in this strange room, where she sat in a kind of waking dream, ashamed of her poor frock, ashamed of her rich jewel, not knowing what to make of herself. Poor little Innocent! perhaps, on the whole, in this new rush of emotions that filled her, there was rather less pleasure than pain.

CHAPTER IX.

AT HOME.

When Mrs. Eastwood received, after long and anxious waiting, Frederick's letter from Leghorn, telling her of his illness and detention in Paris (" the last place in the world one would like to be ill in," she said, in her innocence), she was, as might be supposed, greatly agitated and distressed. Her first thought was for his health, poor fellow! her second for the office, and whether he could get an extension of leave, or if this staying away without permission would injure him. She did not quite know which of her counsellors to send for in such an emergency, and therefore she did what she would have done in any case, whether her advisers had bidden her or not. After she had wondered with Ellinor what it could have been, and why he gave them no details, and had cried over the bad news, and taken comfort at the

thought he was better, she sent for her habitual fly, the vehicle which she had patronized ever since she put down her carriage. It was a very respectable fly, with a sensible brown horse, which never got into any trouble, as the horses of private individuals do, but would stand as patiently at a door of its own free will as if it knew there was a place round the corner where its inferior brother, the coachman, went to refresh himself, and sympathized in his thirst. Mrs. Eastwood and Ellinor got into this respectable vehicle about twelve o'clock, and drove by Whitehall and the Horse Guards to the Sealing-Wax Office. There they found the head of the office, Mr. Bellingham, who had just come in from his cottage in the country, with a rosebud in his coat, which came from his own conservatory, and had roused the envy of all the young men as he came by. Mrs. Eastwood explained that Frederick had been detained by illness in Paris. He had not written sooner in order that his friends might not be anxious, she explained, and she hoped, as it was totally unforeseen, and very, very inconvenient to himself, that there would be no difficulty in the office. Mr. Bellingham smiled upon her, and said he would make all that right. "Jolly place to be ill in," he said, with a little nod and smile. "In-

deed, I thought it was the very last place in the world for a sick person," said Mrs. Eastwood, feeling somehow that her boy's sufferings were held too lightly; "so little privacy, so much noise and bustle; and in an hotel, of course, the comforts of home are not to be looked for." It seemed to Ellinor that Mr. Bellingham's countenance bore traces of a suppressed grin, but he said nothing more than that a letter had been received at the office from the sufferer, and that, of course, under the circumstances, there would be no question about the extended leave. "That is all right at least," Mrs. Eastwood said as they left the office; but it may well be supposed that to wait ten days for any news whatever of the absent son, and at the end of that period, when they began to expect his return, to hear that he had been ill all the time within reach of them, was not pleasant. The mother and daughter could talk of nothing else as they drove home.

"If he had but written at first, when he felt himself getting ill, you or I, or both of us, might have gone to him, Nelly. I cannot think of anything more dreary than being ill in an inn. And then the expense! I wonder if he has money enough, poor boy, to bring him home?"

"If he wanted money he would have told you so," said Nelly, half uneasy, she could not quite tell why.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Eastwood, "boys are so odd. To be sure, when they want money they generally let one know. But there never was anything so tiresome, so vague, as men's letters about themselves. 'I have been ill.'—Now if it had been you or me, Nelly, we should have said, 'I took cold, or I got a bad headache,' or whatever it was, on such a day—and how it got worse or better; and when we were able to get up again, or to get out again. It is not Frederick alone. It is every man. They tell you just enough to make you unhappy—never any details. I suppose," she added, with a sigh, "it is because that sort of meagre information is enough for themselves. They don't care to know all about it as women do. They don't understand what it is to be really anxious. In a great many ways, Nelly, men have the advantage over us—things, too, that no laws can change."

"I don't think it is an advantage not to care," said Nelly indignantly.

"I am not so sure of that," said her mother. "We care so much that we can't think of anything else. We can't take things calmly as they do. And they have an advantage in it. Frederick is a very

good son, but if I were to write to him, 'I have been ill, and I am better,' he would be quite satisfied, he would want nothing more. Whereas I want a great deal more," Mrs. Eastwood said, flicking off with her finger the ghost of a tear which had gathered in spite of her in the corner of her eye, and giving a short little broken laugh. The path of fathers and mothers is often strewn with roses, but the roses have very big thorns. Even Nelly, who was young, whose heart leaped forward to a future of her own, in which brothers had but little share, did not here quite comprehend her mother. For her own part, had she been left to herself, it is possible that Frederick's "I have been ill, but I am better," would have satisfied all her anxieties: but as the girl by force of sympathy was but half herself and half her mother, she entered into the feelings which she did not altogether share with a warmth which was increased by partisanship, if such a word can be used in such a case.

"It is wicked of him not to write more fully," she said.

"No, Nelly, dear, not wicked, only thoughtless; all men are the same," said Mrs. Eastwood. And to be sure this large generalization affords a little comfort now and then to women, as the same

principle does to men in different circumstances; for there is nothing about which the two halves of humanity are so fond of generalizing as each other. It seems to afford a certain consolation that "all men are just the same," or that "women are like that everywhere"—an explanation which, at least, partially exonerates the immediate offender.

Another week elapsed, during which the Eastwoods carried on their existence much as usual, unmoved to appearance by the delay, and not deeply disturbed by the prospect of the new arrival. Mrs. Eastwood spoke to Mr. Brotherton, her rector and adviser about "the boys," on the subject, but not much came of it; for Mr. Brotherton, though fond, like most people, of giving advice, and feeling, like most people, that a widow with sons to educate was his lawful prey, was yet shy of saying anything on the subject of Frederick, who was no longer a boy. Whether any more serious uneasiness lay underneath her anxiety for her son's health, no one, not even Mrs. Eastwood's chief and privy councillor, could have told; but when appealed to as to what he thought on the subject, whether another messenger or the mother herself should go to the succour of the invalid, Mr. Brotherton shook his head, and did

not know what to advise. "If he has been able to go on to Leghorn, I think you may feel very confident that he is all right again," he said. "You must not make yourself unhappy about him. From Leghorn to Pisa is but a step," added the Rector, pleased to be able to recall his own experience on this subject. But Mrs. Everard, the privy councillor, was of a different opinion. She was always for action in every case. To sit still and wait was a policy which had no attractions for her. She was a slight and eager woman, who had been a great beauty in her day. Her husband had been a judge in India, and she was, or thought she was, deeply instructed in the law, and able to be "of real service" to her friends, when legal knowledge was requisite. It is almost unnecessary to say that she was as unlike Mrs. Eastwood as one woman could be to another. The one was eager, slight, and restless, with a mind much too active for her body, and an absolute incapacity for letting anything alone; the other plump and peaceable, not deficient in energy when it was necessary, but slightly inert and slow to move when the emergency did not strike her as serious. Of course it is equally unnecessary to add that Mrs. Everard also was a widow. This fact acts upon the character like other great facts in life.

It makes many and important modifications in the aspect of affairs. Life *à deux* (I don't know any English phrase which quite expresses this) is scarcely more different from the primitive and original single life, than is the life which, after having been *à deux,* becomes single, without the possibility of going back to the original standing ground. That curious mingling of a man's position and responsibilities with a woman's position and responsibilities cannot possibly fail to mould a type of character in many respects individual. A man who is widowed is not similarly affected, partly perhaps because in most cases he throws the responsibility from him, and either marries again or places some woman in the deputy position of governess or housekeeper to represent the feminine side of life, which he does not choose to take upon himself. Women, however, abandon their post much less frequently, and sometimes, I suspect, get quite reconciled to the double burden, and do not object to do all for, and be all to, their children. Sometimes they attempt too much, and often enough they fail; but so does everybody in everything, and widows' sons have not shown badly in general life. I hope the gentle reader will pardon me this digression, which, after all, is scarcely necessary, since it is the

business of the ladies in this history to speak for themselves.

"I would go if I were in your place," said Mrs. Everard, talking over all these circumstances in the twilight over the fire the same evening. "A man, as we both know, never tells you anything fully. Of course you cannot tell in the least what is the matter with him. He may have overtasked his strength going on to Pisa. He may break down on the road home with no one to look after him. I suppose this girl will be a helpless foreign thing without any knowledge of the world. Girls are brought up so absurdly abroad. You know my opinion, dear, on the whole subject. I always advised you—instead of taking this trouble and bringing her here with great expense and inconvenience, to make her an inmate of your own house —I always advised you to settle her where she is, paying her expenses, among the people she knows. You remember what I told you about poor Adelaide Forbes?—what a mistake she made, meaning to be kind! You know your own affairs best; but still, on this point I think I was right."

"Perhaps you may have been," said Mrs. Eastwood, from the gloom of the corner in which she was seated, "but there are some things that one

cannot do, however much one's judgment may be convinced. Leave my own flesh and blood to languish among strangers? I could not do it; it would have been impossible."

"If your flesh and blood had been a duchess, you would have done it without a thought," said Mrs. Everard. "She is happy where she is (I suppose). You don't know her temper nor her ways of thinking, nor what kind of girl she is, and yet you will insist upon bringing her here——"

"You speak as if Frederick's illness was mamma's doing," said Nelly, with a little indignation, coming in from one of her many occupations, and placing herself on a stool in front of the fire, in the full glow of the firelight. Nelly was not afraid of her complexion. She did everything a girl ought not to do in this way. She would run out in the sunshine unprotected by veil or parasol, and she had a child's trick of reading by firelight, which, considering how she scorched her cheeks, can scarcely be called anything short of wicked. This was a point upon which Mrs. Everard kept up a vigorous but unsuccessful struggle.

"Nelly, Nelly! you will burn your eyes out. By the time you are my age how much eyesight will you have left, do you think?"

"I don't much care," said Nelly, in an undertone. She thought that by the time she reached Mrs. Everard's age (which was under fifty) she would have become indifferent to eyesight and everything else, in the chills of that advanced age.

"Nelly, you are not too civil," said Mrs. Eastwood, touching the toe of Nelly's pretty shoe with her own velvet slipper, in warning and reproof. The girl drew her toes out of the way, but did not make any apology. She was not fond of Mrs. Everard, nor indeed was any one in the house.

"Of course, I don't mean that your decision had anything whatever to do with Frederick's illness," Mrs. Everard resumed, "that I don't need to say. He might have been ill at home as much as abroad. I am speaking now on the original question. Of course, if Frederick had not gone away, you would have been spared this anxiety, and might have nursed him comfortably at home. But that is incidental. What I *am* sorry for is that you are bringing a girl into your house whom you know nothing of. She may be very nice, but she may be quite the reverse. Of course one can never tell whether it may or may not be a happy change even for her—but it is a great risk for you. It is a very brave thing to do. I should not have the courage to make

such an experiment, though it would be a great deal simpler in my house, where there is no one to be affected but myself.

"I don't see where the courage lies," said Nelly; "a girl of sixteen. What harm could she do to any one?"

"Oh, a great deal of harm, if she chose," said Mrs. Everard; "a girl of sixteen, in a house full of young men! One or the other of them will fall in love with her to a certainty if she is at all pretty——"

"Oh, please!" said Mrs. Eastwood; "you do think so oddly, pardon me for saying so, about the boys. Frederick is grown up, of course, but the last young man in the world to think of a little cousin. And as for Dick, he is a mere boy; and Jenny! Don't be vexed if I laugh. This is too funny."

"I hope you will always think it as funny," said the privy councillor solemnly; "but I know you and I don't think alike on these subjects. Half the ridiculous marriages in the world spring out of the fact that parents will not see when boys and girls start up into men and women. I don't mean to say that harm will come of it immediately—but once she is in your house there is no telling how you are to

get rid of her. However, I suppose your mind is made up. About the other matter, here are the facts of the case. Frederick is ill, you don't know how or with what; he has taken a long and dangerous journey——"

"Not dangerous, dear, not dangerous——"

"Well, not dangerous if you please, but long and fatiguing, and troublesome to a man who is ill. He has gone on to Pisa in a bad state of health. You know that he has reached so far; and you know no more. Of course he will be anxious to get home again as quick as possible. What if he were to get worse on the road? There is nothing more likely, and the torturing anxiety you would feel in such circumstances I need not suggest to you. You will be terribly unhappy. You will wait for news until you feel it impossible to wait any longer, and then when your strength and patience are exhausted, you will rush off to go to him—most likely too late."

"Oh, have a little pity upon me! Don't talk so —don't think so——"

"I can't stop my thoughts," said Mrs. Everard, not without a little complacency, "and I have known such things to happen before now. What more likely than that he should start before he is equal to the journey, and break down on the way home?

Then you would certainly go to him; and my advice is, go to him now. Anticipating the evil in that way you would probably prevent it. In your place I would not lose a day."

"But I could not reach Pisa," said Mrs. Eastwood, nervously taking out her watch, "I could not reach Pisa, even if I were to start to-night, before they had left it; and how can I tell which way they would come? I should miss them to a certainty. I should get there just when they were arriving here. I should have double anxiety, and double expense——"

"If they ever arrived here," said Mrs. Everard, ominously; "but indeed it is not my part to interfere. Some people can bear anxiety so much bette- than others. I know it would kill me."

Mrs. Eastwood very naturally objected to such a conclusion. To put up with the imputation of feeling less than her friend, or any other woman, in the circumstances, was unbearable. "Then you really think I have reason to be alarmed?" she said in a tremulous voice.

"I should not have any doubt on the subject," said her adviser. "A young man in delicate health, a long journey, cold February weather, and not even a doctor whom you can rely upon to see him before

he starts. Recollect I would not say half so much if I did not feel quite sure that you would be forced to go at last—and probably too late."

"Oh, don't say those awful words!" said the poor woman. And thus the conversation went on, till Brownlow appeared with the lamp, interrupting the agitating discussion. Then Mrs. Everard went her way, leaving her friend in very low spirits with Nelly, who, though kept up by a wholesome spirit of opposition, was yet moved, in spite of herself, by the gloomy picture upon which she had been looking. They sat together over the fire for a little longer, very tearful and miserable, while Mrs. Everard went home, strong in the sense of having done her duty "however things might turn out."

"Must you really go, mamma?" said Nelly, much subdued, consulting her watch, in her turn, and thinking of the hurried start at eight o'clock to catch the night train, and of the dismal midnight crossing of that Channel which travellers hate and fear. "It will be a dreadful journey. Must you really go?"

"What do *you* think, Nelly?" said Mrs. Eastwood, beginning to recover a little. "I have the greatest respect for Jane Everard's opinion, but she does

always take the darkest view of everything. Oh, Nelly, what would *you* advise me to do?"

This was an infallible sign that the mercury had begun to rise. "Pressure had decreased," to use a scientific term. The mother and daughter made up their minds, after much discussion, that to catch the night-train would be impossible, and that there might perhaps be further news next day. "If that is your opinion, Nelly?" Mrs. Eastwood said, as they went up-stairs, supporting herself with natural casuistry upon her child's counsel. The fact was that she herself saw very clearly all the practical difficulties of the question. She loved advice, and did not think it correct for "a woman in my position" to take any important step without consulting her friends; and their counsel moved her deeply. She gave all her attention to it, and received it with respectful conviction; but she did not take it. It would be impossible to over-estimate the advantage this gave her over all her advisers.

"I knew she had made up her mind," Mrs. Everard said next day, with resignation. Whatever might happen she had done her duty; and the consequences must certainly fall on the culprit's own head.

CHAPTER X.

THE ARRIVAL.

To the reader, who is better acquainted with the causes and character of Frederick Eastwood's detention on his journey than either his mother or her privy councillor, the fears entertained by these ladies in respect to his health will scarcely appear deserving of much consideration. His health, indeed, very soon came right again. Two days' rest at Pisa, the substitution of the *vin du pays* for champagne, and the absence of other excitements, made him quite equal to contemplate the journey home without anxiety, so far as his own interesting person was concerned. He had difficulties enough, however, of another kind. He was obliged to stay a day longer than he intended, in order to fit out his cousin with various things pronounced by Mrs. Drainham to be indispensable. She had to be

clothed in something more fit for a journey than the thin black frock which Niccolo had ordered for her at her father's death. Pisa did not afford much in the way of toilette; but still the dress and cloak procured by Mrs. Drainham were presentable, and the fastidious young man was extremely grateful to the physician's pretty wife for clothing his companion so that he should not be ashamed to be seen with her, which would have been the case had the poor child travelled, as she intended, in her only warm garment, the velvet cloak.

"It must have been a stage property in its day," Frederick said, looking at the many tints of its old age with disgust.

Innocent hid it away instantly in the depths of her old trunk, and sat proudly shivering with cold in her thin frock through all the long evening,—the cold, long, lingering night which preceded their departure. She thought her cousin would have come to her; but Frederick wisely reflected that he would have enough of her society for the next few days, and preferred the Drainhams' comfortable drawing-room instead. Poor Innocent! she stood in the old way at the window, but not impassive as of old, looking for some one this time, and trying with a beating heart to make him out among the

crowd that moved along the Lung' Arno. This expectation engrossed her so much that she forgot to think of the change that was about to come upon her life. I do not know, indeed, that she was capable of thinking of anything so complex as this change. She had wandered from one place to another with her father, living always the same dreary, secluded life, having such simple wants as she was conscious of supplied, and nothing ever required of her. I believe, had it been suggested to her unawakened mind that thenceforward she must do without Niccolo, this would have been the most forcible way of rousing her to thought of what was about to happen. And, indeed, this was exactly the course which was about to be taken, though without any idea on the part of Niccolo of the effect it would produce. He came in as usual with his little tray, the salad heaped up, green and glistening with oil, just as he liked it himself. Beside it, as this was the last evening, was a small, but smoking hot, dish of maccaroni, a morsel of cheese on a plate, and a *petit pain*, more delicate than the dry Italian bread. The usual small flask of red wine flanked this meal, which Niccolo brought in with some state, as became the little festa which he had prepared for his charge. Tears were in the good fellow's eyes, though his beard was divided in

its blackness by the kind smile, which displayed his red lips and white teeth. He arranged it on the little table close by the stove, placed the chair beside it, and trimmed the lamp before he called upon his signorina, whose position by the window he had immediately remarked with a shrug of his shoulders. He had taken care of her all her life; but I am not sure that the good Niccolo was not glad to be relieved of a charge so embarrassing. His own prospects were certainly brightened by her departure. He had served her father faithfully and long with but poor recompense, and now the reward of his faithfulness was coming to Niccolo in the shape of a better place, with higher wages, and a position which was very splendid in his eyes. Never was heart more disposed to entertain a romantic devotion for the child he had nurtured; but it is difficult for the warmest heart to give itself up in blind love to an utterly unresponsive being, whether child or man, and as Innocent did not love Niccolo or any one else the separation from her was less hard than it might otherwise have been. Nevertheless there were tears in his eyes, and his heart was softened and melting when he arranged her supper for her, and went to the cold window to call her to her solitary meal. He touched her shoulder caressingly with his hand.

"Santissima Madonna!" cried Niccolo, "you will

die of cold, my poor young lady; you have nothing but this thin dress, which cannot keep you warm. Where in the name of all the saints is your cloak?"

"I have put it away. It is ugly; it is not fit to wear," cried Innocent. "It is a thing of the theatre. Why did you let me wear it?" and she put off his hand gently enough, but coldly, and continued her watch.

"A thing of the theatre!" cried Niccolo, indignant, "when I bought it myself at the sale of the pittore Inglese, who died over the way; and you looked like a princess when you put it on, and warm as a bird in a nest. But I know who it is that turns you against your old dresses and your old way of living and your poor old Niccolo. It is the cousin. I hope he will be to you all we have been, signorina. But in the meantime my young lady is served, and if she does not eat, the maccaroni will be cold. Cold maccaroni is good for no one. The cousin will not come to-night."

"You do not know," said Innocent, turning a momentary look upon him, which was half a defiance and half a question.

"But I do know," said Niccolo; "he went to the house of the English doctor half an hour ago, and bid me tell the signorina to be prepared at ten to-

morrow. Come, then, to the maccaroni. When everything else fails it is always good to have maccaroni to fall back upon. *Chi ha buon pane, e buon vino, ha troppo un micolino.*"

"I do not care for maccaroni," said Innocent She turned from the window, however, with a dawning of the pride of a woman who feels herself slighted. "Niccolo, I do not want anything; you can go away."

"And this is how she parts with the old Niccolo!" he cried. "I have carried her in my arms when she was little. I have dressed her, and prepared for her to eat and drink all her life. I have taken her to the festa, and to the church. I have done all for her—all! and the last night she tells me, 'I do not want anything, Niccolo; you may go away.'"

"The last night?" said Innocent, moved a little. She shivered with the cold, and with the pang of desertion, and with that new-born sense of her loneliness which had never struck her before. She knelt down by the stove to get a little warmth, and turned her eyes inquiringly upon him. She knew what he meant very well, and yet she did not know.

"The last night," said Niccolo. "To-morrow

evening you will be upon the great sea; you will be on your way to your relations, to your England, which cannot be colder than your heart, signorina. I weep, for I cannot forget that you were once a little child, and that I carried you in my arms. When I reflect that it is fifteen years, fifteen years that I have taken care of you, from the moment your nurse left you, *disgraziata!* and that after to-morrow I shall see you no more! Whatever has to be done for you must be done by others, or will not be done at all, which is more likely. When you want anything you may call 'Niccolo, Niccolo;' but there will be no Niccolo to reply. If I were to permit myself to think of all this I should become *pazzo*, signorina—though you don't care."

Innocent said nothing; but slowly the reality of this tremendous alteration in her lot made itself apparent to her. No Niccolo! She could not realize it. With Niccolo, too, many other things would disappear. She looked round the lofty bare walls, which, indeed, had few attractions, except those of use and wont, and faintly it dawned upon her that her whole life and everything that was familiar to her was about to vanish away. Large tears filled her eyes; she turned to Niccolo an appealing, beseeching look. "I do not understand," she cried,

with a panting breath; and put out her hands, and clung to him. He who was about to be left behind was the emblem of all the known, the familiar—I do not say the dear, for the girl's heart and soul had been sealed up, and she loved nothing. But she knew him, and relied upon him, and had that child's trust that he would never fail her, which is often all that a child knows of love. No Niccolo! She did not understand how existence was to go on without him. She clung to him with a look of sudden alarm and dismay in her dilated eyes.

The good Niccolo was satisfied. He had not wished or attempted to rouse that miserable, vague sense of desertion and abandonment of which he had no comprehension; but he was satisfied to have brought out some evidence of feeling, and also that his dramatic appeal had produced the due effect. "My dearest young lady," he said, wiping the great tears from her eyes with his own red handkerchief, a service which he, indeed, had performed many a time before. "Carissima signorina mia! There will never be a day of my life that I will not think of you, nor shall I ever enter a church without putting the blessed Madonna in mind of my poor, dear, well-beloved young lady who has no mother! Never, carina! never, my child, my little mistress!

You may always rely upon your old Niccolo; and when my young lady marries a rich milordo she will come back to Pisa, and seek out her old servant, and say to the handsome, beautiful young husband, 'This is my old Niccolo, that brought me up!' Ah, carina mia," cried the good fellow, laughing and crying, and applying the red handkerchief first to Innocent's cheeks and then to his own, "that will be a magnificent day to look forward to! The young milordo will say immediately, 'Niccolo shall be the maestro della casa; he shall live and die in my service.' Ah, my beautiful signorina, what happiness! I will go with you to England or any-where. You were born to be our delight!" cried Niccolo, carried away by his feelings, and evidently imagining that the *giorno magnifico* had arrived already. Innocent, however, did not follow these rapid vicissitudes of feeling. To get one clear idea into her mind was difficult enough. Sometimes she looked at him, sometimes into the little fire, with its ruddy embers. Her head was giddy, her heart dully aching. All was going away from her; the room, the walls, seemed to turn slowly round, as if they would dissolve and break up into vapour. The very dumbness of her heart made this vague sense of misery the more terrible; she could say nothing.

She could not have told what she felt or what she feared; but all the world seemed to be dissolving about her into coldness and darkness and loneliness; the cold penetrated to her very soul; she was miserable, as we may imagine a dumb animal to be, without any way of relieving itself of the confused pain in its mind.

Niccolo, after a while, became alarmed, and devoted himself to her restoration with all the tender kindness of his race. He rushed to the trunk, and got out the old mantle, in which he wrapped her; he put the scaldino into her hands, he brought her wine, and petted and smiled her back into composure. He carried the largest scaldino in the house, full of the reddest embers, into her stony bedroom. "It is not the cold," he said to himself, "it is the sorrow, poverina! poverina! Let no one say after this that she has not a tender heart." And when she went to bed Niccolo stayed up all night—cheerful, yet sad—to finish the packing, to set everything straight, and to leave the apartment in such order that the Marchese Scaramucci might have no grievance against his tenant, and as small a bill of repairs as possible. Good, kindly soul; he was rather glad though, on the whole, that to-morrow he was going to the new master, who was rich,

and kept a number of servants, and who, being a milordo, might perhaps be cheated now and then in a friendly way.

And next morning Innocent's old world did break up into clouds and vapours. For the last time she stole over to the little church in the dark morning, and said the Lord's Prayer, and then sat still, looking at the little altar, where this time the candles were lighted, and a priest saying mass. The mass had nothing to do with Innocent. The drone of the monotonous voice, the gleam of the candles, made no sort of impression upon her. Her imagination was as little awakened as her heart was. If she thought of anything at all it was, with a sore sense of a wound somewhere, that Frederick had left her, that he had not come near her, that he was happy away from her; but all quite vague; nothing definite in it, except the pang. And then Santa Maria della Spina, and the high houses opposite, and the yellow river below, and the clustered buildings about the Duomo, and all Pisa, in short, melted into the clouds, and rolled away like a passing storm, and the new world began.

What kind of a strange phantasmagoric world this was, full of glares of light and long stretches of darkness; of black, plunging, angry waves, ready

to drown the quivering, creaking, struggling vessel, which carried her and her fortunes; then of lights again wavering and dancing before the eyes, which were still unsteady from the sea; and once more the long sweep of the railway through the night, more lights, more darkness, succeeding and succeeding each other like the changes in a dream—we need not attempt to describe. It was four days after their start from Pisa, when her strength was quite worn out by the continuous and unusual fatigue both to body and mind, her nerves shaken, and all her powers of sensation dulled, when, shuddering at the sight, she came again to the short, but angry, sea, which had to be crossed to England. It was not a "silver streak" that day. There are a great many days in the year, as the traveller knows, in which it is anything but a "silver streak." In short, few things wilder, darker, more tempestuous, and terrible could be conceived than the black belt of Channel across which Innocent fought her way in the Dover steamboat to where a darker shadow lay upon the edge of the boiling water, a shadow which was England. For a wonder she was not sea-sick. Frederick, whose self-control under such circumstances was dubious, had established her in a corner, and then had left her, not coming near her

again till they entered the harbour, which was no unkindness on his part, but an effort of self-preservation, which the most *exigeant* would have approved. He had been very good to her on the journey, studying her comfort in every way, taking care of her almost as Niccolo had done, excusing all her little misadventures with her hand-bag, and the shawl she carried over her arm. He had let her head rest upon his shoulder; he had allowed her to hold his hand fast, when the steam-boat went up and down on the Mediterranean. These days of fatigue had been halcyon days of perfect repose and confidence in her companion. The poor child had never known any love in her barren life, and this kindness, which she did not know either, seemed in her eyes something heavenly, delicious beyond power of description. It had never been possible for her to cling to any one before, and yet her nature and breeding both made her dependent, and helpless in her ignorance. Frederick appeared to her in such a light, as had as yet touched nothing else in earth or heaven. Her heart woke to him and clung to him, but went no further. Her eyes searched all the dark figures on the deck in search of him when self-preservation drove him from her side. A cloud—an additional cloud—came on the

world when he was absent. She felt no interest in the darksome England which loomed out of the mists; no curiosity even about the home it enclosed, or the unknown women who would hereafter so strangely affect her happiness. She gazed blankly at the cliffs rising through the fog, at the lights blown about by the wind, which shone out upon the stormy sea, and the bustle on the shore of the crowd which awaited the arrival of the steamer. All that she felt was again that ache (but slighter than before) to think that Frederick liked to be away from her, chose to leave her. For her part she felt only half living, and not at all real when he was not near enough to be touched. He was all she had left of reality out of the dissolving views into which the past had broken up; she might be dreaming but for him. When he came to her side at last in Dover Harbour, she caught at his arm and clasped it, and stood close up to him, holding on as to an anchor in the midst of all her confusion. Frederick did not dislike the heavy claim thus made upon him. The girl was very young, and almost beautiful in her strange way. She was ice except to him. She had thrown herself into his arms the first time they met, and a certain complacency of superiority which was very sweet,

mingled with the sense of protecting and sustaining care with which he looked upon the creature thus entirely dependent on him.

"Now the worst of our troubles is over," he said cheerfully, though he was very white and even greenish in colour after the last hour's sufferings. "Two hours more, and we shall be at home."

Innocent made no answer. She did not think at all of home, she only clung a little closer to him, as the only interpreter of all the vague and misty wonders which loomed about her. They were just about to step out of the boat, she always clinging to him, when Frederick heard himself called in a coarse but jovial voice, which at first bewildered him with surprise before he recognized it, and then gave him anything but a pleasant sensation.

"Glad to see you again, Mr. Eastwood," it said. "Horrid passage, sir; a thing not to be endured if one could help it. I've been as sick as a dog, and, judging by your colour, so have you."

"No," said Frederick coldly; but it is not easy to be politely calm to a man who has you in his power, and who could "sell you up" to-morrow if he liked, without benefit of clergy. He shivered as he replied, feeling such a terror of the consequences as I should vainly attempt to describe. It was like

the death's head at the feast, suddenly presenting itself when his mind was for the moment free from all dread of it. He turned round (though he had recognized the voice) with supercilious surprise, as if he could not imagine who the speaker was.

"Oh, Mr. ——! You have been in Paris, I presume, ever since I saw you there?"

"Just so," said Batty, "and some jolly evenings we've managed to have since, I can tell you. Not your way—unlimited, you know; but in moderation. By Jove! your way was too good to last. Made out your journey comfortable, eh, Mr. Eastwood? Got a companion now, I see."

Oh, how Frederick blessed that companion for the opaqueness of her observation, for her want of interest in what was done and said around. "Yes, my cousin," he said, in a quiet undertone; and added, "Now I must get her into the train, and find a place for her. I am sorry I have no time to talk to you just now. Don't be afraid that I shall forget the—the business—between us."

"No, I don't think you will," said Batty, with a horse-laugh. "You couldn't if you would, and I shouldn't let you if you wanted to. And, by the way," he said, keeping them back from the wished-for landing, "I recollected after I left you that I had

never given you my address. Stop a moment, I'll find it directly."

"I will come back to you," cried Frederick, desperate, "as soon as I have placed this lady in the train."

"Just a moment," said the man, pulling out his pocket-book. "I have your address, you know. There I have the advantage," he added, with a leer into Frederick's face.

Perhaps there is no ill-doing in this world which escapes punishment one way or other. Frederick had escaped a great deal better than he had any right to hope for till this moment. But now the fates avenged themselves. Though he was cold and shivering, he grew red to his hair with suppressed passion.

"Let me pass, for heaven's sake!" he cried, bursting into involuntary entreaty.

"Here it is," said Mr. Batty, thrusting a card into his hand, and with a chuckle he turned round to some people behind, who were with him, and let his victim go. Frederick hurried his silent companion on shore in a tumult of miserable and angry feeling. It was the first time he had felt the prick of the obligation under which he lay. He did not make the kind and pleasant little speech which he

had intended to make to Innocent as he led her on to English soil. It had been driven out of his head by this odious encounter. Heavens! he thought, if it had been Nelly instead of Innocent! and next time it might be Nelly. He hurried the girl into the train without one word, and threw in his coat, and went off to get some brandy to restore his nerves and his courage. "Hallo! Eastwood!" some one else called out to him. "Bless my life, how green you are! been ill on the crossing, eh?" This is not a confession which the young Englishman is fond of making in a general way, but Frederick nodded and hurried on, ready to confess to anything, so long as he could be left alone. The brandy did him good, driving out the shuddering cold, and putting some sort of spirit into him; for indeed it was quite true that, in addition to the mental shock, he had been ill on the crossing too.

Innocent had paid no attention to this colloquy; she received into her passive memory the voice and face of the man who had addressed her cousin; but she was not herself aware that she had done so. She was grieved when Frederick left her, and glad when he came back in a few minutes to ask if she would have anything. "No; only if you will come," she said, putting out her hand. That was all she

thought of. A kind of tremour had taken possession of her, not of expectation, for she was too passive to speculate—a thrill of the nerves as she approached the end of her journey. "You will not go away from me when we get there?" she said piteously. What with his disagreeable acquaintances, and his too clinging charge, poor Frederick had enough on his hands.

"Of course I shall not go away; but, Innocent, you must put me in the second place now," he said, patting her shoulder kindly as he sat down beside her.

The answer she made was to put her hand softly within his arm. I don't think Mrs. Eastwood would have approved of it, and Frederick found it rather embarrassing, and hoped the old lady did not observe it who was in the other corner of the railway carriage; she dozed all the way to town, and he did not know her; but still a man does not like to look ridiculous. Otherwise it was not unpleasant of itself.

And then Innocent's bewildered eyes were dazzled by a blaze of lights, and noise, and crowding figures. Out of that she was put into the silence of a dingy cab, and left there, feeling unutterably lonely, and not at all sure that now at the last moment he had not forsaken her, while Frederick was absent look-

ing after the luggage, that dismal concluding piece of misery after a long journey. By the time he came back to her she was crying, and sick with suspense and terror. And then came a last quick drive, through gleaming lights and intervals of darkness, by shop-windows and through dim lanes, till at last a door flew open in the gloom, sending forth light and warmth, and two figures rushed out of it, and took her passive into their arms. She held Frederick fast with one hand, while she gazed at them. This was how she came home.

CHAPTER XI.

AT HOME AND NOT AT HOME.

ALL the events of that evening passed like a dream over the mind of Innocent. The warm, curtained, cushioned, luxurious room, with its soft carpets, its soft chairs, its draperies, its fulness and crowd of unfamiliar details, the unknown faces and sounds, the many pictures on the walls, the conversation quick and familiar, carried on in a language which to be sure she knew perfectly, but was not accustomed to hear about her—all bewildered and confused her. She sat and looked at them with an infantile stare of half-stupefied dull wonder, not altogether understanding what they said, and not at all taking in the meaning even when she understood the words. She made scarcely any response to their many questions. She said "Yes" when they asked if she were tired, but nothing at all in

reply to her aunt's warm and tearful welcome. She felt disposed to wonder why they kissed her, why they unfastened her wraps and put a footstool for her feet before the fire, and made so much fuss about her. Why did they do it? Nothing of the kind would have occurred to Innocent had they gone to her. She did not understand their kindness. It seemed to her to require some explanation, some clearing-up of the mystery. She sat with her lips shut close, with her eyes opened more widely than usual, turning to each one who spoke. She had felt no curiosity about them before she arrived, and she did not feel any curiosity now. They were new, and strange, and wonderful, not to be accounted for by any principles within her knowledge. They placed her by the fire, they took off her hat and cloak, they established her there to thaw and be comforted.

"Dinner will be ready directly—but will you have a cup of tea first?" said Mrs. Eastwood, stroking her lank hair.

"No," said Innocent, "I am not ill." She thought as was natural with her Italian training, that tea was a medicine.

"Would you like to go up to your room before dinner, or are you too tired, dear?" said Nelly.

"I will stay here," said the girl. This was how she answered them, always gazing at the one who spoke to her, and ever turning to give a wistful look at Frederick, who, for his part, felt himself somehow responsible for the new guest, and annoyed by the wondering looks of his mother and sister.

"Let her alone," he said with some impatience. "Don't you see she is frightened and tired, and scarcely understands you? We have been travelling day and night since Tuesday. Innocent, are you very much tired? Should you like to go to bed? or are you able to sit up to dinner? Don't be afraid."

She looked up at him instantly responsive. She put out her hand to him, and grasped his, though this was a formula which he could have dispensed with. "Are you to sit up to dinner?" she asked. "Then I will too."

"I am the only one she knows," he said, turning to the others, half pleased, half ashamed; perhaps more than half ashamed, the young man being English, and in deadly terror of being laughed at. "I hope I am old enough to sit up to dinner," he said, carrying off a little confusion in a laugh; "but I confess after all this travelling I am tired too."

"Let me look at you, Frederick," said Mrs. East-

wood. "I see you are better; you are not so pale as when you went away. Your illness, on the whole, must have agreed with you. Why didn't you write, you unkind boy? Nelly and I would have gone over to nurse you —— "

Heaven forbid! Frederick said to himself; the bare suggestion gave him a livelier idea of the dangers he had escaped than anything else had done. "No, no," he said, "a journey at this time of the year is no joke. That was the very reason I did not write; and then, of course, I was anxious to get on as quickly as I could to poor Innocent, who was being made a victim of by all the ladies, the doctress, and the clergywoman, and all the rest ——"

"Was she made a victim of?" said Nelly, looking at the new comer in her easy-chair with doubtful wonder.

Innocent divined rather than understood that they were talking of her, and once more raised her eyes to Frederick with a soft smile which seemed to consent to everything he said. She seemed to the ladies to be giving confirmation to his words, whereas, in reality, it was but like the holding out of her hand—another way of showing her confidence and dependence on him.

"I took her out of their hands," said Frederick,

with a delightful indifference to facts; "they would have sent her to you with a Pisan outfit, peasant costume for anything I can tell. I was very glad to get there in time. I found the poor child living in the house all alone, not even with a maid, and a dark, ghostly, dismal sort of house, which you would have thought would have frightened her to death."

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Eastwood, "alone without even a maid? Oh, that is dreadful! Were you frightened, my poor darling?"

"No," said Innocent, glancing at her questioner quickly, and then returning to her habitual gaze upon Frederick. This was not encouraging; but of course Frederick had been her first acquaintance, and she had come to know him. His mother dismissed him summarily to wash his hands before dinner. "Don't think of dressing," she said; and Innocent was left alone with them. She sat quite passive, as she had done with Mrs. Drainham, turning her eyes from one to the other with a wistful sort of fear, which half amused, half angered them. To be sure, in her fatigued state, there was every excuse to be made.

"You must not be afraid of us, my dear," said Mrs. Eastwood. "Nelly and I will love you very much if you will let us. It will be a great change

for you, and everything is very different here from what it is in Italy. I have lived in Italy myself when your poor dear mamma was a young girl like you. Do you remember your mamma, Innocent?"

"No."

"I think you must remember her a little. You are not like her. You must be like the Vanes, I suppose. Have you ever seen any of the Vanes, your father's relations?"

"No," said Innocent, again getting bewildered, and feeling that this time she ought to say yes. Nelly came to the other side of the chair and took her hand, looking kindly at her. Why would these people say so much—do so much? Why did not they leave her alone?

"Mamma, she is stupefied with cold and fatigue," said Nelly. "To-morrow she will be quite different. Lean back in the chair, and never mind us. We will not talk to you any more."

But she did not lean back in her chair; she had not been accustomed to chairs that you could lean back in. She sat bolt upright, and looked at them with her eyes wide open, and looked at everything, taking in the picture before her with the quick eyes of a savage, though she was confused about what they said. How close and warm everything was,

how shut in, no space to walk about or to see round the crowded furniture! The room, in English eyes, though very well filled, was not at all crowded with furniture; but Innocent compared it with the Palazzo Scaramucci, where every chair and table stood distinct in its own perspective. How different was the aspect of everything! the very tables were clothed, the windows draped to their feet, the room crammed with pictures, books, things, and people. Innocent seemed to want space; the walls closed and crowded upon her as they do upon people who have just recovered their sight. Mrs. Drainham's drawing-room had been made very comfortable, but it was not like this. The want of height and size struck her more than the wealth and comfort. She was not used to comfort, never having had it—and did not feel the want of it. Even the fire, after the first few minutes of revived animation produced by its warmth, felt stifling to her, as to all Italians. The ladies by her side thought she was admiring everything, which disposed them amiably towards her, but this was very far from the feeling in Innocent's mind.

And after dinner, when they took her to her room, this effect increased. She was led through Mrs. Eastwood's room and Nelly's to that little snug

bright chamber, with its bright fire blazing, the candles burning on the toilette table, the pretty chintz surrounding her with garlands, and the pictures on the walls which had been chosen for her pleasure. With what wonder and partial dismay she looked upon it all! It was not much larger than the great carved chest which stood in a corner of her chamber at the Palazzo Scaramucci, and yet how much had been put into it! The girl was like a savage sighing for her wigwam, and to be shut up here was terrible to her. Mrs. Eastwood and Nelly both led her to this room, explaining, poor simple souls, how they had placed her in the very heart of the house, as it were, that she might not feel lonely. "Both of us, you see, are within call, my dear," said Mrs. Eastwood; "but the room is very small."

"Yes," said Innocent. They had, no doubt, expected her to say in answer to this that the room was delightful, and to show her sense of their kindness by some word of pleasure or admiration. But nothing of the kind followed. She looked vacantly round with a scared, half-stupefied expression. She had no desire to be put into the heart of the house. And there can be no doubt that this absolute want of all effusion, all response even on her part, chilled the warm hearts of her relations. "She is tired,"

they said to each other, excusing her; but that was an imperfect kind of satisfaction. Nelly herself had meant to stay with her to help her to undress. "But perhaps you would rather be alone?" said Nelly.

"Yes," was Innocent's answer; and you may imagine how discomfited poor Nelly felt, who was used to the gregarious way of girls, and did not understand what this could mean.

"I will leave you, then," she said, so completely taken aback that her self-possession failed her. She turned to go away, blushing and disturbed, feeling herself an unwelcome intruder in the room which she had spent so much care upon. Nelly did not know what to make of it. She had never encountered any thing like it in her life, and it puzzled her beyond expression.

"I am here, Miss Ellinor," said the voice of old Alice behind her, which startled Nelly once more; for Alice had disapproved of all the fuss about Innocent's arrival, and had done everything she could to discourage it. "I'll put her to her bed," said Alice. "It's me that am the proper person. Go to your mamma, my dear, and I'll come and tell you when she's comfortable. She canna be expected to be pleasant to-night, for she's tired, and all's new to

her. I've done the same for her mother many a day. Leave her to me."

Innocent took no part in the discussion. She stood in the centre of the little room, longing to be alone. Oh, if they would only go away and leave her to herself! "I never have a maid," she exerted herself to say, when she saw that the tall old woman remained in the room; "I do not want anything. Please go away."

"Maybe it's me that wants something," said Alice authoritatively, and began her ministrations at once, paying very little attention to the girl's reluctance. "Hair clipped short, like a boy's—that's her outlandish breeding," said Alice to herself. "A wild look, like a bit sauvage out of the woods—that's loneliness; and two great glowering een. But no like her mother—no like her mother, the Lord be thanked!"

Then this homely old woman said two or three words, somewhat stiffly and foreignly, in Italian, which made Innocent stare, and roused her up at once. She had no enthusiasm for the country in which she had lived all her life; but still, she had lived there, and the sound of the familiar tongue woke her up out of her stupor. "Are you not English?" she said, "like all the rest?"

"God be thanked, no, I'm no English," said Alice; "but I'm Scotch, and it's no likely that you would ken the difference. I used to be with your mother when she was young like you. I was in Pisa with the family, where you've come from. I have never forgotten it. Do you mind your mother? Turn your head round, like a good bairn, that I may untie this ribbon about your neck."

"Why do you all ask me about my mother?" said Innocent, in a pettish tone. "No, I never knew her; why should I? The lady down-stairs asked me too."

"Because she was your mother's sister, and I was your mother's woman," said Alice. "I'm much feared, my honey, that you've no heart. Neither had your mother before you. Do you mean aye to call my mistress 'the lady down-stairs'?"

"I don't know," said Innocent, in dull stupor. She felt disposed to cry, but could not tell why she had this inclination. "What should I call her? No one ever told me her name," she added, after a moment's pause.

"This will be a bonnie handful," said Alice to herself reflectively. "Did Mr. Frederick never tell you she was your aunt? But maybe you do not ken what that means? She's your nearest kin,

now you've lost that ill man, your father. She's the one that will take care of you and help you, if you're good to her—or whether or no," Alice added, under her breath.

"Take care of me? *He* promised to take care of me," said Innocent, with her eyes lightening up; "I do not want any one else."

"'He,' meaning your cousin," said Alice grimly.

"Frederick. I like his name. I cannot remember the other names. I never have been used to see so many people," said Innocent, at length bursting into speech after her long silence. She could speak to this woman, who was a servant, but she did not understand the ladies in their pretty dresses, who oppressed her with their kindness. "Shall I have to see them every day?" she continued, with a dismal tone in her voice. The corners of her mouth drooped. At this thought she was ready to cry again.

"Go to your bed," said Alice authoritatively. "If I thought you knew what you were saying, my bonnie woman, I would like to put you to the door. The creature's no a changeling, for it says its prayers," she added to herself, when she had extinguished the candles, and left the stranger in her

chamber; "but here's a bonnie handful for the mistress," Alice went on, talking to herself while she arranged Mrs. Eastwood's room for the night, "and plenty of mischief begun already. She's no like her mother, which is a comfort; but there's Ane that is."

Nobody heard these oracular mutterings, however, and nobody in the house knew as much as Alice did, who had no thought in the world but the Eastwoods, and kept her mental life up by diligently putting one thing to another, and keeping watch and ward over the children she had nursed. It was common in The Elms to say that Alice was "a character;" but I do not think any of them had the least idea how distinct and marked her character was, or how deeply aware she was of the various currents which were shaping unconsciously the life of the "family." She was nearly ten years older than Mrs. Eastwood, and had brought her up as well as her daughter, commencing life as a nurserymaid in the house of her present mistress's father, when Mrs. Eastwood was six or seven years old, and her young attendant sixteen. She knew everything, and more than everything, that had taken place in the family since; more than everything, for Alice in her private musings had thought out the mingled story, and divined every-

body's motives, as, perhaps, they scarcely divined them themselves. She had married, when she was thirty, the gardener who took charge of a shooting-box in Scotland, which belonged to Admiral Forbes, the Eastwoods' grandfather, but had been absent from them only about two years, returning at her husband's death to accompany them to Italy, and to settle down afterwards into the personal attendant and superintendent of her young lady's married life. She knew all about them: she knew how it was that the old admiral had made his second marriage, and how his second daughter, Isabel, had developed by the side of her more innocent and simple sister. She recollected a great deal more about Innocent's father and mother than Mrs. Eastwood herself did—more than it was at all expedient or profitable to recollect. And it was not only the past that occupied her mind; she understood the present, and studied it with a ceaseless interest, which the subjects of her study were scarcely aware of; though they had all long ago consented to the fact that Alice knew everything. Mrs. Eastwood thought it right to inform Alice of all the greater events that affected the family, but generally ended such confidences abruptly, with a half-amused, half-angry consciousness that Alice already knew all about them, and

more of them than she herself did. Alice was the only one in all the house who had divined the real character of Frederick. As for the others, she said to herself, with affectionate contempt, that they were "Just nothing, just nothing—honest lads and lasses, with no harm in them." She loved them, but dismissed them summarily from her mind as persons not likely to supply her life with any striking interest; but here was something very different. Life quickened for the observant old woman, and a certain thrill of excitement came into her mind as she put out Mrs. Eastwood's comfortable dressing-gown and arranged all her "things." Mrs. Eastwood herself had furnished but little mental excitement to Alice, but something worth looking into seemed now about to come.

Down-stairs the two ladies looked at each other doubtfully when Nelly went back to the drawing-room. They did not know what to say. Dick was shut up in his own room at work, or pretending to be at work, and Frederick had gone out into the garden to smoke his cigar, though the night was dark and cold. "Well, Nelly?" said Mrs. Eastwood to Nelly; and "Well, mamma?" Nelly replied.

"I do not understand the girl," was Mrs. Eastwood's next speech.

"How could we expect to understand her, just come off a long journey, and stupefied by coming into a strange place? Remember, she never saw any of us before. Don't let us be unreasonable, mamma," cried Nelly; and then she added, in a more subdued tone, "She must be affectionate, for she seemed to cling so to Frederick."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Eastwood, with a long-drawn breath. "My dear," she added, after a pause, "I don't want to anticipate difficulties which may never come; but on the whole it might have been better to send some one else than Frederick. A young man, you know; it is always a risk. I wish I had made up my mind at once to spare Alice——"

"Nonsense, mamma!"

"It is all very well to say nonsense, Nelly, but when you have lived as long as I have——" Mrs. Eastwood said slowly: "However, it cannot be helped now. Do you think she is pretty, Nelly? It's rather a remarkable face."

"I don't know," said Nelly, puzzled. "It would be beautiful in a picture. Wait till she wakes up and comes to life, and then we shall know. Here is Frederick, all perfumed with his cigar. We were talking her over——"

"Yes, I knew you must be pulling the poor child

to pieces," said Frederick, seating himself by the fire. "What have you got to say against her? She is not cut in the common fashion, like all the other girls whom one sees about—and is sick of."

"I should think the other girls cared very little whether you were sick of them or not," retorted Nelly, affronted.

Mr. Frederick Eastwood was one of the young men who entertain a contempt for women, founded on the incontestable consciousness of their own superiority; and it was one of his theories that all women were jealous of each other. Even his mother, he felt, would "pull" the new comer "to pieces," out of pure feminine spite.

"Hush, children," said Mrs. Eastwood; "we have nothing to do with other girls for the moment. This one is very unresponsive, I am afraid. You have seen more of her than we have, Frederick. Had she any friends out yonder? Did she seem to you affectionate?"

Frederick laughed. "I have no reason to complain of any want of affectionateness," he said, pulling his peaked beard with that supreme satisfaction of gratified vanity which no woman can tolerate. Mrs. Eastwood and Nelly looked at each other with

a common wrath, but the mother put up a finger to suppress the impatience of her child.

"Yes, she seemed to turn to you," she said, with as much indifference in her voice as was practicable. "Ring for tea, now, Nelly. Frederick will like to get up-stairs early after his journey. I saw Mr. Bellingham at the office after I got your letter, Frederick. He made rather a joke of your illness, poor boy. I hope you will not wish to go away for some time again. I am told that, though promotion is by seniority, those young men who are most to be depended on are the ones who get secretaryships, and so forth—and you know your income, my dear boy, is but small——"

"Those who get secretaryships, and so forth, are those who have private influence," said Frederick loftily, "which is not my case, mother. Whoever told you so told you stuff and nonsense. Men in office take their own sons and nephews, or their friends' sons and nephews, for their private secretaries—and fellows like me have no chance."

"But Mr. Bellingham, I am sure, had no private influence," urged Mrs. Eastwood; "it must have been merit in his case——"

"There was some political reason, I suppose," said Frederick. "Merit is humbug, you may take

my word for that. By the bye, I think I will just step out to the club for half an hour, to see what is going on. It is rather a fine night——"

"But after your illness, Frederick——"

"Oh, I am all right," he said, going out of the room. If I am obliged to tell the truth I must say that I do not think his departure was any great loss to his mother and sister. Mrs. Eastwood sighed, half because it was the first night of his return, and she felt the slight of his speedy withdrawal, and half because of an old prejudice in her mind that it was best for young men when not engaged to spend their evenings at home. But Frederick never made himself at all delightful at home, after an absence like this, for reasons of which she was altogether unconscious. Nelly did not sigh at all, and if she felt her brother's departure, did so more in anger than in sorrow.

"Are all young men coxcombs like that, I wonder?" she said.

"Hush, Nelly, you are always hard upon Frederick. Most of them are disposed that way, I am afraid; and not much wonder either when girls flatter their vanity. We must teach Innocent not to be so demonstrative," said Mrs. Eastwood. She sighed again, remembering her friend's warning.

"Perhaps Jane Everard was not so much in the wrong, Nelly, after all."

"I suppose people who take the worst view of everything and everybody must be in the right sometimes," said Nelly indignantly—a saying in which there was more truth than she thought.

CHAPTER XII.

A LOVE TALE.

I AM obliged at this moment to interrupt the history of Innocent's entrance into English life by the intrusion of another event which occurred quite suddenly, and without adequate preparation, a few days after the arrival of the traveller, and which threw Innocent for the moment altogether into the shade. It was not a deeply premeditated event, as perhaps it ought to have been, aiming as it did at such very important results, and affecting two lives in so momentous a way. On this particular afternoon there had been a flood of visitors at The Elms, such as now and then occurs without rhyme or reason—every acquaintance the Eastwoods possessed seeming to be moved by an unanimous impulse. From two o'clock until five the callers kept pouring in. On ordinary occasions one or two a day kept the house

lively; this was one of those accidental floods which obey, as philosophers tell us, some fantastic law of their own, like the number of undirected letters put into the post-office. Two gentlemen arrived among the latest, both of whom had hoped to find the ladies alone, and who grinned and shook hands with each other, and told each other the news with the most delightful amiability, though their internal emotions were less sweet. They arrived together, and as the room was still tolerably full, they became each other's companions, and stood in a corner talking with the most confidential aspect, after they had shaken hands with Mrs. Eastwood. Nelly was at the other extremity of the room, at the door-window which opened into the conservatory, talking to Sir Alexis Longueville, a man with a rent-roll as long as his name, whom both the gentlemen I have mentioned regarded with unfavourable feelings.

"What do you suppose people see in that old ass, Molyneux," said Major Railton, "that everybody kootoos to him?"

"His money," said Molyneux sententiously; and for ten minutes more these gentlemen crushed Sir Alexis under their heels as it were, and ground him into powder, though no feminine spite could be involved in their proceedings. He was not an old

ass. He was a cynical middle-aged man of the world, who, notwithstanding his romantic name, had sustained a great many prosaic batterings and fierce encounters with the world. He had come to his fortune after his youth was over, and after he had learned to think badly enough of most people about him, an opinion which was not altered by the great social success he had when he reappeared as Sir Alexis, after a somewhat obscure and not much respected career as Colonel Longueville. It was now generally understood that this hero, the worse for the wear, was disposed to marry, and indeed was on the outlook for a suitable person to become Lady Longueville; a fact which his kind but vulgar sister, Mrs. Barclay, who had married a millionaire, made known wherever she was received. He was "looking for a wife." Major Railton and Mr. Molyneux in their corner were both aware of this fact, and both of them were extremely bitter upon Mrs. Eastwood for allowing him, as she did quite placidly, to stand talking to Nelly "for hours," as Mr. Molyneux expressed it afterwards.

"What a pity that the best of women should be so mercenary!" he said to his companion.

"They will give anything for a handle to their names," said the misanthropical major, stroking his

moustache, with discomfiture in his countenance. He had come with an estimate in his pocket for the work that had to be done at the stables, and had calculated on an hour at least of confidential talk.

And Nelly stood and talked to Sir Alexis, pointing out to him quite eagerly the different flowers that thrust their pretty heads against the glass, peering into the room. He knew about flowers. This innocent taste reigned strangely in his cynical bosom among many other inclinations much less praiseworthy. He laughed with Nelly over their Latin names, and told her stories about them and about his conservatories at Longueville. Perhaps he was not aware of the reckless way in which he was laying himself open to the remarks of the young men in the room, who did not leave him a shred of reputation to cover him, as they stood behind, snarling to each other, and united in a common enmity. He was more amusing than either of them, and though he had no particular designs upon Nelly, he liked her fresh young face, and her interest in all that he said. Perhaps, too, a man who is aware of all the advantages of the youth which he has outlived, has a pleasure in proving himself more entertaining than younger men. He detained Nelly, and Nelly was not unwilling to be detained. She

had perceived the entrance of the two at the end of the room, and rather, I fear, enjoyed their gloomy looks; or rather, she thought nothing whatever about Major Railton, but was guiltily glad to see the gloom on the countenance of young Molyneux.

"It will teach him to be full five days without calling," she said to herself. She had not acknowledged even to herself that she was in love with young Molyneux, but she had an inward conviction that he was in love with her, and on the whole liked him for it. Is it not always a sign of good taste at least? Therefore she stood and talked to Sir Alexis, looking up brightly in his face, till he, who had no designs that way, was half subjugated, and asked himself suddenly whether Nelly Eastwood would not do? which was going a very long way. Time, however, and Mrs. Barclay's horses, could not wait for ever, and at last the baronet was borne away.

"Come to me soon, Nelly, dear, and finish what you have begun," said that lady, whispering in her ear as she took leave. Finish what she had begun! Nelly had no idea what she could mean.

By this time most of the visitors were gone, and Nelly, after a few minutes' talk with the pair at the other end of the room, proceeded to execute some

business which she had been kept from doing before. "I am sure Major Railton and Mr. Molyneux will excuse me," she said; "but I must get my primroses now before any one else comes in——"

"I don't think you will find any," said Mrs. Eastwood, making her a sign to stay. But it was getting dark, and Nelly, who was perverse, pretended not to understand. Any pleasure she might have in the society of one of the two was neutralized by the presence of both, and perhaps there was even a thought in her mind that a young lover might take heart of grace and follow. In the conservatory her white-furred jacket and little flower basket were lying on a chair. Before she could throw on the wrap Molyneux had joined her. "I think Railton has some business to talk about," he said aloud, with a slight nod of concealed triumph to his adversary; "May I come upon the flower-gathering expedition? Gathering flowers by moonlight has quite a poetical sound."

"It is too cold to be poetical," said Nelly. There had been just enough between this girl and boy to give them both a thrill of the heart when they went out of sight and hearing, into the stillness of the garden, where, indeed, to tell the truth, few primroses were as yet to be found. It was one of those

lovely nights of early spring which sometimes succeed a boisterous day. The wind had fallen with the evening. The sky in the west was still full of colour, a pink flush extending far into the blue. The gorgeous sunset clouds had broken up, but this great rose-tinted pavilion still stood, spreading out its film of lovely colour over the house. On the garden side there was a stretch of clear sky, untinged by this dispersing veil of glory; clear, somewhat cold, pale, and luminous, with one star set in the midst of it; and, separated from this blue bit of heaven by billows of fleecy cloud, a soft, clear, young moon in her first quarter. It was cold, but to think of cold was impossible with such a heaven above them—impossible at least, for these two, who were young, and who were together. They went along under the trees for some time without saying anything, except a little exclamation about the beauty of the sky.

"I am tired," said Nelly at length; "I am so glad it is over. Calls are the stupidest of all things. If people would come in the evening, as they do abroad—but English people will never understand."

"Your visitors were not all stupid, I think," said Molyneux, warming with the heat of combat.

"Oh no; Sir Alexis, for instance, was very amusing," said Nelly, feeling by instinct what was coming, and defying her fate.

"You seemed to think so," said the young man, with the loftiest tone of disinterested comment.

"And indeed I did think so; he is excellent company," said the girl.

Thus the first parallels of warfare were opened. The pair went on quite beyond the bit of lawn where the primroses grew, and the red in the west stretched out as if to cover them, and the moon in the east looked down as if it were hanging over some battlement of heaven to watch. Nelly's delicate nostrils had dilated a little with a sense of coming battle, and as for Molyneux, he held his head high like a war horse.

"Yes, I am aware that ladies take that view sometimes; he is not popular among men," he said, with lofty calm.

"I suppose men are jealous of him," said Nelly. "Oh dear, yes, men are very jealous of each other. If you think a girl can have been out two seasons without perceiving that——"

"I am sorry we should have given you such a bad opinion of us. I am at a loss to understand," said Mr. Molyneux solemnly, "what kind of creature

the man could be who would be jealous of an old *roué* like Longueville. His character is too well known among men, I assure you, Miss Eastwood, to make any such feeling possible."

Nelly coloured with pride and shame. "He ought to have a label on him, then, to warn the ignorant. Not knowing what his crimes are, I cannot judge him; he is very amusing, that is all I know."

"And that, of course, makes up for everything; and when any one ventures to warn you, Miss Eastwood, instead of listening, you turn your displeasure against the unfortunate man who feels it on his conscience——"

"Mr. Molyneux," cried Nelly, quickly interrupting him, "I don't know what right one gentleman, whom mamma knows, has to warn me against another. Mamma is the person to be spoken to if there is really anything to say."

Thus the quarrel flashed and fizzed to the point of explosion; and what would have happened—whether they would have been driven apart in fragments, and their budding romance blown into dust and ruin in the ordinary course of events, had Molyneux responded in the same tone, I cannot say; but there are resources at the command of lovers which are not open to the general public. He did not go on

in the same tone. He became suddenly lachrymose, as young men in love are permitted to be on occasion.

"Miss Eastwood," he said dolefully, "there have been times when I have ventured to think that you would not quite place me on the same level with the last new comer——"

"Oh, no," said Nelly, with compunction, "I beg your pardon, that was not what I meant. We have known you a long time, Mr. Molyneux, and, I am sure, have always looked upon you as—a friend."

"Well, as—a friend," he said, in the same pathetic tone, "might I not be allowed to say something when I saw that you were being deceived? Dear Miss Eastwood, could I stand by, do you think, knowing all I do of you, and see a man making his way into your esteem under false pretences?"

"Making his way into my esteem!" cried Nelly with frank laughter. "Please don't be so solemn. You can't think surely for a moment that I *cared* for that old Sir Alexis!"

"You are quite sure you don't?" cried the lover, brightening up.

"Sure! Now didn't I say it was all jealousy?" cried Nelly, laughing; but when she had said the words she perceived the meaning they might bear,

and blushed violently, and stopped short, as people in embarrassing circumstances constantly do.

"You are quite right, as you always are," said Molyneux, stopping too, and putting himself directly in front of her. If it were not that the women who are being proposed to are generally too much agitated to perceive it, a man about to propose has many very funny aspects. Young Molyneux placed himself directly in Nelly's way; he stood over her, making her withdraw a step in self-defence. His face became long, and his eyes large. He put out his hands to take hers, if he could have got them. "Yes, you are right," he said, more lachrymose than ever; "you are always right. I should be jealous of an angel if he came too near you. I am jealous of everybody. Won't you say something? Won't you give me your hand? I don't care for anything in the world but you, or without you."

"Mr. Molyneux!" cried Nelly, drawing a little back, with her heart beating and her cheeks burning, in the soft, starry twilight. He had got her hands somehow, in spite of her, and was advancing closer and closer. How unforeseen and unintended it all was! Neither of them had meant anything half an hour ago of this tremendous character. But Molyneux by this time felt sure that his life de-

pended upon it, and that he had thought of nothing else for ages; and Nelly's heart beat so loud that she thought it must be heard half a mile off, and feared it would leap away from her altogether. Their voices grew lower and lower, their shadows more confused in the young moonlight, which made at the most but a faint outline of shadow. There grew to be at last only a murmur under the bare branches, all knotted with the buds of spring, and only one blot of shade upon the path, which was softly whitened by that poetic light. This happened in the Lady's Walk, which was on the other side of the lawn from the elm trees, narrower and quite arched and overshadowed with branches. The pink had scarcely gone out of the sky overhead, and the one star was still shining serenely in its luminous opening, when the whole business was over. You might have been in the garden without seeing, and certainly without hearing; but then matters were delightfully arranged for such interviews in the leafy demesne of The Elms.

"Oh, dear! I have forgotten my primroses," said Nelly; "and what will they think of us indoors?"

"Never mind; Railton has been very busy talking to your mother about bricks and slates," said Molyneux, with a laugh of irrepressible

triumph. They both laughed, which was mean of Nelly.

"Oh, hush! What has poor Major Railton to do with it?" she said. She was leaning against a lime tree, a spot which she always remembered. It was cold, but neither of them felt it. Nelly's little toes were half frozen, and she did not mind.

"Look! all the sunset is dying away," said Molyneux. "It would not go, Nelly, till it knew how things were going to turn out. 'Go not, happy day, from the shining fields——'"

"Don't talk nonsense—you should say, from the sodden lawn," said Nelly. "Let us get the primroses now, or what can I say to mamma?"

"We shall both have a great deal to say to her. She will never once think of the primroses, Nelly."

"Oh, don't call me 'Nelly' so loud; some one will hear you. Must we go and tell directly?" said the girl, with a half whimper, which the foolish young man thought celestial. This to be said by Nelly, a girl who had never in all her life kept a secret half an hour from her mother! The fact was that she wanted to have the telling herself, and quaked at the thought of presenting this ardent personage to her mother, and probably having her dignity compromised before that mother's very eyes by "some of

his nonsense." Nelly was very shy, and half ashamed of coming into the light and looking even her wooer himself in the face.

There were but a very few primroses, and these were half frozen, cowering among their leaves. Young Molyneux carried away a little cluster of them, and gave another to Nelly, which was not placed in her basket, and then they made another final round of the garden, and walked down the elm-tree avenue solemnly arm in arm. How quickly the mind gets accustomed to any revolution! This little concluding processional march threw them years in advance of the more agitating contiguity of the Lady's Walk.

"This is how we shall walk about everywhere ten years hence, when we are sober old married people," he said; and there glanced over the imaginations of both a sudden picture, which both would have been sadly disconcerted to have described. A little tremulous laugh went from one to the other. How much emotion that cannot express itself otherwise has vent in such soft laughter! And a sense of the calm of happiness to come, so different from this delightful dream of the beginning, yet issuing naturally from it, stole over them and stilled their young hearts.

This was what was going on in the garden while Major Railton, not without many a horrible thought of his rival's advantages, was talking bricks and slates, as Molyneux flippantly said, to Mrs. Eastwood. They had come to the length of a pipe and water-butt for the rain-water, and the plumber's estimate, when Nelly and Molyneux were gathering the primroses. How the gallant major's heart was being torn asunder in the midst of those discussions, I dare not attempt to describe. He had seated himself so that he could see into the garden; but the flicker of the firelight filled the room, and the Lady's Walk was invisible from the windows.

"Don't you think Miss Eastwood will catch cold? There is an east wind, I fear," he said, in the very midst of the discussion about the plumber.

"I told Nelly to wrap herself up," said Mrs. Eastwood calmly. She was not afraid of the east wind. The Eastwoods had never been known to have any delicacy about the chest. And as for a more serious danger, Nelly's, mother, secure in full possession of her child, had not even begun to think of that.

She was scarcely alarmed even when the two entered somewhat flushed and embarrassed, as soon as Major Railton, who, poor man, had an engagement, had withdrawn, breathing fire and flame.

"What a colour you have, Nelly!" said Mrs. Eastwood innocently. "I suppose it is the wind. The major tells me the wind is in the east. You should not have stayed out so long. Come to the fire and warm yourselves, both of you. I see you have got no primroses after all."

"There were none," said Nelly, guiltily putting her hand over the little cluster in her belt. "It is too cold for them; but I don't think I ever was out on such a lovely night."

"You have no idea how beautiful it is," said young Molyneux—and then he took his leave in the most embarrassed way. When he clutched one of her hands and held it fast, and groped in the dark for the other, Nelly thanked heaven, in mingled fright and gratitude, that she had put a stop to his intention of at once telling her mother. What might he not have done before Mrs. Eastwood's very eyes?

"But, Nelly," said the mother, when he was gone, "you should not have stayed so long out of doors. I don't want to be absurd, or to put things into your head; but Ernest Molyneux is quite a young man, and very nice-looking, and just the sort of person to have stories made up about him—and really what object you could both have, wandering

about on a cold night, except chatter and non-sense——"

Nelly was kneeling before the fire, warming her cold little fingers. At this address she sidled up to her mother's side, and put her flushed cheek down on Mrs. Eastwood's silken lap, and began with the most coaxing and melting of voices,—

"Mamma!"

It is not to be wondered at if an event like this happening quite suddenly and unexpectedly in an innocent young house which had not yet begun to afflict itself with love-stories should for the moment have eclipsed everything, and put the strange inmate and all the circumstances of her first appearance at once into the shade.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONSULTATIONS.

THE commotion produced in The Elms by the above event was very great. It was the first experience of the family in this kind of thing, and it affected every-body, from Mrs. Eastwood down to the kitchen-maid. Frederick was perhaps the least moved of all. He intimated it as his opinion that Molyneux was all right, seeing that he had a father before him; that he wondered at Nelly's taste, but supposed it was her own look-out, and if she was pleased, no one had any right to interfere. He made this speech rather dis-agreeable to his sister from the little shrug of the shoulders with which he announced his surprise at her taste; but otherwise he was friendly enough. Dick, for his part, said little, but he walked round her with a certain serious investigation in the inter-vals of his studies.

"You look exactly as you did yesterday; I can't see any difference," said Dick. "Why don't you put on another kind of gown, or pin Molyneux's card on you, to show you are disposed of?"

To this, however, Nelly paid no more attention than she did to the comments of Winks, who came and wagged his tail at her in a knowing, good-humoured sort of way. When Molyneux came to see Mrs. Eastwood next morning, Winks met him at the door, escorted him to the dining-room, where he was to have his audience, and then trotted in on three legs to where Nelly was sitting, and wagged his tail confidentially. "A very good fellow, on the whole, I assure you," he said as plainly as could be said by that medium of communication.

Nelly did not sit in awful suspense while her lover was unfolding himself to her mother. She knew that mother well enough to be sure that nothing untoward would come in the course of her true love. But she awaited their coming with a certain importance and expectation. They had a long conversation in the dining-room, longer perhaps than Nelly approved. Mr. Molyneux had a great deal to say to Mrs. Eastwood. No one could be less disposed to "repent at leisure" after the hot haste of his declaration, but yet it is very probable, had he had time to think, that

he would have decided on the prudence of waiting longer. When it occurred to him that he must tell Mrs. Eastwood that he was earning nothing, but lived on the allowance his father gave him, it made the young man uncomfortably hot and nervous. He avoided the mother's eye as he told this part of the story, dwelling much upon what he would do in the future, and his eagerness to provide for Nelly "all the comforts she had been used to." Mrs. Eastwood, though she was not a woman of business, knew enough about the world to shake her head at this. She was very well inclined to Molyneux, both for his own sake and for Nelly's. He was good-looking, well-mannered, and always nicely behaved to herself, which naturally has a certain influence upon a mother. And his connexions were all that could be wished. Mr. Molyneux, Q.C., who was recognized by everybody as going to be Mr. Justice Molyneux at the very first vacancy, was perfectly satisfactory as a father-in-law for Nelly, and would secure for Nelly's family a comfortable certainty of being well-lawyered all their lives. And they were "nice people;" there was, on the whole, nothing in the world to be said against Mrs. Molyneux, Ernest's mother, or the Misses Molyneux, his sisters. But, nevertheless, as it is strictly necessary for a young couple to have

something to live on, Mrs. Eastwood shook her head.

"Nelly has five thousand pounds," she said; "but with my boys to place out in the world, I shall not be able to give her any more, and that is not much to depend upon. And, as a matter of principle, I don't like to see young people depending upon allowances from their fathers and mothers—unless it might be an eldest son, with landed property coming to him. I don't think it is the right way."

Molyneux was rather surprised at this display of wisdom. He thought some one must have put it into her head. He had meant to slur over his want of income in his interview with the mother, as he could not have done with a father. And then Mrs. Eastwood was so "jolly," so good-natured, and kind, that he did not expect his position to be regarded as involving any want of principle. It must not be supposed, however, that the young man had any intention of deceiving, or that he was aware of having done wrong in obeying his impulse, and hastening by so many weeks or months his explanation with Nelly. Yet he felt that but for that overwhelming impulse it might have been prudent to have postponed the explanation; and now he received a sudden check, and for a moment experienced the sensations

of a man who has been proceeding on false pretences, and did not know what to say.

"I am afraid you will think I have been premature," he said. "The fact is, I should have made my way first before I ventured—but then, Mrs. Eastwood, you must make allowances for me, and recollect that to see Nelly often, and yet to continue quite prudent and master of myself——"

"But you need not have seen Nelly quite so often," said Mrs. Eastwood with a smile.

"Supposing I had stayed away, what should you have thought of me? That I was a despicable fellow, laying myself out to please her, and then running away when I thought I had gone too far."

"I don't think I should have thought anything of the kind," said Mrs. Eastwood, in that easy way which is so disconcerting to people who feel that the eyes of the world ought to be upon them. "I should have thought you were occupied, or had other engagements. Indeed, until Nelly told me last night, I never had distinctly identified you as being fond of her, Mr. Molyneux. No doubt it was my stupidity, but I should not have remarked it; I don't know whether she might have done so."

Molyneux felt considerably crushed by this calm and tolerant judgment, but he went on.

"You may be sure this state of things won't last," he said; "I have a motive now, and I shall set to work. Of course I cannot press for an early marriage, as I should otherwise have done had I been wise, and made my preparations first——"

"No, of course not," said Mrs. Eastwood. This gave her great pleasure, practically, but theoretically I am obliged to confess that she half despised her future son-in-law for his philosophy. It was quite right, and relieved her mind from a load. But still a woman likes her child to be wooed hotly, and prefers an impatient lover, unwilling to wait. Such an one she would have talked to, and reasoned down into patience, but, theoretically, she would have liked him the best.

"You will not oppose me?" said Molyneux, taking her hand; "you will be a good mother to me, and let me see Nelly, and be a sort of new son, to make up to me for having to wait? You are always good, to everybody—you won't keep *me* at arm's length?"

"No," said Mrs. Eastwood, "I won't keep you at arm's length, for that would be to punish Nelly; but I think you should not have spoken till your prospects were a little more clear."

"They are clear enough," said the anxious lover.

"It is only that I have been idle, and wanted energy; but now no man can have a stronger motive——"

Mrs. Eastwood shook her head again, but she smiled likewise, and gave him her hand, and even permitted a filial salute, which reddened her comely cheek, and softened her heart to Nelly's betrothed. Perhaps, under the circumstances, it was permissible for a man to be imprudent. Molyneux spent the rest of the day in and about The Elms, appearing and disappearing, hanging about Nelly, disturbing all the household arrangements, and communicating to the visitors premature information as to what had happened. Not that he made any confidences, but that his mere presence there all the afternoon, his look of possession and triumph, the little air of being at home, which the young man could not resist taking upon himself, told the tale more clearly than words. Mrs. Barclay ran in "just for a moment," as she said, to beg Nelly to go with her next day to a horticultural show, and "finish what you have begun, you little puss," she whispered in the girl's ear. "What have I begun?" Nelly asked, bewildered, while Molyneux, without any assignable reason, was so rude as to burst out laughing in his enjoyment of the joke. He put Mrs. Barclay into her carriage as if

he had been the son of the house, she said afterwards, a proceeding which sent her away with a certain vague disquiet and resentment, though of course, as she allowed, she had no right to interfere. Major Railton, too, when he called about the plumber's work, was infinitely disgusted to find Molyneux there, and to leave him there, when, after long waiting, he was obliged to relinquish the hope of outstaying his rival. "I must go," he said at length, in tart and ill-tempered tones, "for, alas! I am not so lucky as you young fellows with nothing to do. I have my duties to attend to." This was a poisoned arrow, and struck the whole happy group, mother, daughter, and lover, with equal force.

"I am sure, Major Railton, you are an example to us all," said Mrs. Eastwood; "always so ready to serve others, and yet with so much of your own work to do. But I hope Mr. Molyneux has his duties too."

"Yes, I have my duties," said the lover, in his insolent happiness turning a beaming countenance upon the unsuccessful one. It was growing dark, and he was so impertinent as to give a little twitch to Nelly's sleeve in the obscurity, under Major Railton's very eyes; who did not, indeed, see this flaunting in his face of his adversary's banner, but felt

that there was some bond unrevealed which joined the three before him in a common cause. He went away in a state of irritation for which he could not have given any just reason, and tore the plumber's estimate to pieces when he emerged from the shrubbery in front of The Elms. Mrs. Eastwood had not taken kindly even to his plumber. She had stood by a certain old Sclater, an old jobbing Scotsman, for whom she had a national partiality.

"Why should I bother myself about their concerns? Let them get Molyneux to look after things," the major said to himself, with scorn that transcended all other expression; and he laughed what is sometimes described in literature as a "hollow laugh" of bitterness and sarcasm.

Indeed, I think Major Railton was right, and that Molyneux's supervision of the roofs and water-butts would have come to very little good.

It had been resolved in the family that nothing was to be said about the engagement for the present, as it would in all probability be a long one; and this was how they began to carry out the irresolution. I do not need to add that the servants knew it the first evening, and had already settled where the young people were to live, and what sort of an establishment they would keep up. Winks, too, was aware of

the fact from the first, and, as I have said, was confidentially humorous about it with Nelly, and kept up her courage during the interview between her mother and her lover. But notwithstanding all we have been hearing lately about the communications made by dogs to their friends, I do not think he spread the news out of doors, or if he did whisper it to a crony, that crony was discreet.

On Saturday, which was the day following, Jenny came up from Eton to spend the Sunday with his adoring family. Jenny was extremely unlike his name—a big and bony boy of sixteen, promising to be the biggest of the family, though neither Frederick nor Dick were short. He had big joints and long limbs, and red wrists and prodigious knuckles projecting from the short sleeve of his coat. But notwithstanding so many appearances against him, he was the most intellectual of Mrs. Eastwood's sons—a "sap" at school, and addicted to reading away from school, a fashion of Eton boy with which the world is not familiar. By way of making up for this, he was somewhat rough in his manners, and great in such exercises as demanded strength rather than skill. He was tremendous at football, though no one gave him the credit for clever play and though his "form" was bad, and precluded all

hope of "the boats," he could carry a skiff along at a pace which no one could keep up with, and against the stream was the greatest oar of his years afloat on Thames. In consideration of these qualifications the youth of Eton graciously looked over his "sapping," or rather were vaguely impressed by it—as, to do him justice, the modern schoolboy generally is when intellectual power is combined with the muscular force of which he has a clearer understanding. Jenny was not yet a "swell," but he was in a fair way for being a swell—a title which at Eton bears a very different meaning from its meaning elsewhere. But he was very good to his family when he went home, and tolerant of their ignorance. Jenny's name in the school list was all starred and ribboned, so to speak, with unknown orders of merit, such as the profane eye comprehends not. He had a big Roman letter before his name, and a little Greek one after it, and a double number after that—mystic signs of honours which the Eton man understands, but which I will not attempt to explain. It might have been confusing to a more mature intellect to contemplate all the novelties which were to dawn upon him on this visit; but Jenny was not emotional. He shook hands with his brother-in-law who was to be, with extreme composure.

"I suppose they have told you," said Mr. Molyneux, good-humouredly permitting himself to be inspected by this big boy.

"Yes, they have told me," said Jenny, "but I knew you before."

"You did not know me in my present capacity. Indeed, I am not generally known in my present capacity," said Molyneux; "and I don't quite see why you should have been told. You would never have found out."

"Oh, shouldn't I!" said Jenny. "Last time I was at home, I said, 'He's going to be Mr. Nelly, that fellow;' didn't I, mamma? Of course you are Mr. Nelly. Women don't get half justice in this world. I like her better than you, as a matter of course; so that's your distinction to me."

"Jenny goes in for Women's Rights," said his mother, with a smile.

"Of course I do: I'm a woman's son; oughtn't I to stand up for them? If you mean to tell me old Brownlow there has more sense than my mother, I tell you you're a fool, that's all. Nor Frederick hasn't—not half so much—though he thinks himself such a swell," said Jenny.

In point of negatives, boys, however learned in

Greek and Latin, permit themselves, occasionally, in English, a style of their own.

"I don't want a vote, you silly boy," said Mrs. Eastwood; "it is not in my way."

"You may please yourself about that—but it's a disgrace to England that you shouldn't have it if you like," cried the young politician hotly. And then he sunk suddenly from this lofty elevation, and asked, "Where's the other girl?"

"Do you mean Innocent?"

"I mean her if that's her name," said the boy, colouring slightly. "Don't she stay with the rest of us? Ain't you good to her? Where has she gone?"

"We are as good as we know how to be," said Mrs. Eastwood, glad to plunge into a grievance, and with a new listener. "We don't know what to make of her, Jenny. She does not care for Nelly and me. We have tried to coax her, and we have tried to scold her; but she will stay by herself. She comes down when the bell rings, and she speaks when she is spoken to: that is all; and I am at my wit's end what to do."

"But that is everything a woman ought to be," said Molyneux. "Isn't there a proverb about being seen and not heard, &c.? What a difference from

some people! When I came in to-day, the first thing I heard was some one singing up-stairs—singing so that I felt inclined to dance. I suppose it was not this Innocent?"

"It must be your fault," said Jenny seriously, taking no notice of this interpellation.

"My fault, Jenny!" cried Mrs. Eastwood, getting red; and then she paused, and subdued her tones. "Do you know, dear, I often think it must be. But what can I do?" she said humbly. "I try talking to her, and that fails; and then I try taking no notice. Yes, Jenny, I believe you are right. If I could love her heartily, right out, as I love Nelly——"

"That's unreasonable," said Jenny. "You can't do that, because, you see, we love Nelly by instinct, not for anything in her. She's not bad, for a girl; but if she were as disagreeable as an old cat, still we should have instinct to fall back upon. You have no instinct in respect to the other girl."

"What an odd boy you are," said Mrs. Eastwood, half affronted, half laughing; "and yet I believe there's something in it. But I do blame myself. I want to be kind, very kind, to her; whereas, you know, if I had not been kind to her, but only had loved her at once, I should have done better, I am

sure. As for girls being seen and not heard, I don't think it applies to their families, Mr. Molyneux. It is all very well out in the world——"

"Out in the world one would rather they did say something now and then," said Molyneux. "It may be good, but it is dull. We are in a new cycle of opinion, and don't think as our grandfathers did. At the domestic hearth it might be very nice to have some one who would only speak when she was spoken to. There would be no quarrels then, Nelly, no settings up of independent judgment; no saying, 'Hold your tongue, sir——'"

"That ought to be said, however, sometimes," said Nelly, making a little *moue*.

These were the light-horse skirmishings of conversation, part of that running dialogue about everything which these two young persons carried on in every corner, over everybody's head, and through everybody's talk. The others, to tell the truth, paid very little attention to their chatter, and Jenny came in with a steady march, as of the main body of the army along the beaten road.

"The question is, has she anything to say?" said Jenny. "I have felt myself, sometimes, What is the good of talking? I don't blame you for not being fond of her, mother; for that, I suppose, you

could not help. But she should not be left to go about like a ghost. I don't believe in ghosts," said the youth, propping himself up against the mantel-piece; "they are generally deceptions, or else it is quite impossible to prove them. But when I saw that girl I thought *she* was one. Her face is a face out of a picture: I saw it once at the Louvre, the year we were abroad. And she has something very queer in her eyes; and she glides as if she had not any feet. Altogether she is queer. Don't she take to anybody in the house?"

"She is fond of Frederick, I think," said Mrs. Eastwood, faltering. Jenny formed his lips into the appearance of "Whew!" He was taken by surprise.

"Fond of Frederick, and not care for *them!*" he said to himself, under his breath; this was a very curious indication of character. I am not sure that Jenny did not think, like most other human creatures, that it was possible his own attractions and influence might "bring out" Innocent. He gave her a considerable share of his attention that evening, and kept his eyes upon her. He was a theoretical sort of boy, and had read a great deal of modern poetry, and liked to think that he could analyze character like Mr. Browning. He tried to

throw himself so strongly into her position that he should see the workings of her mind, and why she looked like a ghost. How Jenny succeeded in this noble pursuit of his will be seen hereafter. It occupied his mind very much all that Sunday, during which Nelly and young Molyneux were still in the ascendant, though the first novelty of their glory was beginning to fade.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MOMENTOUS INTERVIEW.

THE course of Nelly's true love did not, however, run so absolutely smooth as might have been supposed from this beginning. Her own family received it, as has been recorded, as a matter concerning Nelly's happiness, with little of those grave considerations about means and money which generally attend the formation of such contracts. Perhaps this might be because she had no father to consider that part of the question, though Mrs. Eastwood did her best to be businesslike. But then Mrs. Eastwood, being only a woman, believed in love, and chiefly considered Nelly's happiness—which after all, if it were involved, was of more importance than money. The other side cared nothing about Nelly's happiness, and not very much for her lover's—it concerned itself with things much more im-

portant, with the fact that five thousand pounds was but a small sum to pay for the honour of being daughter-in-law to Mr. Molyneux, Q.C., and that Ernest might have done better. And though Ellinor Eastwood was of better blood than the Molyneuxes, and better connexions, and really possessed something of her own, whereas her lover had nothing, his friends did not hesitate to say among themselves that Mrs. Eastwood had long had her eye upon him, that the Eastwoods had "made a dead set at him," and many other flattering expressions of the same kind, such as are liberally used in polite society whenever a young man is "caught," according to the equally polite expression, by the young woman who, of course, has been angling for him all her life long. This was the way in which the matter was regarded by Ernest's family, who were very much like other people, neither better nor worse, and took the conventional way of treating the subject. They had not a word to say against Nelly, but were convinced she "had made a dead set at him." Such is the way of the world.

A whole week passed before the Molyneuxes took any notice, and then it was announced to Mrs. Eastwood that the head of the house, the future judge, was to call upon her before he went to his chambers

in the morning. Mrs. Eastwood had been put upon her dignity by this treatment of her, and though she had allowed Earnest to come to the Elms constantly, and to dine there every evening, her manner had become day by day a little colder to him. This made Nelly unhappy, who coaxed and hung about her mother with appealing eyes.

"But you like Ernest? You are sure you like him?" she would ask ten times in a day.

"I have nothing to say against Ernest. It is his family, who are not acting as we have a right to expect of them," answered her mother; and she received with great gravity the announcement of Mr. Molyneux's intended visit. She would not allow to any one that she was excited by it, but the family breakfasted half an hour earlier on that particular morning, in order that everything might be cleared away, and the room in order for this interview. The dining-room was Mrs. Eastwood's business room, where she transacted all her more important affairs. There is something in the uncompromising character of a dining-room which suits business; the straight-backed chairs up and down, without compromising curves or softness, the severe square rectangular lines of the table, the sideboard ponderous and heavy, tons of solid mahogany—even

the pictures on the walls, which were all portraits, and of a gravely severe aspect—made it an appropriate state chamber for great occasions. When Mr. Molyneux was ushered in, he found Mrs. Eastwood seated on a hard chair before the table, with a large inkstand and all her housekeeping books before her. He was amused by the *pose*, being clever enough to perceive that it, at least, was not quite genuine, but he lacked the power to go further, and immediately made a vulgar estimate of her, such as vulgar-minded men invariably make of women whose youth and good looks are waning. Mr. Molyneux was a great speaker, a powerful pleader, but a vulgar-minded man notwithstanding. He was loosely made and loosely dressed, with a certain largeness and breadth about him which impressed his hearers as if it had been a moral quality—and his face was loquacious, especially the mouth, which had large lips, and lines about them bearing token of perpetual motion. These lips, and the peculiar way in which, in repose, they closed upon each other, were enough to prove to any spectator that his powers of speech were not to be despised. It was not an eloquent mouth. There is a great difference between powerful loquacity and real eloquence. He was not eloquent. A lofty subject

would have disconcerted him, and when he attempted to treat an ordinary subject in a lofty way, his grandeur became bathos, and called forth laughter when tears were intended. But he was tremendously fluent, and he was popular. He did almost what he liked with the ordinary British jury, and his name in a bad case was almost as good as a verdict of acquittal.

When this man was ushered in by Brownlow with an importance befitting the occasion, Mrs. Eastwood momentarily felt her courage fail her. She knew him but slightly, and had never come into much personal contact with him, and she had that natural respect, just touched by a little dread for him, which women often entertain for men of public eminence who have gained for themselves a prominent place in the world. Nor did he do anything to diminish her agitation. He looked at her with cool grey eyes which twinkled from the folds and layers of eyelids that surrounded them, and with a half sarcastic smile on his face; and he called her "ma'am," as he was in the habit of doing when he meant to bully a female witness. Mrs. Eastwood, striving vaguely against the feeling, felt as if she too was going to be cross-examined and to commit herself, which was not a comfortable frame of mind.

"So our children, ma'am, have been making fools of themselves," he said, with a twinkle of his eyes, after the preliminary observations about her health and the weather were over. He followed the words with a chuckle at the folly of the idea; and Mrs. Eastwood, who was anxiously determined to fill the part of "mère noble," was taken aback, and scarcely knew what to reply.

"They have taken a step," she said, breathless, "which must very seriously affect their happiness——"

"Just so," said Mr. Molyneux, "and you and I must see what can be done about it. Ernest is not a bad fellow, ma'am, but he is sadly imprudent. He plunges into a step like this, without ever thinking what is to come of it. I suppose he has told you what his circumstances are?"

Mrs. Eastwood replied by a somewhat stiff inclination of her head.

"Precisely like him," said his father, chuckling. "Not a penny to bless himself with, nor the least idea where to find one; and accordingly he goes and proposes to a pretty girl, and makes up his mind, I suppose, to set up housekeeping directly—Heaven help him!—upon nothing a year."

"This is not what he has said to me," said Mrs.

Eastwood. "In the first place, though frankly avowing that he had nothing—beyond his allowance from you—I have understood from him that by greater diligence in the pursuit of his profession——"

Mrs. Eastwood was interrupted here by a low "Ho, ho!" of laughter from her visitor—a very uncomfortable kind of interruption. To tell the truth, feeling that things were against her, and determined not to let down Nelly's dignity, she had taken refuge in a grandeur of expression which she herself was conscious might be beyond the subject. No woman likes to be laughed at; and Mrs. Eastwood grew twenty times more dignified, as she became aware of the levity with which the other parent treated the whole affair.

"Ho! ho! ho! I recognize my boy in that," said Mr. Molyneux. "I beg your pardon, but Ernest is too great a wag to be resisted. Greater diligence in the pursuit of his profession! He ought to be made lord chancellor on the spot for that phrase. Are you aware, my dear ma'am, that he has never done anything, that boy of mine, in the pursuit of his profession, or otherwise, since he was born?"

"Am I to understand, Mr. Molyneux," said Mrs. Eastwood, slightly tremulous with offence and

agitation, "that your object is to break off the engagement between my daughter and your son?"

"Nothing of the sort, ma'am; nothing of the sort," said Mr. Molyneux cheerfully. "I have no objections to your daughter; and if it did not happen with her, it would happen with some one else. It is for both our interests, though, that they don't do anything foolish. What they intend is that we should pay the piper——"

"You must do me the favour to speak for yourself and your son," said Mrs. Eastwood, with spirit. "My child has no such idea. She has never known anything about such calculations; and I am sure she will not begin now."

"I beg your pardon, and Miss Nelly's pardon," said the great man, with an amused look. "I did not mean to reflect upon any one. But if she has not begun yet, I fear she will soon begin when she is Ernest's wife. They can't help it, ma'am. I am not blaming them. Once they are married, they must live; they must have a house over their heads, and a dinner daily. I've no doubt Miss Nelly's an angel; but even an angel, when she has weekly bills coming in, and nothing to pay them with, will begin to scheme."

"Such a thing appears to me quite impossible,"

said Mrs. Eastwood, in a flutter of suppressed indignation, and then she added, pausing to recover herself, "I must say at once, Mr. Molyneux, that if this is the way in which you are disposed to look at the matter, I should prefer to end the discussion. My daughter's happiness is very dear to me; but her credit, and my own credit, ought to be still more dear——"

"My dear ma'am," cried Mr. Molyneux, "now, tell me, as a matter of curiosity, how your credit is concerned, or why you should be angry? My point of view is that, of course, the young people mean to get as much as they can out of us——"

"Perhaps your son does, sir!" cried Mrs. Eastwood, exasperated. "You ought to know him best."

"Of course, I know him best; and, of course, that is his object—to get as much as he can out of *me*," said Mr. Molyneux, pausing upon the pronoun. "Since you don't like it, I will leave the other side out of the question. I have known Ernest these eight and twenty years, and I ought to know what stuff he is made of. Now, as there are two parties to this bargain, we had better know exactly what we mean on either side. I did not want Ernest to marry now, and in case he did marry, he ought to

have looked higher. I don't mean to be unpleasant, but I should have liked him to look out—let us say, brutally—for more money. He has cost a deal of money in his day; and he ought to have brought in more. It is very likely, indeed, that your views were of a similar character. In that case, instead of wrangling, we ought to agree. Miss Nelly might have done better——"

"A great deal better," said the mother firmly, and with decision.

"Exactly so. At bottom we mean the same thing, though I may speak too roughly; but, like a couple of young fools, they have gone and run their heads into a net. Privately, I admire your daughter very much," said Mr. Molyneux, with a certain oily change in his tone—a confession that the present subject under treatment was not to be bullied, but required more delicate dealing; "and though I say it that shouldn't, my son Ernest is a fine young fellow. They will make a handsome couple—just the kind of thing that would be delightful in a novel or in a poem—where they could live happy ever after, and never feel the want of money. But in this prosaic world things don't go on so comfortably. They have not a penny; that is the question that remains between you and me."

"Nelly has five thousand pounds; and he has—his profession," said Mrs. Eastwood, with a certain faltering in her voice.

"Well, well, well," said the wise man. "If we were all in a state of innocence, five thousand pounds would be something; and if we were a little wickeder, his profession might count; but the world is not so litigious as might be desired. My son is too grand to demean himself to criminal cases like that inconsiderable mortal, his father. And do you mean them to live in London, my dear ma'am, upon Miss Nelly's twopence-halfpenny a year?"

"Indeed, I am not so foolish," cried Mrs. Eastwood; "beside thinking it wrong as a matter of principle. He must work, of course, before he can marry. He must have at least the prospect of a sufficient income before I should ever give my consent."

"A sufficient income earned by Ernest!" said Mr. Molyneux, with, again, that detestable "Ho, ho!" "Pardon me, my dear Mrs. Eastwood; but when I see how that boy has imposed upon you! No—believe me, who know him better, that if anything is to come of it, it must be done by you and me."

"I do not understand, Mr. Molyneux——"

"I quite believe it," he said, relapsing into care-

lessness just touched with contempt. "Ladies seldom understand such matters. If you will tell me the name of your solicitor, perhaps it would be better for me to talk the matter over with him."

"What is there to talk over?" said Mrs. Eastwood, once more roused into indignation. "I think, Mr. Molyneux, that we are speaking different languages. Nelly has her little fortune—as you know—and I am willing to allow her to wait till Ernest is in a position to claim her. I should not allow this without your approval, as his father. But as, so far, you have given your approval, what more does there remain to say?"

The great lawyer looked at his simple antagonist with a kind of stupefaction.

"We are indeed talking two different languages," he said. "Tell me who is your solicitor, my dear lady, and he and I will talk it over——"

"In a matter so important," said Mrs. Eastwood, plucking firmness from the emergency, "I prefer to act for myself."

Perhaps at this moment she achieved the greatest success of her life, though she did not know it. Mr. Molyneux was struck dumb. He stared at her, and he scratched his head like any bumpkin. He could not swear, nor storm, nor threaten, as he would some-

times do with the hapless people in the witness-box. He was obliged to be civil, and smooth-spoken, and to treat her with a certain degree of politeness; for though he believed that Ernest might have done better, he had no desire to defy his son, who was, in his way, a formidable opponent, and he did not quite venture, knowing the sort of young man he had to deal with, to break off the match, or do anything violent tending that way.

"Then I must try what can be done by plainer language," he said, hiding his bewilderment under a specious appearance of candour. "We must throw away all circumlocution. Let us be reasonable. I will give my son so much a year, if you will give your daughter so much a year. That is what it comes to. If we do this, there may be some possibility for them; but without this, nothing can be done; and of course, the allowance which you might be able to give her would determine to some extent what I should give him."

"What I might be able to give my daughter?" said Mrs. Eastwood, in surprise; "but I have nothing to do with it. I give her nothing—she comes into it by her grandfather's will."

"The five thousand pounds—yes, yes, I understand all about that," said Mr. Molyneux, with a

mixture of disgust and weariness. This infinitesimal, but always recurring, morsel of money bored him. But he tried to keep his temper. He explained the duty of parents in such an emergency with great fulness. If a sacrifice had to be made, it must, he pointed out, be a mutual sacrifice. The question was not of five thousand pounds, or five thousand pence, but how to "make up an income" for the young people. Without an income there could be no marriage; it was not a matter of feeling, but of arrangement; if the one side did so much, the other side would do so much more. The great man explained the position with all his natural wealth of words, and with all the ease of wealth, to which a hundred or two more of expenditure in a year mattered comparatively little. But Mrs. Eastwood, who, as the reader is aware, had enough, but not too much, listened with a dismay which she could scarcely disguise. She, who had been obliged to put down her carriage, in order to free her son, was not in a position to give large allowances to either son or daughter. She made the best effort she could to maintain her ground.

"I should have thought that your son, in your profession, in which you are so eminent——" she began with an attempt to propitiate her amicable

adversary, who had changed the question so entirely from what appeared to her its natural aspect.

"In my profession, ma'am, a man stands on his own merits, not his father's," Mr. Molyneux answered, interrupting her with brusque decision. What was poor Mrs. Eastwood to do? She could not give to Nelly without being unjust to her other children, and yet how was she to have the heart to crush Nelly's happiness by refusing? A vision of her child, hollow-eyed and pale, casting pathetic glances at her, which would be worse than reproaches, flitted before her eyes. Girls have died ere now of separation from their lovers, and Nelly (the mother thought) was the kind of girl to break her heart without a complaint. Could she risk the breaking of Nelly's heart for a miserable question of money? This was an influence infinitely more subtle and potent than Mr. Molyneux's eloquence. While he talked the good mother fought it out in her own bosom. She gave her consent that he should see her solicitor and talk over the matter, with a sort of despairing acquiescence and that desperate trust in Providence which springs up in an oppressed soul when driven to its last resources. Something might "come in the way." Nothing could be resolved upon at once; neither to-day nor to-morrow could call for

immediate action, and something might come in the way.

Mr. Molyneux saw Nelly before he went away, and was kind and fatherly, kissing her on the forehead, an act which Mrs. Eastwood half resented, as somehow interfering with her absolute property in her child. The lover she tolerated, but the lover's father was odious to her. And this trial of her patience was all the more hard that she had to put the best face upon it before Nelly, and to say that Mr. Molyneux and she did not quite agree on some points, but that everything would come right by and by. Nelly had always been her mother's confidant, knowing everything and thrusting her ready youthful opinion and daring undoubting advice into whatever was going on, and to shut her out now from all participation in this crowning care was unspeakably hard.

And then the nature of the vexation which she had thus to conceal within herself was so doubly odious—a question of money, which made her appear even to herself as if she was a niggard where her child's happiness was involved, she who had never grudged Nelly anything all her life! Other disagreeables, too, mingled in the matter. To be roused from the pleasant confidence that all your

friends think well of you by the sudden discovery that some of them, at least, hold very lightly the privilege of your special alliance, is not in itself consolatory. Everything connected with the subject turned somehow into pain. Since the time when the carriage was put down, no such incident had occurred in the family, and Frederick's debts, which were a kind of natural grief in their way (for has not every man debts?), were not half so overwhelming as this, nor did they bring half so many troubles in their train.

When the love of lovers comes into a house which has hitherto been kept warm and bright by the loves of parent and children, brother and sister, the first thing it does in most cases is to make a rent and division. It calls out the sense of self and personal identity, it breaks the soft silken bonds of nature, and turns the hands a little while ago so closely linked almost against each other. Nelly thought her mother was hard to her Ernest, and Ernest thought his future mother-in-law was already developing the true mother-in-law character, and was about to become his natural enemy. He could not help giving hints of this to his betrothed, which made Nelly unhappy. And then her mother would find her crying, and on

asking why, would be assailed with pitiful remonstrances.

"Dear mamma, why should you turn against Ernest? You used to like him well enough. Is it because I am fond of him that you turn against him?" Thus Nelly would moan, rending her mother's heart.

All this introduced the strangest new commotion into the peaceful household, and the reader will not wonder that poor Mrs. Eastwood, thus held on the rack, was a little impatient of other annoyances. On the very evening of the day on which she had the interview with Mr. Molyneux above recorded, when she was going through the hall on her way up-stairs, another vexing and suggestive incident disturbed her. The hall was square, with one little deep window on one side of the door, the recess of which was filled with a window seat. Here some one was seated, half visible in the darkness, with a head pressed against the window, gazing out. Nothing could be more unlike the large windows of the Palazzo Scaramucci, but the attitude and act were the same. Mrs. Eastwood stopped, half alarmed, and watched the motionlesss figure. Then she went forward with a wondering uneasiness.

"Is it you, Innocent?" she said.

"Yes."

"What are you doing here? It is too cold to stand about in the hall, and besides, it is not a proper place for you. Go into the drawing-room, dear, or come up-stairs with me. What are you doing here?"

"I am waiting," said Innocent.

"For what, for whom?" said the mother, alarmed.

"For Frederick," said the girl, with a long drawing out of breath, which was almost a sigh.

CHAPTER XV.

A SUNDAY AT HOME.

INNOCENT, it may well be supposed, had been thrown into the shade by these great events in Nelly's history, and yet she was, notwithstanding, a most important element in the discomfort which began to creep into the house. The very first day after her arrival she had begun her strange career. Brought downstairs for meals, she would sit very quietly, eating or pretending to eat what was offered to her—and much of what was offered to her was so strange to her that she fared but badly, poor child, until a new habit had begun to form, and the wholesome appetite of youth had driven away her prejudices. It is a whimsical thought, and one which we are aware the British intellect in general declines to contemplate, that frog-eating foreigners, or those still more miserable specimens of humanity who are brought up upon

maccaroni and polenta, should not when they come among us take any more enthusiastically to our richer fare than we do to theirs; but yet, strange to say, this is unquestionably the case—and poor Innocent had very little to eat for the first few days, not knowing the looks of things, and hesitating, as the inexperienced always do, to venture upon the unknown. When the meal was over, unless absolute moral force was exerted to restrain her, she escaped at once to her own room, her constant occupancy of which became at once a standing grievance of the housemaid, who immediately settled in her mind that this unusual course of procedure was suggested by an ardent desire to spy upon her movements, and to report her imperfections to her mistress. There were countless complaints from this quarter about the impossibility of "cleaning out" Miss Innocent's room, or even of "cleaning out" Miss Ellinor's room, which adjoined, or in short, of doing anything whatever under the constant inspection of the stranger's eyes. What with this offence against the housemaid of being constantly in her bedroom, and the offence against the cook of never being satisfied with anything at table, and the offence against Brownlow of paying no attention to his intimations that dinner was ready, Innocent was in bad odour

with all the servants except Alice, who stood by her quietly, without any warmer applause, however, than that there was no "hairm in the girl." In the higher regions Innocent made a still more puzzling and painful impression. When she could be retained among them she sat dumb in a corner, generally near one of the windows, saying nothing, answering yes and no to the questions addressed to her, doing nothing, presenting a blank, impenetrable surface of silence to all the attempts at friendly intercourse made by the lively and genial group which she intruded herself amongst like a figure of stone. She would obey when absolutely commanded, and for the immediate moment of the command—but then only as by machinery, without the least appearance of entering into the spirit of the directions given her, or wishing to please, or desiring to bring herself into accord with her surroundings. No idea indeed of putting herself in accord with her surroundings seemed ever to enter into her mind. She was an alien in her own consciousness, altogether untouched by the distress, the vexation, the bewilderment, caused by her self-isolation. Perhaps, if, as Mrs. Eastwood said, they had been able to love the girl heartily, and by nature, without any action of hers to call it forth, they might have thawed the snow-image.

But beyond the natural bounds of the family, love ceases to be given in this instinctive, causeless way, and nobody can long resist the repellent effect of a perpetual non-response. The girl was a worry and vexation to Mrs. Eastwood and Nelly, and she was the cause of much suppressed merriment to Dick, who held that she was sulky, and giving herself airs, and ought to be laughed at. Jenny, as the reader has been informed, looked at the matter in a more philosophical way; but neither nature nor philosophy threw any light upon the darkness, or suggested any way of mending the matter. The strange girl in their midst occupied the ladies (before the moment of Nelly's engagement) perpetually. They took her out, they tried to amuse her, they tried to sympathize with her, they asked countless questions, and elicited many details of her former life, but they never moved her with all their pettings and coaxings to say one word to them, or to stay one moment with them longer than she was compelled.

This was the outside aspect of affairs, as seen by those surrounding her, who were much discouraged in every way by the strange passiveness of the new comer; but to Innocent herself, the world bore a different appearance, as may be supposed. She had been brought up in utter solitude; her

father, who cared little for her, and took little notice of her, and Niccolo, who had done everything, were the two sole figures with which she was familiar. Other human forms she had seen going about the streets, gliding round her in a strange, dull phantasmagoria, without touching her. Her intellect was feeble, or so partially awakened that she had never yet begun to think of her own position, either present or future, or connexion with the rest of humanity. All that life had yet been to her was a window through which she had seen other people, bearing no connexion with herself, moving about with mysterious comings and going through a world not realized. She had watched them with a certain dull wonder. Their occupations and their activity surprised without interesting her. Why should they take so much trouble, why keep so constantly in motion? And then the whirlwind had seemed to seize herself, to whirl her through air and space, through a still stranger phantasmagoria—moving pictures of sea and land, and to set her down in the very heart of one of those strange groups of people who were so unlike anything she had ever known, people who clustered together and talked and laughed, and had a great deal to do with each other, but among whom she felt as strange as a stray olive

leaf dropped among the cast-off garments of English beech and elm. She could not mix with them. She felt no interest in what they did or said, and no desire to feel any interest. She was even secretly vexed, as much as her dulled nature would allow, by all the care taken of her, the demands which she was daily conscious they made, the disappointment with her irresponsiveness, which more or less they all showed. Why could not they let her alone? She had not, as Nelly sometimes supposed, any conventional prepossession in her mind, or feeling that she, the penniless niece and dependent, must be of necessity slighted and kept down, an idea which does take possession of some natures, and cause much unreasonable mischief. Such a notion, however, was much too complicated, much too profound for the mind of Innocent. It was not so much that she had a false impression about her relationship with them as that she had no real conception of any relationship at all. She accepted her external surroundings mechanically, without even asking herself what right she had to be an inmate of her aunt's house, or to be cared for as she was. Gratitude was more than impossible to her; she did not know what the word meant. She had never asked to be brought to Mrs. Eastwood's house; it occurred

to her in her ignorance that she would rather have stayed in Pisa, but it never occurred to her to ask why she could not stay in Pisa, why Niccolo had been sent away, and she brought here. She had never possessed more than a franc or two in her life, and had no idea of the value of money or its necessity. In short, the development of her mind was rather that of six than sixteen. Nothing was formed in her except the striking personality and individuality that shut her up within herself as within a husk, and kept her from mingling with others. This absence of all capability of thought or feeling, this perfect blank and stupefaction of intellect and heart, took away from her all that lively sense of novelty, all that interest in the unknown which is so strong and so beneficent in youth. She did not ask to understand either the things or persons round her. She accepted them dully, as she would have accepted any other order of things; they did not affect her at all; they moved her neither to love nor to hatred, scarcely even to wonder; through them all she pursued her own dull way, crossed by these other threads of existence perforce, but never entangling with them, or allowing herself to be woven into the common web. Their outcries and laughter, their manifestations of feeling,

their fondness for each other, the perpetual movement of life among them, affected her only with a vague surprise too faint for that lively title, and a still more languid contempt. She had nothing in common with them; they were, it seemed to her, restless, afflicted with a fever of activity, bound by some treadmill necessity to talk, and walk, and move about, and be always doing, of which her frame and mind were totally unconscious. A vague resentment against them—the girl scarcely knew why—for disturbing her with their companionship, and subjecting her to such strange demands for a sympathy which she had not to give, and an affection for which she felt no need, gave a certain reality to the mistiness of her sensations. But that was all; she came among them like a thing dropped out of another sphere, having no business, no pleasure, nothing whatever to do or to learn upon this alien earth.

But there was an exception to this rule. Innocent clung to Frederick as a savage might cling to the one white man who had brought her out of her woods and from among her people into the strange and beautiful world of civilized life. She knew him, though she knew no one else. Frederick was her revelation, her one discovery out of the darkness which surrounded every other nature. She formed

no very close or distinct estimate of him, but at least she was conscious of another existence which affected her own, and upon which she was to some degree dependent. When Mrs. Eastwood found her lurking in the hall in the cold and darkness, waiting for Frederick, an immediate and full-grown love tale glimmered before the unfortunate mother's eyes, filling her with dismay. But Innocent's thoughts had taken no such form. She was as unconscious of love as of any other passion, and had as little idea of anything to follow as a baby. It was, however, her only point of human interest, the sole thing which drew her out of herself. When Frederick was present she had eyes only for him; when he spoke, she listened, not much understanding what he said, but vaguely stimulated by the very sound of his voice. When he told her to do anything she made an effort to bring her mind to bear upon it, and somehow took in what he said. The moment when he came home was the moment to which she looked forward the whole day through. A vague sense that he understood her, that he did not ask too much from her like the others, made no bewildering demand on her comprehension, but accepted what she gave with a matter-of-fact simplicity equal to her own, gave her confidence in him. Could she have been with Fre-

derick alone she would have been happy; or would he even have permitted her to sit close to him, or hold his hand, while the bewildering conversation of the others—conversation which they expected her to join in and understand—was going on around, Innocent would have been more able tobear it. This, however, he had privately explained to her could not be.

"When we are alone I do not mind," he said, with a condescension which suited his natural temper, "but when we are with the others it makes you ridiculous, Innocent; and what is more, it makes me ridiculous. They laugh at both you and me."

"Why should they laugh?" asked the girl.

"Because it is absurd," he said, frowning. "I cannot allow you to make me a laughing-stock. Of course, as I tell you, I don't mind so much when we are alone."

And he stroked her hair with a caressing kindness which was at that time about the best sentiment in the young man's mind. He was often embarrassed by her, and sometimes had asked himself the question, What on earth was it to come to? for he, too, like his mother, believed that Innocent was in love with him; and the love of such a girl, so manifested, was more absurd than gratifying. But yet he was always kind to her. Evil impulses enough of one

kind and another were in his mind, and he could have made of this girl anything he pleased, his slave, the servant of his will in any way. But he never treated her otherwise than as his little sister, and was kind, and put up with her demonstrative affection, and did his best to advise her "for her good."

"You must not shrink so from my mother and Nelly," he said. "They want to be kind to you. If you could only take to them it would be much better for you than taking to a fellow like me——"

"I don't like women," said Innocent. "My father always said so. I cannot help being one myself, but I hate them. And nobody is like you."

"That is very pleasant for me," said Frederick, "but you must not keep up that notion about women. Your father was a capital judge, I have no doubt, but he might have taught you something more useful. Depend upon it, you will never be happy till you make friends with your own sex. They may be dangerous to men, though men are not generally of your opinion," continued the moralist, "but for you, Innocent, mark my words, it is far your best policy to make the women your friends."

"What is policy?" she asked, stealing her hand into his, much as a dog puts his nose into his master's hand.

"Pshaw!" said Frederick. His mother had come into the room, and had seen this pantomime. "You ought to be put to school and learn English," he added, somewhat roughly. "I don't believe she understands half of what we say."

"Indeed, I should not be sorry to think so," said Mrs. Eastwood, not without severity in her tone. But the severity was lost upon Innocent. She understood, as she did always by some strange magic understand Frederick, that she was now to withdraw from him, and do her best to appear indifferent. It was a Sunday afternoon, rainy and miserable—and a rainy Sunday afternoon, when English domestic virtue shuts up all its ordinary occupations, is, it must be allowed, a dreary moment. I do not at all agree in the ordinary conventional notion of the dreariness of English Sundays generally, but I allow that a Sunday afternoon, when all the good people are at home, when the children are forbidden to play, and the women's work is carefully put away, as if innocent embroidery were sin, and the men do not know what to do with themselves, is trying. If you are musical to the extent of Handel you may be happy, but the only thing to be done otherwise in a good orthodox respectable family bound by all the excellent English traditions, is to pick a quarrel with

some one. About five o'clock or so, with the rain pouring steadily down into the garden, the flower-beds becoming puddles before your eyes, the trees looking in upon you like pitiful ghosts—if you have not dared the elements, and gone to afternoon church, you must quarrel or you must die.

Mrs. Eastwood felt the necessity. She called Frederick close to her, and she addressed him in an undertone. Innocent had gone away, and placed herself in a chair close by the window. She had not even "taken a book"—the impossibility of making her ever "take a book" was one of the miseries of the house. She was gazing blankly out upon the rain, upon the trees that shivered and seemed to ask for shelter, and the beds, where a draggled line of closed-up crocuses were leaning their bosoms upon the mud. Her beautiful profile was outlined distinctly against the pale gray dreary light. It *was* a beautiful profile always, more beautiful than the full face, which wanted life. Blank as the day itself was her countenance, with that motiveless gaze which was, indeed, almost mystic in its absolute want of animation. Her hands were crossed upon her lap, her whole limp, girlish figure seemed to sympathize with the dreariness outside. Mrs. Eastwood looked with a mixture of pity, sympathy,

and disapproval at this apathetic, immovable being, so self-absorbed, and yet so childish and pitiful in her self-absorption. She drew Frederick to her, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Frederick, look there," she said in a low tone, "if you were not in the room Innocent would rush off up-stairs. She stays only for you. I saw you just now with her as I came in. For God's sake take take care what you are about. You are turning that child's head."

"Bah! nonsense," said Frederick, freeing himself with a complacent smile.

"It is not nonsense. I have watched her since ever she came. She has neither eyes nor ears but for you."

"Is that my fault?" said Frederick, making a motion as if to break away.

"I do not say it is your fault. Stop and hear what I have to say. It was very good of you, no doubt, to be so kind to her on the journey, to gain her confidence——"

"Your words are very nice, mother," said Frederick, "but your tone implies that it was anything but good of me, as if I had gained her confidence with an evil intention——"

"Frederick! how dare you put such a suggestion

into my lips? If I were to answer you as you deserve, I should say that only a guilty mind could have thought of such a thing, or thought that I could think of it," cried Mrs. Eastwood, becoming involved in expression as she lost her temper. This heat on both sides was entirely to be attributed to the Sunday afternoon. On arriving so near the brink of the quarrel as this, Mrs. Eastwood paused.

"Sunday is not a day for quarrelling," she said, "and heaven knows I have no wish to quarrel with any one, much less my own boy; but, Frederick, dear, you must let me warn you. You do not know the world as I do" (heaven help the innocent soul!) "nor how people are led on further than they have any intention; nor how the simplest kindness on your part may affect the imagination of a girl. She is not much more than a child——"

"She is an utter child—and a fool besides," said Frederick, throwing the female creature about whom he was being lectured overboard at once, as a sacrifice to the waves, according to the wont of man.

"I would not say that," said Mrs. Eastwood doubtfully. "She is a very strange girl, but I do not like to think she is a fool; and as for being a child —a child of sixteen is very near a woman—and my dear, without meaning it, without thinking of it,

you might do a great deal of harm. With a brooding sort of girl like this, you can never tell what may be going on. If she was one to speak out and say what she is thinking, like my Nelly——"

"Nelly! Well, to do her justice, she is very different from Nelly," said Frederick, with that natural depreciation of his sister which is also usual enough, and which was largely increased by Sunday-afternoonishness.

"No, indeed, she is not like Nelly more's the pity," said Mrs. Eastwood, fortunately not detecting the injurious tone. "She is so shut up in herself that you can never tell what may be going on within her. I am sure you don't mean it, Frederick, but sometimes I think, for Innocent's own sake, it would be better if you were not quite so kind. I don't like her waiting for you in the hall, and that sort of thing. There is no harm in it, I know—but I don't like it. It is always an unpleasant thing to have ideas—which she would be better without—put into a girl's head."

"You are too mysterious for me to follow," said Frederick. "What ideas? If you will be a little more plain in your definition——"

She was his mother, and thought she knew a great deal more than he did about life; but she

blushed as red as a girl at this half contemptuous question.

"Frederick, you know very well what I mean," she said quickly, "and I hope you will not try to make me sorry that I have appealed to you at all. You may make Innocent more fond of you than will be good for her, poor child, and that can produce nothing but unhappiness. I am not finding fault, I am only warning you. Her I cannot warn, because she so shuts herself up. She is a mystery," said poor Mrs. Eastwood, shaking her head.

"Whip her," said Frederick, with a little scornful laugh; and he walked off to the library, where Dick was pretending to read, and really teaching Winks, who had been having a *mauvais quart d'heure*, and whose patience was so utterly exhausted that nothing but his regard for the family could have kept him from snapping. Winks made his escape when the door was opened, and rushed to the drawing-room, where nobody was allowed to insult his intellect by tricks. He came and sat up before his mistress on his hind legs, waving his feathery forepaws in expostulation. She understood him, which is consolatory alike to dogs and men. The tears had come into her eyes at the unkind scorn of Frederick's tone, but this other complaint brought a

little laughter and carried off the sharpness. "Yes, Winks, they are wicked boys," she said, half laughing, half crying. Dick declared after that Winks had been "sneaking," and I think the dog himself was a little ashamed of having told; but it did the mother good, and set her thinking of her Dick, who was not too bright, nór yet very industrious, but the honestest fellow!—and that thought made her laugh, and healed the little prick in her heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

INNOCENT'S FIRST ADVENTURE.

INNOCENT had remained quite unconscious that she was the subject of this conversation. She was still a little in doubt even of the words of a dialogue carried on by others. The quickness of utterance which strikes every one when hearing an unaccustomed language, the half completed phrases, the words half said, confused her mind, which was not equal to such a strain, and her want of interest in the matter limited her comprehension tenfold more. She sat with her profile marked out against the light, the line of the curtains falling just beyond her, the garden furnishing a vague background, until some time after Frederick had left the room. She had scarcely moved while she sat there; there was nothing to look at, nothing to occupy her, but that did not matter to Innocent. When Frederick was gone she too moved a little, and after a few minutes

stole out and up-stairs like a ghost. She went to her room, stealing through Nelly's, where her cousin was occupied about some of the little legitimate Sunday employments which a good English girl may permit herself on a rainy Sunday. Nelly made some little friendly observation, but Innocent glided past, and closed the door upon her. Innocent, however, had nothing to do; she sat down by the fireplace, where, Mrs. Eastwood being extravagant in this particular, there burned a cheery little fire. But the fire was no comfort to her. So far as she had any feeling at all, she disliked the warm little room, with all its cushions and curtains, and its position so close to her cousin's. Now and then she thought of the cold and bare rooms at the Palazzo Scaramucci, so large and empty, and lonely, with something like a sigh. Her life there, which was so void of any interest, so blank and companionless, came back upon her as if it had been something better, more natural than this. There no one bade her talk, bade her do anything; no one cared what she was about. She might stand for hours at the window, looking out, and no one would chide her, or ask why she did so. Books and music, and such perplexing additions to life, had no existence there: and in Pisa there was room enough to move about,

and air enough to breathe. With the help of a scaldino, and the old velvet cloak, which she kept in her box now, she had been able to keep the cold at bay; but here she grew drowsy over the fire, and had no need for her cloak. There, too, she might do what she pleased, and no one ever said, Why?—no one, except Niccolo, who did not matter. Whereas now she could not go in or out of her room without being observed, without having somebody to peep at her, and to say, "Ah, it is you." What did it matter who it was? If people would but let her alone! I do not know how long she had been alone, shut up in the little room, when Nelly knocked at the door. During the short time since Innocent's arrival Nelly had gone through a great many different states of mind respecting her. She had been eager, she had been sympathetic, she had been sorry, she had been angry, and then she had recommenced and been sympathetic, sorry, and indignant again. The only thing Nelly could not do, though she advised her mother with great fervour to do it, was to let the stranger alone.

"Leave her to herself, mamma," Nelly said with precocious wisdom, "let us have patience, and by and by she will see that we mean her nothing but good, and she will come to herself."

This was admirable advice if Nelly herself could only have taken it. But she could not; a dangerous softness would come over her at the very height of her resolution. She would say to herself, "Poor Innocent, how lonely she must be!" and would go again and commit herself, and endeavour in another and yet another way to melt the unmeltable. On this Sunday she had begun the day very strongly in the mind that it was best to leave Innocent alone; but the sight of the pale girl gliding past, escaping to her solitude, shutting herself up alone, was too much for Nelly. The soft-hearted creature resisted her impulse as long as possible, and then she gave in. Surely this time there must be an opening somehow to the shut-up heart. She knocked softly at the closed door, which, indeed, Innocent had almost closed upon her. "May I come in?" she said softly. It was not easy to make out the answer which came reluctantly from within; but Nelly interpreted it to mean consent. She went in and sat down by the fire, and began to talk. It was before her engagement, and she had not that one unfailing subject to excite Innocent's interest upon, if that were possible; but she chattered as only a well-conditioned, good-hearted girl can do, trying to draw the other from her own thoughts. Then she

proposed suddenly an examination of the house. "You have never been over the house, Innocent; come, there is no harm in doing that on Sunday. There is a whole floor of attics over this, and the funniest hiding-holes; and there are some curiosities, which, if we could only find room for them, are well worth seeing. Are you fond of china, or pictures? Tell me what you like most."

"No," said Innocent, "nothing."

"Oh, that is just because you don't know. China is my delight. If I had my way I would cram the drawing-room; but mamma is no true connoisseur; she likes only what is pretty. Come along, and I will show you the house."

Innocent rose, more to avoid controversy than from any interest in the house. Nelly showed her a great many interesting things in the attics; an old screen, which you or I, dear reader, would have given our ears for; a whole set of old oak furniture, which had once been in the library; old prints, turned with their faces to the wall; and one or two family portraits. The girl moved quite unaffected through all these delights. She neither knew their value nor saw their beauty. She answered Nelly's questions with yes or no, and vaguely longed to get away again. To do what?—nothing. Once, and

only once, she was moved a little. It was when Nelly introduced her into the old schoolroom, a bare room, with a sloping roof, and two windows, looking away over the elms to the suburban road some distance off, which led into London, and showed moving specks of figures, carriages and people, diminished by the distance, over the bare tops of the trees. There were neither curtains nor carpets in this bare place. It was cold and deserted, apart from the other rooms, up a little staircase by itself. Innocent gave a cry of something like pleasure when she went in. "I like this room," she said, and it was about the first unsuggested observation she had made since her arrival. "May I come and live here?"

"Here! far away from us all?" cried Nelly, with no furniture, no pictures, nothing to make you cheerful! It would seem like banishment to put you here. You do not mean to say you like this bare little place?"

"Yes," said the girl, "I can breathe here. I can see out of the windows; and I should not trouble anybody. I like this best."

"Innocent, you must not talk of troubling anybody. All that troubles us is when we think you are not happy."

"I should be happy here," she said wistfully,

sitting down on the ledge of the window, which was low, and turning her gaze to the distant road.

"Oh, Innocent!" said Nelly, half inclined to cry in her disappointment; "if you knew how much I wished to make your room pretty, how I worked at it, and how anxious mamma and I were to make it look like home to you! We thought you would feel less lonely if you were close to us, and felt that we were within call night and day. We hoped you would grow fond of us, Innocent! You don't really mean that you would like to get away from mamma and me?"

To this appeal Innocent made no immediate answer. She looked far away over the tree tops, and watched the omnibuses, crawling like flies along the road. It was not a beautiful or exciting sight, but it soothed her somehow, like "the woven paces and the waving hands" of Merlin's spell—the subtle influence of motion apart from herself, which acted upon her like a cadence and rhythm. Then she said slowly, as if to herself, "I like this best."

"Oh, you cold-hearted, unkind thing!" cried impetuous Nelly, growing red and angry. "After all we have done and tried to do to make you comfortable! Don't you care for anything or any one? Good heavens! how can any girl be so indifferent!

You deserve to have nobody care for you; you deserve to be kept by yourself, to be allowed to do whatever you please, never to be minded or thought of. You deserve—to be shaken!" said Nelly, with all the heat of sudden passion.

Innocent turned round and looked at her, vaguely wondering; though she did not comprehend the gentler emotions, she knew what it was to be scolded. It was an experience she had gone through before. Her father and Niccolo had both scolded her, and the sound was familiar. Perhaps it might even have penetrated her apathy, and roused some sort of life in her, had not poor Nelly been smitten by instant compunction, and gone down metaphorically on her knees to expiate her fault.

"Oh, what a wretch I am," cried Nelly, "to lose patience with you like this, you poor, dear, little lonely child. I daresay you will care for us in time. I did not mean to be disagreeable, Innocent. It was only disappointment and vexation, and my horrid temper. Forgive me, won't you?" she said, taking the girl's hand. Innocent let it drop as soon as she could extricate her fingers. She was moved only to wonder, and a feeling scarcely lively enough to be called impatience—weariness of this perpetual emotion. Nelly seemed to her to be always laughing

or crying, always demanding sympathy, requiring to be responded to, asking answers which by no strain of her nature could Innocent give.

"Oh, don't!" she said, as her cousin put her arms round her and pleaded for pardon. Poor Nelly, transported with anger and repulsed kindness, had nearly blazed up again, but fortunately restrained herself, looking with a kind of dismay at the other's composure, which, indeed, was a little disturbed by confused amazement, but nothing more.

"You are a very strange girl," she said, drawing away with a feeling of offence which had never before surmounted her friendliness and pity; "but if you will keep us all at arm's length, I suppose you must be allowed to do it. If you wish for it very much, mamma, I am sure, will let you have this room."

"I could sleep there," said Innocent, pointing to a hard little settee, which Nelly knew was far from luxurious.

"Oh, you need not be afraid. I shall take care that you are comfortable," said indignant Nelly, and she went away down-stairs with dignity to lay the case before her mother. "You know the way back to your own room?" she said, pausing at the door. "As it is Sunday we cannot make the change

to-day." Innocent heard, and gazed at her, but made no answer. She did not know how she had offended her cousin; neither, it is true, did she care; but yet a certain surprise awoke in her mind. Why was Nelly angry? What was there to make any one angry? Innocent did not connect the "scolding" which she was aware of with anything that might have called it forth. Scolding was in her experience a phenomenon by itself, not attached by way of cause and effect to any other phenomena. Many times in her life she had been scolded; but very seldom could she have told why. In this present case the cause was one entirely beyond her moral grasp. If she had broken a china tea cup, or torn a dress, these would have been tangible causes of displeasure, which her mind could have taken in; but this was altogether mysterious. Perhaps it was partially owing to the strange way in which she had been brought up, and the absence of natural love in her early life, that Innocent's entire mental constitution was of so peculiar a kind. She had no consciousness of the home affections, no need of them, no perception of their sweetness. Whether there might not be in her the capacity for a great love was yet unproved; but she had no affections. Such a condition of nature is not so rare, perhaps, as we

think. There are both men and women who can love with passion the lover or the mistress, the husband or the wife; but who remain through all the warmth of that one possibility cold as death to all other affections. The decorous guise of ordinary life prevents such natures from making themselves fully visible in many cases. But Innocent was like a savage; she was unaware of the necessity of those gentle pretences and veils of apparent feeling which hold civilized life together. Therefore she sinned openly, and, so to speak, innocently, against the softer natural sentiments which are general to humanity, yet did not exist in her own bosom. She knew nothing about them, and she had never been taught to feign a virtue which she did not possess.

She sat in her newly-found refuge till she was thoroughly chilled with cold, and gazing from the window she found out an object which exercised some influence upon her afterwards, and got her into some immediate trouble. This was a little chapel in the distant road, which some freak of her imagination connected with that little church of the Spina which she had been in the habit of frequenting in Pisa in so strange and passive a way. I need not tell the gentle reader that the Methodist Chapel in the Brighton Road was profoundly unlike any chapel

ever dedicated to Our Lady. This particular Little Bethel, however, was ornamented in front with some stucco pinnacles and tabernacle work, which caught at a stray corner of Innocent's memory. She had been taken to church that very morning, to a church utterly unlike Santa Maria della Spina—a huge place with pews and galleries full of people, where she had looked on at a service of which she had very little knowledge, and listened to a sermon which she never attempted to understand. A longing for her old haunt came upon her as she saw the place which seemed to recall it to her mind. If she could but get there, it seemed to her that part of her old life—with which she had never been dissatisfied—would come back.

Innocent had so far felt the thrill of awakening novelty and change as to know that her present life was not satisfactory, though rather in the instinctive way of sensation than by any conscious thought. The little chapel possessed her not with any idea of improvement or knowledge to be gained, but only as a possible means of drawing back to her a scrap of the past. Innocent had a consciousness that were she to rush out immediately to find this place she would be stopped and "scolded," or perhaps locked in, and prevented for ever from gratifying

her wish, so she resisted her impulse to go at once. The dreary afternoon by this time was over, and the dressing bell sounded its welcome summons through the house. Frederick was dining out, so that there was nothing to detain her in the drawing-room during the evening. She stole up to her room as soon as dinner was over, and, taking her old velvet cloak from her trunk, and the old black hat which she had worn in Pisa, stole very carefully down-stairs, and out into the darkness. Nobody saw her making her stealthy exit, and it was with a strange sense of bewildered freedom mixed with fear that she found herself out of doors alone, in the drizzling rain and darkness. She had no superstitious terrors, however, of any kind, her imagination being too little active to make them possible, and she had run down the long dark stairs of the Palazzo Scaramucci too often to be afraid merely of the dark. It was the novelty, the uncertainty as to how to turn and where to go that moved her. However, Innocent had the good fortune which so often attends the beginning of a foolish enterprise. By a maze of muddy turnings, which she took aright by mere luck, and without making any note of them for guidance on her return, she managed to make her way to the chapel. It was resounding with the

clangour of a hymn, chanted at the top of their voices by the young men and young women who form in all places and in all churches the majority of the evening worshippers. The noise startled this poor little pilgrim; but she stole in notwithstanding, to the mean little building full of pews and glaring gas-lights, which was like and yet unlike Mr. Browning's wonderful description. The sight of the place inside startled Innocent still more. The quaint darkness of her little Italian church, the silent people kneeling and sitting here and there, the priest proceeding with his uncomprehended mystery at the altar, the glimmer of the tapers, the odour of the incense, were strangely replaced by the glare of light, the clangour of the hymn, the people packed close in their pews, who stared at the lonely girl as she entered. The chapel was very full, but Innocent, whose instinct led her to the dark corners, found a refuge in a dim pew close to the door, underneath the little gallery, where after a while a grim old pew-opener with a black bonnet, came and sat beside her. Innocent went through her own little simple formula; she kneeled down and said the Lord's Prayer; and then she seated herself and gazed towards the pulpit, which stood in place of the altar. I do not know whether the ser-

mon that followed would of itself have attracted her attention any more than the more regular and decorous one which she had heard in the morning. But while poor Innocent sat looking rather than listening, and began to think of repeating her prayer, and going away again, the old woman at her side uttered a groan which chilled the very blood in her veins. The girl shrank away from her into the corner of the pew as far as she could go, and turned her eyes from the pulpit to her terrible neighbour. But no sooner had she recoiled thus than a man in front of her uttered another exclamation.

The preacher was one famous in the Wesleyan connexion, whose appearance prepared his audience for excitement, and as he went on the exclamations grew louder and louder. Innocent, who had no understanding of this proceeding at all, who could not make out even the words of those cries which rose around her, was first startled into fright, and then frozen into physical terror. I don't know what dreadful vision of savages and cannibals and human sacrifices came into her bewildered mind; a mixture of fairy tales and those horrors of ghosts and vampires which still linger about Italy, and which she had heard, though at an ordinary moment her

memory would not have retained them. The old woman by her side was pale and haggard, with long teeth and large jaws. She groaned at regular intervals, so regular that Innocent got to be prepared for them, though they made her jump each time they sounded on her ear. When her endurance was almost at an end, and she had become sick with very fear, there came a lull in the proceedings; a hymn was sung, and part of the congregation went out.

Innocent made an anxious effort to go too, but the old woman stood immovable between her and the door, and the girl watched with agony the last figures retiring, and an evident movement to begin again taking place. "Let me go. Let me go!" she cried in her terror. The old woman clutched her shoulder with long, lean fingers, which looked like claws to the girl's excited fancy. She approached her face to Innocent's ear, and hoarsely whispered something which she did not understand. Innocent was half frantic with fear. She did not know what might be the next step. It seemed to her that other people were approaching her, and that she saw the gleam of knives, an idea which was natural enough to her Italian breeding. She uttered one loud shriek, and, springing over into the pew in

front, rushed out of the chapel, pushing down some one in her passage. It seemed to her that she heard steps pursuing as she flew madly along the dimly-lighted road. She had taken the turn towards London in her bewilderment, and, by the time she lost breath and was obliged to stop, had come to the verge of a greater thoroughfare, crowded and noisy. No one had come after her, though she had thought she heard steps resounding close behind. She stopped short, panting for breath; and, leaning against a wall, looked round her in dismay up at the dark sky, and down at the muddy road, and along the long line of dim lamps and passing figures, all strange, and without help for her.

When the full sense of her helplessness, her loneliness, her desolation, burst upon her, she crouched down upon the pavement close to the wall, and burst into tears. "Niccolo! Niccolo!" she cried, with a wail of childish despair. Another girl in such circumstances would have called upon God or her mother; but Innocent knew nothing of her mother, and very little of God. The only being who had always been helpful to her was Niccolo. She called upon him with a bitter cry of helplessness.

Niccolo in Pisa—how could he come to her? What could he do for her? But other help—less tender, less sure than Niccolo's—was approaching slowly to her along the crowded way.

END OF VOL. I.

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