INNOCENT:

A TALE OF MODERN LIFE.

By Mrs. OLIPHANT,

Author of "The Chronicles of Carlingford,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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INNOCENT:

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CHAPTER I.

FREDERICK TO THE RESCUE.

"WHAT is wrong?" said one of two young men who were coming along the road.

"Bah! what does it matter to us?" said his companion.

This companion was Frederick Eastwood. He had dined out, and he had looked in for half an hour at his club, and he was now walking leisurely home with a friend who was going the same way. Why should two gentlemen thus making their way homewards on a Sunday evening pay any attention to a group of people gathered on the muddy pavement? But the curiosity of his companion was stronger than Frederick's indifference. There were a dozen or so of people standing round some one

who was crouching down against the wall, and there was a policeman in the middle.

"Ask her her name: even if she's furrin' she'll give some sort of an answer to that," suggested one of the bystanders.

"It is some tipsy woman," said Frederick; but the next moment he changed colour, and stepped into the midst of the crowd.

"Call me a cab," he said to his amazed friend, and put out his hand to grasp, not very gently, at the old cloak which he recognized. "Heaven and earth! what has brought you here?" he said, in a tone of passion. The crouching figure uttered a cry, and, springing up at once, rushed upon him and clung to his arm.

"She's found her young man at last," said some one in the crowd; and the very policeman grinned as he cast the light of his lantern upon poor Innocent, who, pale and scared, and dazzled by the light, clung closer and closer to her cousin.

"Oh, Frederick, I lost my way. Take me home! take me home!" she cried piteously.

"Why did you ever leave home, you little fool?" he asked, and thrust her savagely into the cab which drove up. He threw a coin to the policeman, and waved a good-night to his companion. He did not give

any explanation. It was better, he thought, to leave his friend to suppose that this was some adventure—some disreputable acquaintance whom he took the trouble to help, than to let him know who it really was whom he had found in such a position. But he was savage when he got into the cab, and thrust away the girl, who put out her trembling hands to cling to him once more.

"How can you be such an idiot?" he said. "Where next must I pick you out of? Do you know you are behaving like a shameless creature, and doubly like a fool? Did you come out after me? or why are you here, and where were you going? By heaven, it is enough to drive a man mad to see a girl making an idiot of herself like this!"

Poor Innocent could not stand against this torrent of reproof. She shrank back into a corner, and cried and sobbed. It seemed to her that heaven and earth had risen up against her, now that Frederick "scolded" her too. She had done no harm. But what an evening, what a round of miserable adventures she had gone through! Her limbs were aching with fatigue, and her mind with fright and terror. He had seemed to her the very messenger of heaven for her deliverance. Her cry when she saw him was one of those outcries of pure joy which

sound keen and sharp as if a pang were in them. Out of the darkness, the forlornness, the utter misery, he appeared to her like an angel. But when the angel began to scold her, poor Innocent, muddy and wretched, shrank up into her corner. For the first time a consciousness of her own foolishness came across her mind. How could he, so spotless and smooth as he was, touch or look at her, with mud on her dress, with her old cloak wet with the rain, and her hair hanging limp and damp upon her shoulders? Yes, she deserved to be scolded: she perceived this for, perhaps, the first time in her life.

"When you have done crying," said Frederick, still savage, "perhaps you will explain to me what ridiculous cause brought you to this plight. Have you run away entirely? Where were you going? What do you want? You little fool! They are far kinder to you at home than any one would be anywhere else. You would gain very little, I can tell you, by running away."

"I did not mean to run away," said Innocent, crying softly, as it were, under her breath.

"You will find no other people so foolish," said Frederick savagely. "What did you want? what were you thinking of? Good heavens! you are a

girl, are you, and not a spirit of mischief? Fancy my dismay when I saw you—you, who ought to have been safe and sound at home, questioned by a policeman in the midst of a London crowd! Try and imagine how disgraceful such a thing is to yourself—how exasperating to me."

"Oh, Frederick!" cried the girl, overwhelmed by his reproaches, and roused into understanding by the sharpness of the pain to which she was subjected, "I did not mean it. Do not be angry: it was not my fault——"

"Not your fault!" he cried in his rage. "Good heavens! if it had not been that I was afraid you might get into some still more disgraceful scrape, I should have left you to your fate. The thought did go through my mind. If this were known, nobody would ever speak to you again; nobody would believe your excuses. Not your fault! What made you come out at all, away from home?"

"Oh, don't be angry," she cried piteously, and put out her trembling hand to touch his coat, to propitiate and pacify him with abject self-humiliation. By this time his passion had begun to wear itself out, but he would not give her any sign of forgiveness. When the cab reached the gate of The Elms, it was thrown open to them by all the ser-

vants in a body, who were searching about among the shrubbery with lights.

"Oh, here she is, with Mr. Frederick. I know'd she'd be found with Mr. Frederick," said one of the maids, whom Frederick overheard.

Mrs. Eastwood met them at the door, looking pale and frightened. "Oh, thank God, here she is at last!" she cried to Nelly, who was behind.

Innocent clutched tightly at Frederick's arm as she stepped down, bewildered and dazzled by the lights that flashed everywhere around her. He had scolded her cruelly, but yet she clung to him in preference to the women who had been so kind to her. He felt the implied compliment, even in the midst of his wrath.

"Yes, I have brought the little fool home," he cried loudly, that all might hear him. "Where do you think I found her? In the middle of the Brompton Road, with a crowd round, crying, and unable to tell where she came from. What were you thinking of, mother, to let such a child go out alone?"

"I! let her go out alone!" cried Mrs. Eastwood, astonished at the undeserved blame. "Are you mad, Frederick? I have been more unhappy about her than I can say. The gardener has gone out to

look everywhere, and we have been all over the grounds with lanterns. But bring her in—bring her in. Thank God we have her safe at last!"

With the lights apparently flashing all round her, dazzling her eyes, Innocent went in, half dragged by Frederick, to whom she kept clinging. He pushed her roughly into a chair, pulling away his arm. "There! let us see if you can give any account of your escapade," he said harshly.

The tones of his voice, his harsh words, sunk into poor Innocent's heart like stones sinking into water. She remembered nothing else afterwards, and the pain seemed something more than she could bear. She sat and gazed at them all, holding her old faded cloak round her closely, and showing the stains of mud on it and upon her black frock. Her hair fell limp to her neck: her poor little hat was pushed back from her head. The excitement and distress threw out, as nothing before had done, the peculiar beauty of her face, but a more forlorn figure could not have been seen. Mrs. Eastwood was more anxious and more compassionate than her son.

"How was it, Innocent?" she asked: "I am sure you could not mean any harm. Tell me where were you going? where had you been?"

The girl sat silent, like one under a spell, eager yet dumb, on the point of utterance. She seemed to struggle with some force which prevented her from speaking. She turned her eyes from one to another, eager, miserable—trying, it seemed, to tell her story—incapable of beginning. At last she surmounted the spell, and burst suddenly into wild tears.

"I did not mean it. I saw the church from the window—I thought it was like the Spina. Oh—h! it was not a church at all: it was some dreadful place. They tried to kill me, and then I fled—fled! and I did not know the way——"

"What is the Spina?" said Mrs. Eastwood, wondering. "You frighten her, Frederick, making those grimaces. Innocent, no one will be hard upon you. Tell me plainly; what sort of a dreadful place was it? Why did you go?"

The girl looked round her at them all, one after another. Why did she go? She did not really understand the question, but it seemed to drive her to that necessity for an answer which sometimes brings the truth from our lips, and sometimes calls up an involuntary fiction which appears like truth to other minds, and sometimes to that of the speaker. "I was—lonely," she said, after a long pause.

Mrs. Eastwood gave a cry of pain. She turned her back upon them all, and walked up and down the room two or three times with an agitation that no one understood. Then she came and stood by Innocent, and put one arm round her. "Oh, Nelly," she cried, "Nelly, this is our fault!"

It would be wrong to say that Nelly was less tender-hearted than her mother, except in so far as youth is always less considerate, less tolerant than experience; but on this occasion she stood unmoved, feeling more indignant than sorry. She, too, had made her essay at sympathy, and she had not got the better of its rejection. She stood by without any particular demonstration, while by degrees some sort of account of the evening was got from her cousin. Innocent told them in broken words all that had happened to her. She shuddered as she described the groans. She was sure she had seen the gleam of the knives, and heard the steps approaching of the men who were going to kill her. This curious Italian version of a very commonplace incident puzzled the family greatly, to whose imaginations knives were quite strange and impossible things. When she had told her tale somehow, she sat, looking at them all, one after the other, with strained eyes, not knowing what they might do to

her for the crime she seemed to have committed, without knowing it to be a crime. She did not catch the sense of what they said to each other, though her eyes followed every word, trying to divine it on the lips of the speaker.

"I was lonely," she repeated, with a curious mixture of wistful misery, and the childish cunning of the perception that she had made a successful stroke with these words before.

The result, so far as Innocent was concerned, was that she was taken tenderly up-stairs, and committed to the care of Alice, who put her to bed, and questioned her over again, making her own reflections on the adventure. Innocent cried herself to sleep, sobbing while drowsiness crept over her, and waking up to sob again. The groans of the old woman in the chapel possessed her brain, and the strange black desolation of the streets, which every time she dropped asleep seemed to enfold her again, frightening her back out of the world of dreams to feel for the first time the soothing of the firelight, and the kindly warmth and comfort of her little room. These, however, were but superficial tortures. The one which gave them their hold upon her, and which had indeed produced a sort of half awakening of her spiritual nature, was the terrible disappointment

of being "scolded" by Frederick. She knew no more tragical word to use, even in her own mind. He had forsaken her. She dwelt upon the fact with an acute pang, almost like the birth-pang of the soul which had not yet come to life within her. Almost, but not altogether—for the impulses of that high and potent inspiration of pain died off, when they reached the intolerable point, into vague childish moaning over an unexpected unkindness. Her only moral standing-ground in this vague uncertain world had failed her—Frederick had scolded her. The two things sound very different, yet in the feverish and confused musings of this poor undeveloped nature they were the same.

The party in the drawing-room were moved by very different feelings. The young people could not understand their mother. She had been crying, with her head bent down into her hands. To Nelly the incident was disagreeable and annoying, but not tragic; while to Frederick it had become chiefly an occasion of fault-finding. To think that it was somebody's fault was a great relief to his mind.

"Why do you let her stray about as she likes? Why don't you make her stay in the room with you? Why don't you give her something to do? Surely there are people enough in the house to see

that a child like that is not wandering about at her own will wherever she pleases," he said.

This view of the subject relieved him from the indefinite uneasiness which had begun to steal into his mind as to his own sharp words to Innocent. He was quite right in using those sharp words. She must be made to see (he thought) that something more was required of her than to yield to every impulse—that she must learn, being a girl, to respect the limits which society draws around a girl's path from her earliest beginning. She ought to have known them by instinct; but as she did not know them, it was necessary she should be taught, and the sooner and more effectually the better. But, besides this, it was good to have somebody at home to blame for her foolishness. If she had been properly watched it could not have happened. Why did not some one keep her in their eye? Why not force her to remain with the others, if force was necessary? Why not—? There was no end to Frederick's whys; everybody was wrong who had anything to do with the management of the girl; while he managed her, nothing of this sort had happened. But it was not in the nature of things that he could go on looking after a girl of sixteen—and the moment she got into the hands of the

women, her natural guardians, this was the issue. It was just like women's way—they wanted to do men's work, and they would not take the trouble to do their own.

That Nelly should have accepted this challenge hotly and fiercely was natural enough; but Mrs. Eastwood took no notice. It was only when the discussion grew furious that she roused herself and interfered.

"Children," she said, in her usual words, but with a more serious tone than usual, "don't wrangle. It does not become you, Frederick, to speak against women who have brought you up, and done everything for you; and it is foolish of you, Nelly, to argue, as if it was a thing for argument. If Frederick thinks I am a fool, and you are a fool, seeing us every day as he does, and knowing all about us, what good will arguing do him?"

"I did not mean that, mother," said Frederick, momentarily ashamed of himself.

"You said it, then, my dear, which is a very common thing among men," said Mrs. Eastwood, "and curious when you come to think of it. But, as I say, talk will not change any one's opinion. And here is something very much more serious to call for our attention. Something must be done about

Innocent. Her mother made me very unhappy when I was young. She was not affectionate either. She was secret; nobody could ever make sure what was going on in her mind. When she ran away and married Mr. Vane, none of us had the least suspicion of what was going on. I am afraid of Innocent doing something of the same kind."

"Running away and marrying — some one?" asked Frederick. An ineffable smile of secret complacency came over the young man's face. He gave a short little laugh of pleased embarrassment. "I think you may feel yourself safe against any such danger. Running away—or, at least, marrying—requires two——"

Mrs. Eastwood and Nelly looked at each other with secret feminine indignation, thus relieving their minds; but the mother replied, with a composure which she was far from feeling,—

"There are more ways of going wrong than making a foolish marriage. That is very wrong, heaven knows; when you consider how much the very character of the family and its standing in the world depends upon the wife whom a young man may marry in a sudden fancy——"

"If you are referring to me, mother," said Frederick catching fire, "you may make yourself per-

fectly easy. I look upon Innocent as a mere child. It seems to me a kind of insult to suppose for a moment that I could be capable——"

"Of running away with Innocent?" said his mother, looking him calmly in the face. "Be comforted, Frederick; I never imagined that you were likely so to compromise yourself. The danger I warned you against was of a very different kind.—But we need not return to that. Nobody can say you have been too kind to her to-night."

"I am not sentimental," he cried, getting up from his chair, and glad of the excuse for being angry, and withdrawing from unpleasant discussion. He went off, whistling an opera air, to show his perfect indifference, and was heard next moment pitching coals on the fire in the library, and wheeling the chairs about violently, to get himself the most comfortable place. This Sunday night was not so peaceable as a Sunday night ought to be in a respectable English household, which strove to do its duty. Dick came in immediately after Frederick's withdrawal, with muddy boots, and rain on his rough coat, but his cheeks pink with the cold air outside, and the serenity of an easy mind in his good-natured countenance. Dick seldom wrangled, and never allowed any event to disturb him very deeply. His

honest matter-of-fact character was always a comfort, whatever went wrong.

"So she has come back?" he said; "that's a blessing. I went as far as Piccadilly without seeing anything of her. I say, weren't they making a row in that little chapel in the road—groaning as if they'd groan their heads off. Had Innocent gone after Frederick, as the maids say? or where had she been?"

Dick was much amused when they told him the facts of the case, and saw great possibilities of laughter in the idea.

"I say, what jolly fun!" he cried—"thought they were going to kill her? Oh, ho, ho! What a stupid I was not to go in. Poor little soul, though, I hope you didn't scold her—not more than you could help, mamma! I suppose it's right to scold—to a certain point—but she's so scared and so bewildered."

"And you are my own good Dick," cried his mother, giving him a kiss, which the boy did not understand.

"Well, I'm glad to hear it," he said, with a brightening of pleasure, "though hang me if I know why. Ain't I muddy, rather! You never saw such a night. Honest fog is a joke to it. Drizzle, drizzle for ever; and the sky is so low you could touch it.

I'm glad she's in all right, and safe in bed; and I hope you didn't whip her. If I am to be up at seven to those dear mathematics," Dick added, making a face, "I suppose I had better go to bed too——"

"And don't forget to get up when you are called, dear," said Mrs. Eastwood; "and do work, there's a good boy. I am sure you have plenty of brains, if you will only take the trouble."

Dick shrugged his shoulders, as he went off cheerful after his long walk. I don't know that his brains were at all superabundant; and he was not fond of work; but after the clever and refined Frederick the very sight of this honest fellow, weighted to the ground as he was by the burden of the coming exam., was a consolation to everybody belonging to him. The mother and daughter had a final consultation before they, too, left the drawing-room. There had to be beer ordered for the gardener, who came in much more overwhelmed by the fatigue of his bootless walk than Dick was, depressed about things in general, and taking a dark view of Innocent's prospects in particular.

"Gentlemen don't like to be followed about like that," he said oracularly, "no more nor I would myself. Women should know as their place is at 'ome, and make up their minds to it."

This, it is true, was said down-stairs to a sympathetic housemaid; but, being an old servant, the gardener felt that he might unfold his mind a little, even to his mistress.

"I'd give the young lady a word, mum," he said, strong in his own sense of injury, as having lost his Sunday evening's ease and leisure through her means. "I'd let her know, whatever may be furrin' ways, as this sort o' thing won't do—not in England. It ain't the thing for a young gell. In furrin' parts there's many ways as ain't like ours—so I'm told—dancing all over the place of Sundays, and that sort; but not to be hard upon her the first time, nor nothing violent, I'd jest give her a word—that it won't do, not here."

"You may be sure I will say all that is necessary," said Mrs. Eastwood, half laughing, half angry. "My niece went out to go to church, and went to the little chapel in the road, and got frightened, poor child. That is the whole matter."

"Ah, ma'am you're a simple 'earted one," said the man, shaking his head with a scepticism that no asseveration could have touched.

The maids, too, were of opinion that Mrs. Eastwood was a very simple 'earted one; though not where they themselves were concerned. She had

not the same faith in their excuses as she seemed to put in this patent deception attempted by "the French girl," who was a likely one to get into trouble by going to church surely. The kitchen and all its dependencies laughed the idea to scorn, though, perhaps, respecting Innocent more for the cleverness and invention she had displayed in finding out such an excuse. But the story was laid up against her, with a fulness of detail and circumstance such as might have made an historian despair. How she followed Frederick to his dinner-party, and watched him through the window, and went after him to the club, was all known to the housemaid as particularly as if she had been there.

"And I hope he'll reward her, when he's free, and can please hisself," said Jane in the kitchen, who was romantic.

"Get along with you," cried the cook. "Do you think gentlemen care for a chit like that?"

"And one as follows 'em about," said Susan solemnly, whose younger sister Jane was.

CHAPTER II.

PHILOSOPHY FOR GIRLS.

THE result of this day's proceedings was not on the whole satisfactory to Frederick. If, as he, like the maids, felt assured, Innocent's escapade had been entirely on his own account, a despairing attempt to follow and be with him, such devotion, however flattering, was of an embarrassing character, and very likely to compromise him, however prudently and conscientiously he might struggle to take no undue advantage of her. Like the gardener he felt that it would not do, and having also, like the gardener, very little confidence in his mother's severity, he determined to make the matter very clear to Innocent herself. Fortune favoured him so far in this virtuous intention that he found her alone in the breakfast-room next morning when he came down-stairs. Frederick was always late. This was

one of the things that made Dick so angry; while he, unhappy boy, was hunted up at seven o'clock, Frederick came down to breakfast at ten, with an occasional mild remonstrance, but no more. Things were sent away to be kept hot for him; fresh coffee had to be made, and fresh rolls procured, and to everybody this seemed the most natural thing in the world. He was always late, but he was later than usual on this particular day, which, being Monday, was an early day with the household. I need not enter into the reasons why Monday was an early day. Every lady who is my gentle reader, and who does her own housekeeping, will understand; and for the uninitiated it is well that they should learn to believe and tremble. It might be unwise of Mrs. Eastwood to leave Innocent alone in the room, but she was unaccustomed to the attitude of suspicion, and felt it dreadful to be obliged always to have her wits about her. Perhaps it was with the object of seeing Frederick, that Innocent, poor soul, lingered. She had been slightly, superficially touched by the kindness of her aunt to her the night before, and by the fact that no "scolding" had followed upon the offence; and she had for the first time offered to do something, no greater a business than arranging moss about some flower-pots, for which purpose it

was, nominally, that she was left in the dining-room. But another feeling much more strong possessed her. Frederick had "scolded" her. He had beaten her down when she was very low with angry words, and consequently she had a wistful desire to be forgiven by him; to know how he would speak to her next time; if there was any hope for her, or if all was over for ever. The others had slightly moved the surface of her mind by their kindness, but Frederick, by his unkindness, had touched her much more deeply, almost to the point of revolution. All her senses were keenly awake to indications of his coming. She heard his step a dozen times before it really came; she wondered vaguely what he would say, how he would look; she was eager, and anxious, and tremulous as she had never been before. Her interest in him, instead of being checked, was doubled. This was what his unkindness had done.

When he came into the room first he took no notice of her. He went and poked the fire, and then he examined the table, and rang the bell for his hot coffee. Then only he said, "Good morning, Innocent." He did not hold out his hand. Sometimes he would stroke her hair, or pat her head, or give her some token of affectionateness. To-day he did not even hold out his hand. "What are you

doing?" was his next question, for it was odd to see her doing anything. She made haste to answer, heaping up the moss with such tremulous fingers that it fell down again in a mass.

"I am doing this—for Nelly."

"That is right," he said more cheerfully. "Never mind what nonsense you do, so long as you make it up with them. I told you the other day you would never get on till you learned to make friends of your own sex."

Innocent made no answer. What could she say? A general observation like this was like Latin and Greek to her. She looked at him, and that was all. By this time Brownlow had brought in the coffee, and he had begun to eat his breakfast. It is a comfortable sort of thing to do on a chilly spring morning, with a pleasant fire on one side of you, and sunshine and crocuses on the other, looking in through the window. This mollified Frederick in spite of himself.

"That was a very foolish business of yours last night," he said, but in a softer tone; "you must not do such things. I daresay it is dull for you here. You don't enter into their life, and there is nothing of your own to interest you. But still you know girls have to put up with that. It may be

hard, but still they have to do it. I suppose when you are married it is expected that you should have it made up to you. At least this is the ordinary state of affairs; girls have to put up with it. I cannot take you to my club, you know, or to the—other places—where I go."

"I did not want you to take me," said Innocent, surprised.

"I am glad to hear it," said Frederick. He did not believe her any more than the maids did. He smiled a little within himself at the idea that she was yielding to a conviction of the necessity for pretence. He was half amused by this, and rather more flattered than before. She must be beginning, he thought, to feel half a woman, to understand that she must not say and do everything that came into her head, with the freedom permitted to himself, for instance. "I was going to speak to you very seriously," he went on, "but as you are trying to make friends with the others, and to do better, I will not worry you. What I said is for your good, Innocent—which is not to be obtained by your usual way of doing what pleases yourself, but by yielding to others and trying to be content with what is thought good for you. This may be hard" (N.B. Frederick certainly had never tried), "but it is the

only way for a girl to get on. You must manage somehow to make friends of your own sex."

Frederick dwelt upon this aphorism with some pride. He felt that it was original, and did him credit, and its wisdom gratified him. On the whole he was pleased with himself while he delivered his little address. Instead of taking advantage of the girl's fondness for him, as some men might have done, he was doing his utmost to lead her in the paths of virtue. Whether she or any one else appreciated it, he at least did. He was so far softened by the sense of his own goodness, that when he had finished breakfast, he put his hand kindly upon her shoulder while he said "Good morning," and finding her face near his, and turned towards him, kissed her for the first time with much benevolence of feeling. Innocent's face grew suddenly red under this salute. She was not angry, she was not pleased—she did not know how to receive it; but a sudden flush of colour answered to the light and somewhat careless touch. Frederick himself went off half laughing, half confused. He said to himself that the girl was growing into a woman, that she had developed very quickly since he had brought her home. "I must mind what I am about," he said to himself. Perhaps, on the whole, in giving

this kiss he had gone just a very little too far. And Frederick felt that there was a deep responsibility upon him. He must not delude his cousin with hopes that never could be realized.

With this feeling in his mind he went off to the office, a little wondering and alarmed lest the story of his wonderful encounter last night in the street should have already reached it. But nobody showed any signs of knowing this curious incident, and though Frederick was slightly defiant and ready to stand on his defence at the slightest provocation, no such provocation was offered him. I do not know how it is that when something disagreeable is about to happen to us, we so often have this preparation of looking for something else, perhaps equally disagreeable, which does not come. Frederick was quite prepared to be assailed about the mysterious female figure which he had rescued from the midst of the crowd, and which he had driven off with, without a word of explanation, under the very eyes of his astonished friend. He looked out a little nervously for every new-comer who entered the place, fancying that his last night's companion would appear. No one came, however, until about three o'clock, just before the hour for leaving, on the verge, as it were, of security. He was just beginning to tell himself

that all was safe, that his perils were over for the day, and that a joke of this kind could not survive twenty-four hours, when the porter brought him the card of a visitor, who awaited him down-stairs. Frederick took it unsuspicious, for at that moment he feared only Egerton, his friend of last night. For a moment he gazed in wonder, which rapidly turned into consternation at the card. This was the inscription upon it:—

MR. R. R. R. BATTY.

The Villa, Sterborne.

The name of a second-rate hotel in London was written in pencil across the card. Frederick held it in his hand, and gazed at it, feeling his features stiffen as if it had been the Gorgon herself whose countenance he was contemplating. I am afraid, that having heard nothing of Mr. Batty for some weeks, he had forgotten the benevolent stranger who had interposed to save him when he was almost in extremity. Mrs. Eastwood had presented her son with a bank-note or two by way of paying the

expenses of that illness of his, which had detained him compulsorily in Paris, and put him, no doubt, to a great deal of extra expense; but as there was not sufficient to pay Batty, and Batty did not ask for payment, Frederick had disposed of these very comfortably in other ways.

"Shall I show the gentleman up?" said the porter, while the young man gazed horror-stricken at the card.

"Show him into Mr. Jones's room," said Frederick, with an effort. Jones was absent on leave, and his room was a safe place, where a disagreeable visitor might be encountered without any more harm than was involved in the sight of him. Then he did what he could to prepare himself for the meeting. He buttoned his coat, and took his hat and cane by way of showing that he was about to leave the office, and had little time for colloquy. He tried to make up in his mind in desperate haste what to say about the money, and he tried at the same time, the one attempt mingling with the other, and confusing it, to make up some story for home, to elicit a few more of those most necessary banknotes. It is dreadful to think how many well-looking, faultlessly-dressed young gentlemen in the public service like Frederick Eastwood, looking self-possessed enough

for any emergency, and superior enough to crush into insignificance the greater part of their fellow-creatures, should be secretly occupied in making up hasty and clumsy inventions like this, to stave off the paying of money, or to coax it out of well-guarded pockets. Frederick walked along the passage as slowly as he could towards Jones's room. Wretched little Innocent! it was all her fault that he had been seduced into this expenditure, and put in this man's power. Frederick remembered vividly how objectionable the man's loud voice and coarse geniality had been to him when, with a bad headache and a sinking heart, he sat and studied "Bradshaw," and counted out his last francs in the Paris hotel. What must he seem now, when he no longer had it in his power to be of use, and appeared only in the guise of a creditor, always an odious character to appear in? Frederick walked into the room at last with something of the feelings which must move the poor wretch who marches to his execution. Could he have followed his own will, ropes would not have sufficed to drag him whither his reluctant feet now paced with that appearance of voluntary motion which is often such a miserable pretence. To how many places do we go thus, pretending to do it of our own free will—to balls and dinner parties, and

other festive meetings, to our own marriage sometimes, to every kind of act in which we are—heaven help us!—free agents, as the jargon goes. Frederick's feelings were doubtless exaggerated, for, after all, he owed this man not much over fifty pounds. But then the man could tell things of him which he fondly hoped were known to no one in his own sphere—as if there was anything in any man's life of a disagreeable or disgraceful kind which was not known!

Batty met him with the greatest cordiality, with a large red dirty hand outstretched, and smiles of genial welcome.

"Delighted to see you looking so well, sir," he said; "quite picked up again, eh, after your little spree abroad? Glad of that. You young men have no moderation. A steady old stager like me knows just how far to go. But you're always on ahead, you young 'uns. I came up to town on Saturday, Mr. Eastwood, to look about me a bit, and see how the world was going on, and I've lost no time in looking you up."

"Much obliged, I'm sure," said poor Frederick, shivering. "I ought to have written to you about that money," and he went up to the smouldering fire and poked it violently. "How cold the weather keeps for this time of the year!"

"It do, to be sure," said Batty. "But, Mr. Frederick, if you'll give me the privilege of calling you so—which comes natural, seeing I have been among Eastwoods all my life—I ain't come here prying about the money. I'm above such mean tricks. When I can be of service to a gentleman I'm proud, and so long as I'm used honourable, and treated like a friend, hang me if I'd dun any man. It ain't the money, sir, but feeling that has brought me here."

"I am sure you are very good," said Frederick stiffly; "but however that may be on your part, Mr. Batty, I am aware that I ought to have written to you about what is really a debt of honour——"

"Hush, hush!" said Batty, "you make me feel like a shopman, I declare you do. I've taken the liberty to write where we're staying, Mr. Eastwood, on my card, and if you'll eat a bit of dinner with us at seven, sharp, you'll do us honour, sir. I've got my daughter with me. It ain't often I can get her up to town, and when I do I like to show her a bit of the world. If you'd ever been down our way with your cousin, the baronet, you'd have heard of my girl. She's known as the Flower of Sterborne down our way. I don't say but what you've great beauties about London, greater beauties than our country lasses; but I'm proud of my 'Manda. I'm

not in the way of asking my friends when she's with me, but an Eastwood ain't like any one else, at least not to her and me."

"I am sure you are very good," said Frederick, using the same words again, and stiffening more and more. A rapid calculation had run through his mind while Batty was speaking. Should he say he was engaged, or should he keep the monster in good-humour by enduring a dinner in his company? Was it worth his while, since the monster appeared so amiable by nature, to take all this trouble to keep him in good-humour? These, and various other branches of the same question, went through his mind, retarding his reply. He did not personally know his cousin, the baronet, though Frederick was fully aware of the importance to a young man in society of such a relative, and if the man really knew the Eastwoods, his power of telling a disagreeable story was infinitely enhanced. On the whole, it seemed to Frederick that it was better to humour him, to accept his invitation, and trust to the support of Providence to get through the evening. After all, it was seeing "life" as much at least as many other ways which he had taken in his day for that purpose, and which his friends were constantly employing. When he had got rid of Batty he made

up, in case of any chance discovery, an explanation of what he was about to do. "I am going to dine with an old fellow whom I picked up in Paris the other day," he said to the people in the office. "A genuine John Bull, ready for anything, but not knowing a word of any language but his own. He turned out to be some sort of rural hanger-on of my cousin Sir Geoffrey, and out of gratitude he is going to give me a dinner. I expect some fun."

"I wonder what that elaborate explanation means?" one of his audience said to another. "Eastwood is always up to some mischief when he's explanatory. This time I wonder what it can be. I don't believe he knows his cousin Sir Geoffrey from Adam."

"If he did, he's a poor wretch in the hands of the Jews, and not much good to any one," said the other; but perhaps this was because neither of the two had a cousin in the baronetage, which makes a difference in a man's feelings.

Innocent was in her usual place in the little window by the door when Frederick went home that evening. The sight of her recalled to him all the wise determinations of the morning, and he was annoyed to see how little fruit they had borne. Really, he felt, this must be put a stop to. He made

a sign to her to come out to him, and went round the side of the house into the garden. It was a cold and unfavourable spring, scarcely warmer now, though it was the end of March, than it had been in February, but the days had grown longer, and Frederick's return was now generally in daylight.

"I wanted to say to you, Innocent, that you must give up this habit of watching for me," he said. "No doubt it is very kind of you. I did not mind it so much when you were quite a stranger, and of course knew me best—and when the nights were darker you were not so much noticed at the window. But now you must recollect it is quite light, and a great girl like you is remarked. People will say unkind things about you. They will say, for instance, that you are fond—of me."

"I am fond of you," she said, with the tears in her eyes.

"That is all very well," said Frederick, "but we must not go too far. Don't let me see you there again. Girls ought to know these things without being told. You are a great girl, almost grown up: and you know the others now almost as well as you know me. I should have told you this in the morning, but I forgot. Altogether, Innocent, there must be a change. I had thought your own sense would

teach you—and I thought that what I said this morning—— But you compel me to speak plainly," said Frederick, seeing the face of his mother looking out from the drawing-room, and feeling inspired by the thought that he would himself be called to question for this interview with Innocent. He was determined, however, at whatever risk, to "put a stop to this sort of thing." And the annoyance to which he had himself been subjected gave him strength and courage. It seems only right that we should have compensation, and afflict others when trouble has come to ourselves.

Innocent made no answer. She walked silently by his side, overcome by the bitterness of this sudden onslaught when she had expected quite the reverse. Poor child, her earliest training was all emotional; the severest kind of mental discipline. When he made her a sign to come out to him, she had thought he meant to be kinder, more affectionate than usual, more like what he used to be when he travelled with her, and cared for her in everything. How quickly, how gladly she had rushed out, leaving the door open behind her, as Brownlow remembered long afterwards. And to find that all her pleasant expectations were to end in a new and utterly unprovoked *accès* of scolding! She tried hard not

to cry, her pride being hurt at last, but the large tears dropped down her cheeks, as she went silently along the walk by his side. She put up her hand furtively to dash them away. She turned her head from him that he might not see them. Was it the same Frederick who had kissed her before he went out, who had always been good to her, except last night? But she could not say anything either in defence or submission. She was too deeply and cruelly disappointed to have any power of speech left.

"You won't give in?" said Frederick. "You are just like all women. You will never allow you are in the wrong. When I come home, fretted and vexed from the world," continued the young man, taking a high tone, "and hoping to have a little repose and comfort at home, you begin to worry me from the first moment you catch sight of me. I declare it is hard; a man who has always tried to do his duty at home—and instead of finding it a refuge from the troubles of life——"

This speech was perfectly unintelligible to Innocent. She looked up at him with vague surprise, being quite unaware, poor child, of the troubles of life from which Frederick escaped with the hope of finding comfort at home. He had fallen without

thinking into the ordinary and conventional manner in which manhood indignant addresses its womankind. He pulled himself up suddenly with a "Pshaw!" of disgust, which could only be addressed to himself.

"I mean you must put a stop to all this nonsense," he said abruptly. "Make yourself happy somehow. Do as other people do. Don't sit and mope in a corner and gaze at me, and don't watch for me any more at that window. If you do, I shall be horribly vexed. There now, run in and think no more of it. I don't mean to be cross; but you must remember, Innocent," he concluded, with great emphasis, "you must remember that what you have got to do is to please, not yourself, but me."

Innocent received this first lesson in the female necessity of self-renunciation in silence, taking it in with her eyes as well as her ears. She kept looking at him, in the dulness of her perception, wondering if there was something more to follow; but nothing followed. Then she said "Yes" vaguely, and they went in together, he to the drawing-room, where he had his mother to encounter, she to the schoolroom, high up in the roof, which she had taken possession of to sit and dream in. Girls seldom have their lesson so very plainly put forth to them in words,

but perhaps Innocent's undeveloped mind required it. "What you have to do is to please, not yourself, but me!" She pondered the words, and got to the length of mastering their meaning without any criticism. Such plain speaking has in it a certain sublimity, surmounting all secondary shades of meaning, and penetrating into the simplest soul. She got it by heart, seated on her window-ledge, looking out upon the little chapel, which once more had caught something of the aspect of the Church of the Spina. "Not yourself, but me; not yourself, but me!" Thus Innocent got her first great lesson by heart.

CHAPTER III.

THE FLOWER OF STERBORNE.

I DO not know if any prevision of the fate which was about to befall him was in Frederick's mind on that eventful night. He had a few words with his mother, which were not altogether friendly, ere he went to dress, for Mrs. Eastwood objected to the private walk and talk with Innocent, which seemed to her to be done in defiance of her warning and request.

"Ask her what I said to her, if you don't trust me," Frederick had said in high dudgeon, before he went to prepare himself for Mr. Batty's entertainment; and this encounter excited him, and gave him a perverse inclination to enjoy himself with the host whom he felt would be so highly disapproved of by his family. I don't think he let his imagination dwell at all on the fact that there was a third person to be present, or that this was a woman and a

"beauty." The greatest beauty in the world, being Mr. Batty's daughter, could be of little importance to an Eastwood. He went his way to Batty's hotel with his head full of many thoughts, but totally indifferent to this one. He thought it was immensely impudent of the fellow to ask him, that it was rather hard upon himself to be obliged to go, that it would be amusing to see how fellows of that sort dined and conducted themselves generally, along with a variety of other reflections equally superficial; but he never thought of the Flower of Sterborne, nor of the special effect she might be likely to produce on a young man suddenly presented to her. The hotel was not one of those seeming humble and quiet establishments, where princes and millionaires abound; it was more pretentious and less expensive, but yet dear enough to frighten any moderate soul out of London. Frederick was shown into a small dining-room, prepared for a small party. He saw with some relief that there were but three places, and took his seat very easily and without ceremony in front of the fire, with the *Times*, which was lying on a table. He scarcely noticed the door open; when it did open it would no doubt be Batty, who was not shy, and would soon make his presence known. Frederick read on, without looking behind him, until he became

suddenly aware of a rustling and subdued movement, and a slight air moved his paper as if some one had passed behind him. Startled by this, and somewhat ashamed of his own easy indifference, he started suddenly to his feet, and turned round. He never forgot all his life the sight that met his eyes. Standing behind his chair was (he thought) the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. The arch look with which she had been contemplating his unconcern was still in her face. She was tall, almost as tall as himself, and ample, a fully-developed and splendid piece of flesh and blood, not so warm or so full-blown as Rubens, but something approaching that school of art. She was of the class of beauty which has come to be distinctive of the present period, though I cannot tell why. Her hair, I need not say, was golden, her complexion dazzling. She was like the sun, almost as brilliant, in her mingling of tints, her snow-white, and rose-red, and glittering glory of hair. The sight of her was too much for weak vision. It dazzled and brought water to the eyes of the rash and feeble beholder. If you could have calmly examined her features, without regard to that soft glow and glory of colour, and texture, and roundness, and life, it is possible that you might have found them to be not at all perfect; but this not one

spectator in a hundred had coolness enough to do. Her eyes were hazel; they ought to have been blue, according to all rules; but it seemed part of her character, and the wilfulness which was its chief point, that she should have eyes which, beautiful as they were, did not quite "go with" her face. There are many kinds of hazel eyes; it is the most change-ful, the most capricious of colours. I have seen it turn to gold in a certain pair of orbs I wot of, showing like light itself in the light. I have seen it melt into the softest liquid grey; but there is a kind of hazel eye, very bright, very splendid, in which there is hung a subtle little danger-signal to all mankind. These are the eyes that have a spark of red in them, flashing out now and then from the warm, translucent brown, a spark which tells of temper, of passion, of headstrong will, and impulse. 'Manda Batty had these eyes. They were lamps of light, and it seemed to the looker-on, if any one remarked it at all, that this fiery gleam was necessary to give them character, and keep them from losing their due importance in the brilliant and sweet glow of colour that surrounded them. This, if it really was, as I think, an indication of danger, was the only one. At this moment her face was full of suppressed laughter. She had a finger lifted to her lip like a statue of silence, but

how unlike a statue of silence was she otherwise! or, indeed, a statue of anything; everything about her was warm and soft, breathing a lavish life. When Frederick turned round upon her so suddenly, the laughter in her face burst forth. Perhaps it was louder and more uncultivated than if she had been, as people say, a lady. She threw herself down in a chair, and laughed till the water sparkled on her pretty eyelashes, and she put her hands to her waist with such a rendering of "Laughter holding both his sides," as never entered into any painter's imagination. "Oh," she cried, "I shall die of laughing; come and stop me, come, papa."

It struck Frederick with a shock of surprise and pain when Mr. Batty came in by another door, also inarticulate with laughter. The idea of this wonderful creature being Batty's daughter appalled and struck him dumb. Not to say that he was very deeply embarrassed by the situation altogether, by the laughter of the new-comer, and his own semi-ridiculous attitude—her beauty had struck him at once with one of those impressions which are not to be shaken off, which count, slight and superficial as is often the instrument, among the great things of life. Never before had Frederick been so profoundly moved. He did not understand the effect, nor what

it meant. He ceased to be himself for the moment, and became the subject of a strange and subtle experiment, which stamped her reflection upon him. No, he was not himself; he was a mirror of her, a sensitive plate, upon which that sudden light had painted her likeness. These may seem fantastic similes, but I know no other that would convey what I mean. I suppose it was what we, with our limited powers of expression, call love at first sight. It was certainly adoration at first sight, which is a different thing.

"Well, Mr. Eastwood, here's my wild girl making fun of us both," said Batty, "without even giving me a chance of introducing you. 'Manda, this is Mr. Eastwood, as, of course you have found out."

"Don't say Mr. Eastwood, papa."

"No, you're right. Mr. Frederick, that's what I mean, and a deal nicer a gentleman," said the father. "You see, Mr. Frederick, 'Manda has been, so to speak, brought up with nothing but Eastwoods. All the young'uns, from Sir Geoffrey downwards, róde into Sterborne on their ponies to have their lessons with our old curate, and 'Manda being his prime favourite, and partly brought up with him——"

"You don't suppose, papa, that any one but ourselves cares for all these details. Pray forgive me for

laughing at you," said Miss Amanda, turning to Frederick, "you were so comfortable and so much at your ease reading your *Times*. What can gentlemen find in the *Times* always, morning, noon, and night? Papa is never done with his paper; first there is one thing, then another. I suppose you had been reading it all the morning, Mr. Frederick Eastwood, and the first thing you do is to take it up here."

"I did not know there was any one observing me," said Frederick, standing confused and humble before her. He who was very lofty and dignified to his mother and sister, was ready to be abject to Amanda. He listened to her with absolute reverence, though all that she had to say was commonplace enough. When he was placed beside her at dinner, and found himself at liberty to look at her and listen to her undisturbed, it seemed to Frederick that he had never been so blessed. He took in all her chatter without losing a word. Miss Batty was in full dress. Those were the days when English ladies were supposed always to appear with bare shoulders in the evening, and her beautiful shoulders and arms were bare. Her dress was blue, with a long train, which was considerably in her way. If there was anything wanting in her it was this—she moved about in a manner that did not suit the dignity of her beauty; her

movements were quick, jerky, and without grace; she bustled like a notable housewife rather than a fine lady. Perhaps if her dress had not been much too fine for the occasion this would have been less remarkable, but as it was, Frederick's dream was disturbed a little when she jumped up to help herself. "Oh, I can't sit and wait, if I want a bit of bread, till the servant comes," she cried. Frederick did not like the words, nor the tone of them, but she was lovelier than ever when she said them. Thus he did not lose his senses instantly, or suppose that everything that fell from her lips was divine. But his admiration, or adoration, mastered all his criticism and swept away his good sense. What she said might be foolish or flippant, but how she said it was heavenly. He could not take his eyes from her. He made what effort he could to keep up the ordinary decorum, and look as if he were capable of eating, and drinking, and talking, as he had been the day before, but the effort was very little successful. Miss Amanda saw her victory, and almost disdained it, it was so easy; and her father saw it and was satisfied.

"Now take me to the play," she said, when dinner was over. "It isn't often I am in town, and I mean to enjoy myself. Oh, we may be late, but it does

not matter. If it is only for the afterpiece I am determined to go."

"Was there ever so imperious a girl?" cried her father. "You ought to remember, 'Manda, here is Mr. Eastwood. You can't send away a gentleman that has but just eaten his dinner."

"He can come too," said Amanda. "I like to have two gentlemen. There is always plenty for two gentlemen to do. Won't you come, Mr. Frederick Eastwood? But anyhow I must go," she continued, turning to her father, who was almost as abject in his devotion as Frederick was. Had she been anything short of perfection Frederick would have hesitated much before he consented to show himself in public with Mr. Batty and his daughter; indeed, the possibility of such a thing would have driven him frantic. But now he had no such thoughts. If he hesitated it was but to calculate what was going on in the theatrical world; what there was worthy to be seen by her. He was not much of a theatre-goer, but he knew what was being played, and where. He suggested one or two of what were supposed to be the best plays; but she put him down quite calmly. She had already decided that she was going to see one of the sensational pieces of the day, a drama (I do not know it, I may be doing it an injustice), the chief

point in which was the terrific situation of the hero or heroine, who was bound down on the line of a railway when the train was coming. It was this lofty representation which she had set her heart on seeing. Frederick handed her into the cab which was immediately sent for. He sat by her in it; he breathed in the atmosphere of "Ess. bouquet" which surrounded her. Now and then he thought, with a glimmer of horror, of meeting somebody whom he knew; but his mind was only at intervals sufficiently free to harbour this thought. It was, however, with a certain fright that he found himself in the stage box, which it appeared had been provided beforehand for Miss Amanda's pleasure. "I prefer a box," she said to Frederick, "here one can be comfortable, and papa, if he likes, can fall asleep in a comfortable chair; but I can't understand a lady making herself happy down there." She pointed to the stalls, where Frederick was too happy not to be. There was, of course, somebody he knew in the second row, who found him out he feared in the dignity of his box, where Miss Amanda had no idea of hiding herself. "She objected to her gentlemen," she said, "taking refuge behind a curtain," and she did no such injustice to her own beauty as to conceal it. She dropped her cloak from her shoulders, and gave the house all the

benefit; and she kept calling Frederick's attention to one thing and another, insisting that he should crane his neck round the corner to look at this or that. Her beauty and her dress and evident willingness to be admired drew many eyes, and Frederick felt that he had a share in the *succès* which he could very well have dispensed with. He had experienced a good many adventures, but very few like this. He had always been very respectable under the eyes of the world; to be sure, he was quite respectable now; there was no fault to be found with the party—his beautiful companion, indeed, was something quite new, and not very much used to her present position; but there was nothing wrong in that. Nevertheless Frederick felt that there was something to pay for the strange confusion of blessedness in which he seemed to have lost himself. He felt this by intervals, and he kept as much as he could behind the curtains, behind *her*. She was perfectly willing to occupy the centre of the box, to rain down influence, to be seen and admired. "Mr. Eastwood, I wish you would not keep behind me. Do let people see that I have some one to take care of me. Papa has gone to sleep, of course," said the beauty, and she turned round upon Frederick with such a look that he remembered nothing any more but her loveliness, and the delight

of being near her. She chattered through all the play, and he listened. She said a great deal that was silly, and some things that were slightly vulgar, and he noted them, yet was not less subjugated by a spell which was beyond resistance. I cannot be supposed to understand this, nor to explain it. In such matters I can only record facts. He was not under the delusion that she was a lofty, or noble, or refined being, though she was Batty's daughter. He presumed that she was Batty's daughter heart and soul; made of the same *pâte*, full of the same thoughts. She was "not a lady," beautiful, splendid, and well dressed as she was; the humble, little snub-nosed girl in the stalls below, who looked up at this vision of loveliness with a girl's admiration, had something which all the wealth of the Indies could not have given to Miss Amanda. And Frederick Eastwood saw this quite plainly, yet fell in love, or in madness, exactly as if he had not seen it. The feeling, such as it was, was too genuine to make him capable of many words; but he did his best to amuse her, and he listened to all she said, which was a very good way of pleasing this young woman.

"I hope you mean to stay in town for some time," he said, in one of the pauses of her abundant talk.

"Not very long," said Miss 'Manda. "Papa likes

to live well, and to do things in the best sort of way; so he spends a deal of money, and that can't last long. Our hotel isn't like Mivart's, and that sort of thing; but it is dreadfully dear. We spend as much as—oh, I couldn't venture to tell you how much we spend a day. Papa likes to have everything of the best, and so do I."

"And so you ought," said Frederick adoring. "Pardon me if I am saying too much."

"Oh, you are not saying very much, Mr. Eastwood. It is I that am talking," said Amanda; "and as for our staying long here, that does not much matter, for papa wants you to come to Sterborne. He has been talking of it ever since he came back from Paris. What did you do to him to make him take such a fancy to you? We don't think the other Eastwoods behaved very nicely to us, and ever since he met with you papa has been telling me of all your good qualities. You have put a spell upon him, I think."

"He is very good, I am sure," said Frederick, stiffening in spite of himself.

"Oh, I know," said Amanda, with a toss of her head. "We are not so fine as you are, we don't visit with county people, nor that sort of thing. But we have plenty of people come to see us who are better off than the Eastwoods, and better blood too, so you

need not be afraid. Papa has dealings with the very best. We don't like to be slighted," said the beauty, with a gleam of that red light from her beautiful eyes; "and when people put on airs, like your cousin has done, it sets papa's back up. That was why we went against Sir Geoffrey at the election. But I hope you will come, Mr. Eastwood; papa took such a fancy to you."

"I have just been away from the office for a month. I fear I shall not have leisure again for some time," said Frederick, feeling that an invitation from Batty was to be resisted, even when conveyed by such lovely lips.

"How hideous it must be not to be one's own master; to have to ask for 'leave' like a servant," cried 'Manda with a laugh; which speech set all Frederick's nerves ajar, and almost released him from the syren. He withdrew into the shade of the curtains, and drew to him all the succour of his pride.

"Yes, it is a pitiful position," he said, with an angry laugh; "but I may comfort myself that a great many people share it with me. Do you know I am afraid I must leave you. This performance is endless, and rather dull."

"Upon my word!" cried Miss Batty, "you are free-spoken, Mr. Frederick. To tell a lady you

are dull when she is doing her best to amuse you!"

"Pardon me, I spoke of the performance."

"Oh, I don't care much for the performance," said Amanda, with a beaming smile. "I like the lights and the music, and the feeling of being out in the world. But you wouldn't go off, and leave me—with papa asleep, and no one to talk to."

"I have an engagement—at my club."

"Oh, if you wish to go away, Mr. Eastwood——" The beauty turned away pouting, turning her lovely shoulders upon him, and tossing her beautiful head. Frederick had risen partly in the liveliness of personal offence, partly with an impulse of prudence, to escape while he might. But his heart failed him when he saw the averted head, the resentful movement. Batty dozed peacefully in his chair, interfering with no one. And something tugged at the unfortunate young man, who stood undecided whether to fly or to stay. To leave a lovely creature like this, the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, alone without any one to amuse her: to leave the place vacant which a hundred no doubt would give their ears for! What harm could it do him to stay? It was pleasant to spend an hour or two by the side of anything so pretty. Come of it—what could come of it? It was

an accidental delight entirely, without connexion with the rest of his life; an isolated event, without either origin or issue. Why should not he, like others, enjoy himself for the moment? While he was thus hesitating Amanda turned her head round with a sudden provoking glance. "Oh, you have not gone yet?" she asked. Frederick felt, as it were, on his knees before her.

"Must I go? have I proved so unworthy of my privilege?" he cried, humbly taking his seat with deprecating looks. Miss Batty did not wish him to go, and said so freely, with unflattering plainness of speech.

"I should be left to listen to papa's snores, which I can hear at home," she said. "I always prefer some one to talk to. I daresay, however, I should not have been left long by myself, for there is Lord Hunterston down below in those horrid stalls looking up. He is trying to catch my eye. No; I don't care to have too many. I shan't see him as long as you stay."

"Then I shall stay for ever," said Frederick, inspired by that touch of rivalship. Lord Hunterston, however, did manage to find his way up to the box, whether by Miss 'Manda's permission or not, and Frederick grew stiff and resentful while the other

foolish youth paid his homage. Lord Hunterston pricked him into double eagerness, and sent all the suggestions of prudence to the winds. Amanda proved herself thoroughly equal to the occasion. She kept the two young men in hand with perfect skill, though she allowed herself to be slightly insolent to Frederick, referring again to the "leave" without which he could not budge. This time, however, the reference did not make him angry, but only impressed him with the fact that his admiration was nothing to her, and that every step of vantage-ground would have to be fought for, and held with the exercise of all his powers. He felt himself pitted against not Lord Hunterston only, but all the world. It seemed impossible to imagine that this syren, who had conquered himself by a glance, should not attract everybody that had the happiness of approaching her. Terror, jealousy, and pride, all came in to aid the strongest passion of all, which had already taken possession of him—terror of losing her, jealousy of everybody who looked at her, and all the *amour propre* and determination to elevate himself over the heads of his rivals that could lend warmth to a young man's determination. No prize is fully estimated until the sense that it will be hotly contested bursts upon the competitor's mind. Frederick grew half

wild when the time came for him to leave the theatre. He secured her arm to lead her down-stairs, but only by dint of having all his wits about him, and taking his rival unawares. And then he was dismissed at the cab door, with all his nerves tingling, his heart beating, his whole frame in a ferment. He walked home all the way, following the path which her vehicle, so ignoble, and unfit for her to enter, must have taken; he passed under the windows he supposed to be hers. In short, he did everything that a foolish young man, mad with sudden excitement, and what is called passion, is expected to do, and worked himself into a higher and higher strain of excitement, as with his head full of thoughts of her he made his way home, longing impatiently for the morning, when he might see her again.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT IT IS TO BE "IN LOVE."

THE story of such sudden passions as this which had come upon Frederick Eastwood are common enough and well known. Love is a subject which concerns and interests the whole world, and though there is not much that is novel to be said about it, it is the event or accident in life of which the gentle reader never tires. Let not that kind listener be shocked if I call it an accident. Sometimes it is the influence which shapes our lives, but sometimes, also, it is so slight an episode that we are disposed to smile or to sneer at the prevailing human prejudice which makes it the chief centre of existence in all song and story. A pure and genuine love, however, has something of attraction in it for every creature. It recalls the most delicious moments of life, those in which the dream of perfect happiness, never to be fully realized,

is forming in the youthful imagination, and all heaven and earth thrills and quickens with visionary hopes and aspirations; or it suggests, more sweetly and more vaguely even than those dreams themselves, the visions that are to come. The ignoble love which it is my evil fortune to have now in hand, would, no doubt, could I enter into it, recall its own ignoble yet exciting memories to the minds which are capable of such feelings. Frederick Eastwood scarcely slept all night, and when he did drop into a feverish doze, the image of Miss 'Manda, her golden hair dropping warm and bright upon her beautiful shoulders, the soft rose-white of her hand supporting the milky rose of her cheek, the curves of her face, the splendour and glow of beauty about her, haunted his dreams. Better visions, I hope, haunt the pillows of most lovers, but this was how Frederick loved, or rather how he fell into passion and frenzy, suddenly, without warning or thought over the attractions of Mr. Batty's daughter, whom the day before he would have thought quite beneath his lightest thought. Thus love, even when of the least worthy kind, laughs at prejudice and class distinctions, and at all those conventional restraints which are stronger than the suggestions of wisdom. I do not think that any generous or exalted emotion

would have led Frederick Eastwood to commit himself, to depart from what he thought becoming to his own elevated position and character; and this being the case, there may be a certain human satisfaction in the thought that something does exist which is capable of plucking the intellectualist from his eminence, and the man of social pretence from his position, as well as the prince from his throne. Love, that conquers all things, conquers in this way even the predominant influence of self. Frederick for once was superior to that determined adherence to his own will and pleasure which had accompanied him through his whole life. His first thought in the morning was for her. He got up earlier than usual, though he had been late on the previous night. He had no wish to sleep; it was sweeter to wander about the garden in the morning sunshine and think of her, which was a proceeding that filled the family with consternation. When he was discovered at the breakfast-table making himself very pleasant and friendly, the surprise of Nelly and Dick came to a height. As for Mrs. Eastwood, she had a mother's natural certainty that her son's manners were always agreeable, except when something had disturbed him. Nothing, it was evident, had disturbed him this morning, and he could show himself in his true

colours. He was very communicative and conciliatory, and told them how he had been persuaded to accompany some people whom he met to the play, and that the piece was very stupid, like so many pieces now-a-days.

"That's all very well for you who were there," said Dick, "I should like to find out for myself. All pieces are stupid to a fellow that can see them whenever he likes."

"You might have had my share and welcome, old fellow," said Frederick, with undiminished amiability. "I didn't pay much attention, to tell the truth. There was the loveliest girl in the box—a Miss Batty. Her father is a—country doctor, I think; but such a beautiful creature!"

I don't know what tempted him to make this confidence; probably the desire to be talking of her. And then he described her, which raised a discussion round the table.

"I am sick of golden hair," said Dick, who was moved by a spirit of contradiction. "There are so many of 'em in novels, great, sleek, indolent, cat-like——"

"And rather improper," said Mrs. Eastwood; "doing things that one cannot approve of girls doing. In my day what you call golden hair was known as

red. Raven locks were the right thing for a heroine, very smooth and glossy——"

"Well plastered down with pomade, and not safe to touch," said Nelly, shaking her own brown locks. "But I agree with you, Frederick, there is no hair so lovely as golden hair. Is your beauty going to stay long in town? Do we know any one who knows her? Has she come for the season?

"They are staying at an hotel," said Frederick, very seriously. "I met the father in Paris, quite by chance, when I was getting better. That is how I came to know them. They are not quite in your set, I suppose. But she is simply the most radiant, dazzling creature——"

"All red and white and green and blue," said the irrepressible Dick, "with her hair growing down to her eyes—oh, I know! seven feet high, and weighing twelve stone."

"Yes, that is odd too," said Mrs. Eastwood; "people like that kind of huge woman. In my days, now, a light, elastic figure——"

"They all died of consumption," said Nelly. She was herself exactly the kind of being whom her mother described; but she took up the cause of the other with natural perverseness. A curious sense of possible help gleamed across Frederick's mind as he

listened. He would not allow himself to realize under what possible circumstances Nelly's championship might be useful to him; but his mind jumped at the thought, with a sudden perception of possibilities which he by no means wished to follow out at once to their full length and breadth. When he went to the office he congratulated himself secretly on his skill in having thus introduced the subject so as to awaken no suspicion—and he went into the conservatory, and cut a lovely little white camellia bud, which Nelly had been saving up for quite another button-hole. It was just after the exciting moment of Nelly's betrothal, and the house was full of a certain suggestion of love-making, which, perhaps, helped to stimulate Frederick's thoughts; but his blaze of sudden passion was very different from the sentiments of the others. He went to the office first, feeling it too early to be admitted to Amanda's beautiful presence. Happily, there was not very much to do at the Sealing-Wax Office. He spent an hour or two there, in a feverish flutter, disturbing the others (who, fortunately, were not very hard at work), and throwing all his own occupations into confusion. At twelve, he went out, and made his way to the hotel. He found Batty there, but not his daughter.

"'Manda? Oh, she's all right," said the father; "but the laziest girl in Christendom. Pretty women are all lazy. I haven't seen her yet, and don't expect to for an hour or more. Have a glass of something, Eastwood, to fill up the time?"

Frederick winced at this free-and-easy address, and hastened to explain that he was on his way to keep a pressing engagement, and would return in the afternoon, to pay his respects to Miss Batty. At three o'clock he went back, and found her indeed; but found also Lord Hunterston and another visitor, with whom Miss Amanda kept up a very lively conversation. Batty himself filled up the centre of the scene, and made a variety with talk of horses and feats in the hunting-field. Frederick was left in the background, to his intense misery. He heard one of the other visitors asked in easy terms to dinner that evening, with again the thrilling prospect of the play after it. He himself, it would seem, had had his day. The only crumb of comfort he procured from the visit was the name of the theatre they were going to. He rushed to Covent Garden after this, poor wretch, and bought the costliest bouquet he could find, and sent it to her. Then he dined, miserable and solitary, at his club, speaking no word to any man, and went afterwards to the

blessed theatre in which she was to exhibit her beauty to the world. He saw her from the first moment of her arrival, and watched with horrible sensations from his stall the comfortable arrangement of Lord Hunsterton in his corner beside her, and the large figure of the father behind dropping into a gentle doze. He sat and gazed at them in tortures of adoration and jealousy, wondering if she was saying the same things to his successor as she had said to him; wondering if Hunsterton, too, was being invited to Sterborne, and ridiculed about the necessity of getting "leave"—for, Frederick reflected with some satisfaction, "leave" was necessary also to that distinguished guardsman. As soon as it was practicable, he made his way up to the box; but gained little by it, since Mr. Batty insisted upon waking up, and entertaining him, which he did chiefly by chuckling references to their previous meeting in Paris, and the amusements of that gay place. Frederick went home half wild to the calm house where his mother and sister were sleeping quietly; and where poor little Innocent alone heard his step coming up-stairs, and longed to get up and say good-night to him, though he had "scolded" her. Had she known it, Innocent was deeply avenged. Amanda Batty had not spared the

rash adorer. She had "made fun" of him in a hundred refined and elegant ways, joking about his gravity and serious looks, about his fondness for the theatre, and his kindness in coming to speak to herself. "When I am sure you might have gone behind the scenes if you liked," she said, with a laugh that showed all her pearly teeth. "You who know so much about the theatres: how I should like to go behind the scenes!"

Frederick, who had made so many sacrifices to appearances, and who was distinguished in society for the stateliness of his demeanour, would have been infinitely insulted had any one else said this—all the more insulted for his own consciousness of those moments of aberration in which he had been behind a great many scenes—though never, so far as he was aware, where he could be found out. But a man in love is compelled, when the lady of his affections is like Miss Amanda, to put up with insults, and does so in scores of cases with a meekness which is nowhere apparent in his domestic character. Frederick felt himself punctured by shafts of ridicule not too finely pointed. He was laughed at, he was rallied, jokes were made upon him. He was even treated with absolute rudeness, Amanda turning her beautiful shoulders upon him, and addressing Lord

Hunterston, in the very midst of something Frederick was saying to her. A thrill of momentary fury went through him, but next moment he was abject in his endeavours to get a glance from her—a word of reply.

"Don't you mind her—it's 'Manda's way," said Batty, laughing as he saw the gloom on Frederick's face. "The more insulting she is one evening the nicer she'll be the next. Don't you pay any attention; it's his turn to-night, and yours to-morrow. Don't take it too serious, Eastwood; if you'll be guided by me——"

"I fear I don't quite understand you, Mr. Batty," said poor Frederick, writhing in impotent pride at the liberties taken with him. Upon which Batty laughed again, more insolently good-humoured than ever.

"As you like—as you like," he said; "you are more likely to want me, I can tell you, than I am to want you."

Frederick answered nothing: his mind was torn in pieces. Could he have had strength to go away, to break those fatal chains which in a day—in a moment—had been thrown over him, he would have done it. A sudden impulse to fly came over him; but a hundred past yieldings to temptation had

sapped the strength of his nature, and taken away from him all power to make such a strenuous resistance to his own wishes. The self-willed, proud young man put down his head and licked the dust before the coarse beauty who had stolen away his wits, and the coarse man whose familiarity was so odious to him. He turned from the father, and addressed himself with eager adoration to the daughter: and, perhaps because Amanda was a thorough coquette, and enjoyed her own cleverness in pitting one admirer against another—perhaps because the misery and earnestness in the eyes of her new slave softened her, she was friendly to him for the rest of the evening, and wrapped his foolish soul in happiness. Before they parted he was made happy by another invitation. They were but to be two nights more in town, and one of these evenings Frederick was to spend with them.

"Be sure and find out for me the very nicest thing that is to be played in London," she said, turning round to him as she left the theatre, though the rival had her hand on his arm. The sweetness of this preference, the sign she made to him as the carriage drove away, contented, and more than contented Frederick. He went home happy; he got through—he did not know how—the interven-

ing time. Next afternoon he went to call on her, at one moment gaining a few words, which made him blessed, at another turning away with his pride lacerated and his heart bleeding. The succession of ups and downs was enough to have given variety to months of ordinary love-making. Frederick was tossed from delight to despair, and back again. He was jibed at, flattered, made use of, tormented, and consoled. Had he been a man of finer mind, he might possibly have been disgusted; but it is astonishing what even men of the finest minds will submit to under the force of such an imperious passion. They console themselves by the conclusion that all women are the same, and that theirs is the common fate. If Frederick had any time to think in the hurry of emotion and excitement which swept him as into the vortex of a whirlpool, he excused Miss 'Manda's cruelties and caprices by this explanation. All women who possessed, as she did, those glorious gifts of beauty—all the Cleopatras of existence—were like her; they had to be worshipped blindly, not considered as reasonable creatures. Reason! what had reason to do with those shoulders, those cheeks, those eyes?

The evening came at last—the evening of rapture

and misery which he was to spend by her side, but which was to be the last. He counted how many hours it could be lengthened out to, and gave himself up to the enjoyment, not daring to forecast to himself what he might say or do before that cycle of happiness was ended. He dressed himself with so much care that Mrs. Eastwood, who had never forgotten that enthusiastic description of Miss Batty, felt an uneasiness for which she could give no very distinct reason. This time the roses in the conservatory were not enough for Frederick. He had brought one from Covent Garden, carefully wrapped up in cotton wool; and he spoiled half-a-dozen ties before he could tie one to his satisfaction. His mother peeped at him from the door of her room as he went down-stairs. In consequence of their play-going propensities, the Battys had to dine early. It was but half-past six when Frederick left The Elms in his hansom, which he had taken the trouble to order beforehand. Mrs. Eastwood opened her window, with a faint hope that perhaps the wind might convey his instructions to the driver to her anxious ear. She withdrew blushing, poor soul, when this attempt proved unsuccessful. It was almost dishonourable—like listening at a door. When one does not succeed in a little wile of this

description, one realizes how ignoble was the attempt.

"Of course, if I had asked him where he was going, he would have told me," she said to herself.

But the truth was that Frederick had so often returned disagreeable answers to such questions, and had made so many remarks upon the curiosity of women, &c., that the household had ceased to inquire into his movements. He was the only one of the family whose comings and goings were not open as daylight to whomsoever cared to see.

His heart beat higher and higher as he threaded the streets and approached the second-rate London inn which was to him the centre of the world. When he was shown into the room, however, in which dinner was prepared as usual, he went in upon a scene for which he was totally unprepared. Seated by the fire, which had suddenly become unnecessary by a change in the weather, and which made the little room very stuffy and hot, was Amanda, wrapped in a great shawl. Her usual sublime evening toilet had been exchanged for a white dressing-gown, all frills and bows of ribbon. High up on her cheeks, just under her eyes, were two blazing spots of pink. Her face, except for these, was pale

and drawn. The sound of her voice, fretful and impatient, was the first thing Frederick heard. By her sat a middle-aged woman in an elaborate cap with flowers. There was a medicine bottle on the mantel-piece. Frederick rushed forward, in wonder and dismay.

"Miss Batty—Good God, you are ill——!"

"You may see that, I think, without asking," said Amanda; "when one is well one does not show like this, I hope. The last night too—the last time for ages I shall have the least chance of enjoying myself, or having a little fun. Oh, it is too shocking! When one is at home, with nothing going on, one does not mind; it is always something to occupy one. Oh, go away, please. Dine somewhere with papa. He is waiting for you outside; never mind me. Oh, aunty, can't you be still? rustling and rustling for ever and ever, and setting all my nerves on edge."

A sudden blackness came over Frederick's soul. "Dine somewhere with papa." Good heavens! was that the entertainment offered to him after all his hopes? He stood transfixed as it were, immovable in a blank and horrible pause of disappointment. The close room and the sudden revulsion of feeling made him sick and faint. His perfect and faultless

costume, the delicate rosebud in his coat, his tie which it had taken him so much trouble to bring to perfection, his boots upon which he had been so careful not to have a speck—all struck Amanda with relenting as she looked at him, and finally roused her a little out of her absorption in her own troubles. He looked such a gentleman! Miss Batty belonged to that class which is given to describe its heroes as "looking like gentlemen," with often an uneasy sense that the looks are the only things gentlemanlike about them. Frederick impressed her profoundly and suddenly by this means. She relented as she looked at him.

"Dinner was laid here," she said, "as you see—but I don't think I could stand it,—and then when one is not dressed or anything—it would not be nice for you——"

"It is perfectly nice for me," said Frederick, coming to life again,—"a thousand times more nice than anything else. Your dress is always perfect, whatever it may be. Let me stay! What do I care for dining or anything else? Let me be with you. Let me read to you. Don't send me into outer darkness——"

"Oh, how you do talk, Mr. Eastwood," said Amanda, though with a smile. "No, of course you

must dine. We must all dine. No, now go away. I could not have it. Let some one call papa, and you can go with him——" she paused for a moment, enjoying the blank misery that once more fell upon Frederick's face; then added suddenly, "On second thoughts, after all it might amuse me. Aunty, ring the bell. If you are sure you don't mind my dressing gown—and the room being so warm,—and aunty being here,—and the medicine bottle, and the big fire,—well, perhaps," she said, pausing to laugh in a breathless way,—"you may stay."

If the Queen had created him Earl of Eastwood with corresponding revenues, it would have been nothing to the bliss of this moment. He drew a footstool to her feet and sat down on it, half kneeling, and made his inquiries.—What was it? How was it? was she suffering? did she feel ill? had she a doctor, the best doctor that London could produce, Jenner, Gull, somebody that could be trusted? Amanda informed him that it was heart disease from which she was suffering, an intimation which she made not without complacency, but which Frederick felt to pierce him like a horrible, sudden arrow—and that "Aunty" here present, whom she introduced with a careless wave of her hand, knew exactly what to do.

"It is dreadful, isn't it, to think I might die any moment?" she said, with a smile.

"Good God!" Frederick said, with unaffected horror, "it cannot be true!" and he sat, stricken dumb, gazing at her, the tears forcing themselves to his eyes. Mr. Batty entered at this moment, and the man, who was human and a father, was touched by this evidence of emotion. He wrung Frederick's hand and whispered him aside.

"It ain't as bad as it seems," he said. "We daren't cross her. If she wanted the moon I'd have to tell her we'd get it somehow. We've known for years that she wasn't to be crossed; but barring that, I hope all's pretty safe. It's bad for her temper, poor girl, but I'm not afraid of her life."

Frederick spent such an evening as he had never spent in his life. He sat at Amanda's feet and read to her, and talked to her, and listened to her chatter, which was soft and subdued, for she was languid after her spasms. Mr. Batty sat by most part of the evening admiring, and so did the person called Aunty, who kept in constant attendance. Frederick could not throw himself at Miss 'Manda's feet according to conventional form; he could not declare his love and entreat her to marry him, as he was burning to do, for he was not permitted a minute

alone with her. But short of that, he said everything that a man in love could do. He told his adoration by a hundred signs and inferences. And he went home in such a whirl of sentiment and emotion as I cannot attempt to describe. His love was frantic, yet so tinged and imbued with a sense of the virtuous and domestic character of this evening of complete happiness, that he felt as good as he was blessed. She was going away; that was the only drawback to his rapture; and even that impressed a certain intense and ecstatic character upon it, as of a flower snatched from the edge of a precipice of despair.

CHAPTER V.

A FAMILY DINNER.

While this wild love-fever of Frederick's had run its course, Nelly's little drama had also enacted itself, and the interview between Mrs. Eastwood and Mr. Molyneux, Q.C., had taken place, so that the moment had been an exciting one in the family story. The young people were absorbed in their different adventures, and it was only the mother who felt, even though she did not know, all that was going on, on either hand. She did not know what it was which had moved Frederick so much out of his usual composure, which had made him "engaged" and inaccessible to all family invitations or arrangements during one entire week. He had never mentioned Miss Batty or her beauty again, but he had been engaged every evening, going out early and staying late, and making no

allusion to where he had been. Indeed during that period he had scarcely seen any of the family, except his mother herself, who had waited to pour out his coffee for him at breakfast, and who saw by his hurried manner and self-absorbed looks that something more than ordinary must be going on. But he had offered no confidences, and Mrs. Eastwood had not gone so far as to ask for any, partly from pride, and partly from a compassionate unwillingness to disturb him any more than he was already disturbed. The time when she could inquire into his troubles and set them right was over. But she was uneasy about him, not knowing what to think, anxious and unhappy; and she was still more distinctly disturbed about the Molyneux business, and the engagements which she might be forced into, against her will and her judgment, on Nelly's account. The shadow which thus had come upon her overshadowed the whole house, as I have already said. It irritated Ernest Molyneux, and it made Nelly unhappy. Nelly, poor child, had never known what it was to have any cross influences in her life before. She had never been pulled two ways, never divided in her affections or her allegiance. Few people appreciate the difference this makes in a girl's life. She is taken suddenly in the midst of

an existence which is all tender, filial duty, or that sweet counterfeit of filial duty which animates the child's mind who has a large part in deciding the will of the parent who guides her, and is unconsciously the inspiration of the very laws she obeys. This had been Nelly's case. She and her mother had been as one soul—the one ruling, the other obeying, but neither able to discriminate from which came the original impulse; and now she felt herself suddenly placed in a position, if not of antagonism to her mother, yet at least of tenderest sympathy and union with one who declared himself so far her mother's antagonist. This curious turn and twist of circumstances made the girl giddy—it gave an uncertainty to all things, it confused her old ideas, the ideas which she had held as unchangeable till the day before yesterday, when they were suddenly undermined, and all her old gods made to totter in their shrines.

"Your mother does not like me," Molyneux said to her one day, when Mrs. Eastwood, disturbed and worried by a communication from his father, had been cold and distant to him. "It is always the way. She was nice enough as long as I was only a young fellow dangling about the house; but as soon as everything is settled, and you are ready to have

me, Nelly, she turns off at a tangent. Clearly your mother does not like me——"

"How can you say so?" cried Nelly. "Oh, Ernest, as if it were possible——"

"Quite possible,—indeed, quite common," he said, shaking his head. "You don't know the world, darling, and I don't wish you to; but when people have to make sacrifices to establish their children, they don't like it. Nobody likes to have a sacrifice to make. I suppose I thought your mother different, because she was your mother; but human nature is the same everywhere,—though you, Nelly, heaven be praised, have no knowledge of the world——"

"Is it mamma you mean by the world?" said Nelly, disengaging herself almost unconsciously from her lover's arm.

"Don't be vexed, dear. Mothers are just like other people. When our interests come to be in opposition to those of our nearest and dearest——"

"How can mamma's interests be in opposition to ours?" said Nelly, with open eyes.

"Well, I suppose our parents have got to provide for us," said Molyneux. "They have got to part with so much, on one side and the other, to set us up—and they don't like it—naturally. When it

comes to be our turn we shall not like it either. There is always a struggle going on, though your dear, innocent eyes don't see it; we trying to get as much as we can, they to give us as little as they can; that is what makes your mother look so glum at me."

"We trying to get as much as we can,—they to give us as little as they can?" repeated Nelly, with a dreamy wonder in her tone. She dwelt on the words as if she were counting them, like beads. She had withdrawn, quite involuntarily and unawares, from his side.

"I don't want to vex you about it," he said, drawing closer to her. "It can't be helped, and after it is settled, things will come right again. You don't know anything about business, and I don't want you to know about it——"

"I know all about mamma's business," said Nelly. She withdrew again with a little impatience from his close approach. She fell a-musing and thinking, and made some excuse, soon after, to get away from him. She was startled beyond measure in the staightforwardness of a soul unacquainted with business. Very strange to her was this unexpected distinction and separation. Was it really possible that her mother's interests were opposite to her

own, for the first time in her life? "We trying to get as much as we can,—they to give us as little as they can," she said to herself, in the solitude of her room, putting the fingers of one hand against those of the other, as if to count the words. Nelly was bewildered—her head was dizzy through this strange whirlabout of heaven and earth—the firm ground seemed failing beneath her feet.

It was about this time that another person appeared on the family scene, a man about whom none of the Eastwoods felt any particular interest, or rather, against whom they had all a decided prejudice. This was John Vane, a distant cousin of Innocent's father, a squire in the north country, with considerable, but poor estates, who had lived a wandering life for some years, and who was considered by all who knew him "eccentric," to say the least. His true name was Reginald or Roland, or something of a sentimental and ornamental description represented by the letter R; but society, which has a way of identifying character by this simple means, called him John. He was a man of three or four and thirty, with a brown complexion tanned by much exposure to wind and weather, and a golden brown beard, which was the chief feature about him to a stranger. His hair had worn off his

temples, and he had a threatening of baldness, as if the forest on his chin had drawn all his locks downwards. His forehead was clear and open and white, in contrast with the tanned and much-lined surface of the more exposed parts of his face. He was by no means the nearest or even a near relation of Innocent, but he had lost no time in seeking her out. He arrived on the very day when this first touch of doubt and pain came into Nelly's belief in her lover; and it was by no means a happy household in which the new comer appeared one bright spring morning shortly after the events we have been telling. His mission was to ask what had become of his cousin's child, to ascertain in the most delicate way possible what was her position in her aunt's house, and to offer her, should that prove necessary, a refuge in his own. He made this offer with so much grace and natural kindness that Mrs. Eastwood's prejudices against him fled like the morning dew. She was prejudiced against everything (except poor Innocent) that bore the name of Vane, and against this John Vane in particular, whose father had been a man of very unsettled opinions, and who was understood to have been badly brought up. Innocent too, poor child, had been very badly brought up, and Mrs. Eastwood

shuddered at the idea of what might follow if the one uninstructed nature was put into the hands of the other. But Mr. John Vane had that sure passport to a woman's favour—a frank and open countenance, and a pair of smiling eyes which met your gaze frankly. He made so pleasant an impression that Mrs. Eastwood ended by inviting him to a very solemn dinner-party which was to take place at her house that evening—a dinner at which "the Molyneuxes" were to be present, though the negotiations between Ernest's side and Nelly's side were yet far from being completed. Major Railton, who had been one of the invited guests, had felt his courage fail him at the last moment, and had sent an excuse on account of his health. "Mr. Vane is a kind of connexion," Mrs. Eastwood said, doubtfully, when she explained the change to her son. Frederick, who was full of other thoughts, made no objection, and Mr. Vane, who was not less pleased with his new acquaintances than they were with him, accepted frankly. This dinner party was a very great event in the family; and though dinner parties are not generally exciting occurrences, I may perhaps be pardoned, for the sake of the issues, if I dwell upon it a little. The chief guests were the Molyneuxes—Mr. and Mrs. and Miss, the latter of

whom we may drop out of the present history, having already enough people on our hands. They were both of opinion that Mrs. Eastwood had "kept her eye upon" Ernest for years, and that Nelly had made "a dead set" at him; and they were accordingly dignified and a little condescending in their cordiality. Mr. and Mrs. Brotherton also formed part of the company, along with two other of Mrs. Eastwood's advisers—Mr. Parchemin and Mrs. Everard; and the party was made up to the number of sixteen (which was all that could be comfortably accommodated at The Elms dinner-table) by the presence of Sir Alexis Longueville and his sister. In opposition to the selection of this guest Nelly had put forth the moral objections to him, which her lover had on a certain evening pressed so warmly upon her, but had found, to her great amazement, that Ernest laughed at the whole matter, and declared Longueville one of the best fellows going; while Mrs. Eastwood silenced her with some indignation, declaring that she had known him for twenty years, and would not have any old scandals raked up. Poor Nelly, who knew nothing about the old scandals, but who felt the whole responsibility thrown upon her, withdrew, hot with angry blushes, from the discussion, feeling as if

she had shown a shameful knowledge of the evil reports of the past, which the poor child was, in fact, as ignorant of as a baby. "We must forgive and forget," even Ernest said to her. "Don't be such a terrible moralist, Nelly." This, too, wounded poor Nelly, in the ignorance and innocence of her youth.

The dinner went off as such dinners do everywhere. There was a great display of all the Eastwood plate, and the meal itself lasted two hours and a half, and included everything that was out of season, and all that was most costly in the way of eating and drinking. Mrs. Eastwood, at the head of her own table, with Sir Alexis on one side of her and Mr. Molyneux on the other, tried her very best to feel no sort of opposition to the latter, and to look as if nothing but family love and union was symbolized by their meeting. Frederick, at the other end, with his head full of Amanda Batty, endeavoured to give his best attention to the gorgeous Mrs. Barclay and the dignified Mrs. Molyneux. He had his Charles the First look upon him, and he was not judged severely by these ladies, who thought him superior to the rest of the family, and very probably worried by his mother, whom Mrs. Molyneux considered a scheming and worldly person. The other

members of the party had no doubt their own cares; but their cares do not concern us greatly, except in so far as Nelly was concerned, whose poor little heart was wounded and her mind confused, and who, in her position of *fiancée*, felt this sort of formal reception of her by her lover's parents to suggest all kinds of strange doubts and miseries, and to throw uncertainty instead of security upon the bond which had been tied so tightly, yet so happily, in the cold, half-frozen garden but a little while before. No doubt that she loved Ernest Molyneux, or that his love made her perfectly happy, had crossed her mind then. She had been as full of gentle bliss as a girl could be, when she had stolen in with him into the drawing-room in the firelight, frightened lest any one should see how he held her hand, and yet unable to conceive how anything or any one in the world could be ignorant of the new great flood of light and joy which had flooded earth and heaven. In that beatific moment, however, no idea of settlements or negotiations, or the suggestion that Ernest might have done better, or that it was his business and hers to try to get as much as they could, had entered into her mind. There are well-seasoned and justly-regulated minds, even of twenty, which understand all these accessories as well as the oldest

of us, and have no nonsense about them, and are robust enough to enter into the whole question "as a matter of business." But Nelly was not one of these. She had a great deal of nonsense about her. She was shocked, chilled, brought to a stand suddenly, in the first outset of her independent career. Her love seemed to have ceased to be real, now that it was being talkèd about and struggled over, and Ernest, Ernest himself——. She would not say, even in the depths of her own heart, any more than this; but her poor little heart gave an inarticulate cry when he opened up his philosophy to her with so much confidence, and congratulated himself that she knew nothing of business. Nelly did not know whether, perhaps, among the strange confusions of this world, he might not be right. She saw no way out of the maze. She did not know how she herself, if left to herself, could have bettered it; but her instinctive sense of what was noble and ignoble, lovely and unlovely, was deeply wounded. She was put out of harmony with herself and every one. If life was so—if such gulfs were ready to open under your feet at your very first step in it, was it worth living? Such was the painful question, not yet put into words, that breathed through poor Nelly's heart.

Mr. John Vane was on one side of her, and

Ernest on the other; but Mrs. Everard, who was a great conversationalist, had taken possession of young Molyneux, and was putting him through a catechism. Nelly did not feel herself capable of talk, but the kind looks of her next neighbour were comforting, and he was touched by her downcast, yet bright face.

"Miss Eastwood," he said, "may I guess at something? I am a stranger, but I am a connexion. You know your mother admitted my claims. This is a solemn family assembly to celebrate something that is to make your happiness. Have I guessed rightly? and will you forgive me, and let me make my congratulations too?"

Nelly looked up, blushing and bright and sorry, and very much tempted to cry. "Oh, Mr. Vane, I can't bear it," she said.

"What, not the happiness? I could bear a great deal of it if it ever came my way."

"Has it never come your way?" said Nelly, looking at him wistfully. "But I did not mean—the happiness. I have always been very happy. It is the family assembly, and the talk, and the congratulations. If you don't know, you can't think how they hurt, how they——"

"Take the bloom off?"

"I suppose that is it," said Nelly, with a soft little sigh.

Vane, who had a great deal more experience than she gave him credit for, looked past her at her lover, and concluded, on perfectly insufficient grounds, that Molyneux was not worthy of Nelly. The ladies of Ernest's family were not only convinced of the fact that Nelly was quite unworthy of *him*, but that Frederick also was really misplaced in such a family. Why such ideas should be so readily entertained by the different halves of humanity, I cannot tell. It was something in Nelly's tone and something in the cut of Ernest's nose which decided Mr. Vane.

"And would it be impertinent of a stranger, who is a connexion, to ask if it is all settled," he said, "and when it is to be?"

"Nothing is settled," said Nelly, with a deeper blush than ever; and after a pause she turned to him with a despairing simplicity, which he did not quite understand. "Mr. Vane," she said, "I should like to ask you something. You say it has never come your way. Yet you look as if one might ask you things. Do you think that people, relations, those who have been each other's dearest friends— or more than friends—I mean," said Nelly, "one's

father or mother even—do you think they change to you, when your interests are in opposition to theirs?"

"One's father or mother?" said Vane, trying to follow her thought; "but that must be so rare a case, Miss Eastwood."

"You think so too?" said Nelly, brightly, recovering herself in a moment. "That is my opinion; but they tell me I know nothing of the world. How can one's interests be in opposition to those of one's own people? Since ever I have known anything, I have been taught the contrary. I am so glad you think as I do."

"But stop a little," said Vane, "perhaps we are going too far. Suppose we were to take an instance. Regan and Goneril felt their interests to be in opposition to their fathers, and it did make a great change in them. If we were to ask more than we ought from our nearest relation, it would wound his sense of justice and his trust in us; even love might be impaired. I have known men who threw themselves upon their friends to save them from ruin, real or supposed, and to whom there was no change of feeling. And I have known others who made demands upon the same friends for no greater a sacrifice, to whom it was given with a sore heart and a deep

sense of injury. All the difference depends upon the circumstances."

Nelly grew wistful again; she was not satisfied. "Tell me this, then," she said in a low voice, which he had to stoop to hear. "Is it natural that we hould be always trying how much we can get, and t hey how little they can give?"

"Any one who told you so," said Vane indignantly, "must have the lowest and meanest conception"—then he caught Nelly's eye with a mingled ook of fright and entreaty in it, which at the moment he could make nothing of it, but which touched some instinct in his mind more capable of action than reason, and compelled him to change his tone. "I mean," he said, with a forced laugh, "that this is the conventional way in which we speak in society, which sounds terrible but means nothing. It is the fashionable cynical view, which we all pretend to take to hide the real feeling, which it is not English to show. How didactic you have made me, Miss Eastwood, and what a serious strain we have drifted into! I am afraid you will never sit next to me again."

"Indeed, I will, and like it," said honest Nelly, smiling at him with her heart in her eyes. It seemed to Nelly that here was a sort of big brother,

kinder than Frederick, wiser than Dick, who had suddenly come to her aid to disentangle for her that ravelled skein which had troubled her mind so much. She turned round to Ernest forthwith, and whispered something to him with a sweet compunction, to make up for the injustice she had done him in her heart. Mr. Vane, I am sorry to say, was not moved with like sentiments. He gave a short, audible breath of impatience through his nostrils, which he ought not to have done, and glanced at young Molyneux over Nelly's head, and said to himself, "Confound the fellow!" I have observed that, towards a young man in Ernest's position, this is a common sentiment—with men.

Innocent was on her cousin's other side. Mrs. Eastwood had hesitated much about this, feeling that at sixteen, and with no education, the girl ought not perhaps to be allowed to assist at a dinner party. But Mr. Vane's presence and the family character of the whole ceremony decided her. It was a very poor pleasure to Innocent. She was dressed in a black tulle dress, like nothing she had ever worn before, and which seemed to transmogrify her and turn her into some one else. Nelly had made a valiant effort to put up her hair, and give her something of the aspect of a young lady of the period,

but this even Mrs. Eastwood had resisted, saying wisely that if Innocent appeared with her hair hanging on her shoulders, as she always wore it, it would be presumed at once that she was "still in the schoolroom" (poor Innocent, who had never been in the schoolroom in her life!), a girl not yet "out." She answered only "Yes" or "No" to the questions Vane put to her, and would have stolen away from the drawing-room afterwards altogether if she had not been detained by something like force. The great Mrs. Molyneux took condescending notice of her, and plied her with a great many questions, all actuated by an idea of which no one in the family had the smallest conception. "I don't doubt they neglect her shamefully," she said to her daughter, after she had ascertained that Innocent neither played, nor sang, nor drew; that she had never been to school, nor had a governess, nor masters, and that, in short, she knew nothing.

I am quite unable to tell why this discovery should have given pleasure to Ernest's mother, but it did so, and was remembered and made use of afterwards in most unthought-of ways. But Innocent interested more people than Mrs. Molyneux. When Sir Alexis came into the drawing-room after dinner, he requested to be presented to the young stranger.

"I think I knew her father," he said, and he went and sat by her, and did his best to call forth some response. "Since he cannot have the one, he is going to try for the other," said Mrs. Barclay in Mrs. Eastwood's ear. But whatever his intentions or desires might be, he did not make much of Innocent, who was frozen back into her old stupefied dulness by the many strange faces and fresh appeals made to her. "You remember your father?" said Sir Alexis, meaning to move her. "Oh, yes," said Innocent, but took little further interest in hearing about him. Perhaps, had it been Niccolo, he might have moved her more.

"Has she all her faculties?" he asked, hesitating, of Nelly.

"Oh, yes, I think so. She has never been taught anything. She has not got over her strangeness yet, and she does not care for any of us," said Nelly, "except, perhaps——"

Here she paused, not venturing to add the name that came to her lips. Young Molyneux laughed, and took up the words.

"Except, perhaps—yourself, do you mean? You made a wonderful picture once of the cousin whom you expected; how she was to be the most beautiful, clever, learned, accomplished of women, to

throw everybody else into the shade; and how, in self-defence, you would have to be cruel to her, to banish her to the schoolroom——"

"That has come true," said Nelly, smiling, "but it is the only thing. She is not Aurora Leigh."

"She has a beautiful face," said Sir Alexis. They all looked at the girl when he said so, for her beauty was not of a kind which struck every beholder at the first glance. She was sitting quite by herself, in the corner which she preferred, with her hands crossed upon her lap, and her head half turned, following Frederick with an undivided gaze. She was not conscious of any observation. She had eyes but for him alone.

CHAPTER VI.

ABOUT ANOTHER MARRIAGE.

Frederick was in so strangely disturbed a state of mind that this evening's entertainment—as well as all the other incidents of these hurrying days, which seemed years as they passed, yet appeared to have raced by him helter-skelter as soon as they were gone—was to him as a dream. He did not seem to know what he was about. Whatever he did was done mechanically. He declined all engagements, never went to his club, went home of nights, and shut himself up in the library or his own room, smoking a greater number of cigars than he had ever done in his life before, and thinking of *her*. Tobacco may be said to be the food of love to the modern man, as it is the food of musing minds, and intellectual work, or idleness. Frederick lighted one after another mechanically, and brooded over the

image of Amanda. He thought of her in every aspect under which he had seen her. He recalled to his mind, in detail, the times when they had met, and everything that had been said and done. And there came upon him a hunger for her presence which he could not overcome, and scarcely restrain. She was not an interesting or amusing companion in any intellectual way. Her talk was the merest chit-chat. The amusements and occupations she preferred were not of an elevated character: she ignored or was bored by everything serious; she was uneducated, sometimes almost vulgar. But all this made no difference, though he was sensible of it. He made, indeed, occasional efforts to throw off the spell that bound him; to try, if not to forget her, at least to consider all the obstacles that stood between them. Their condition of life was entirely different, and to this Frederick was deeply sensitive. He had trembled to have Batty find him out at his club, or visit him at his office. He had accepted the man's invitation in haste to get rid of him, that no one might see the kind of person who claimed his acquaintance; and, good heavens! if that very man became his father-in-law! Then Frederick acknowledged to himself that Amanda would be "pulled to pieces by the women." Men might admire her only

too much; but, notwithstanding Frederick's contempt for women, he felt the deepest angry humiliation at the thought that only men, probably, would approve of his wife—if she should become his wife. Then he had no means to gratify this sudden passion. He had been very lucky at the office, making his way by a series of deaths and misfortunes to a position which he could scarcely have hoped to hold for five or six years longer. Three or four hundred a year, however, though much for a public office, is not much to set up house upon, according to Frederick Eastwood's ideas. He had, like Nelly, five thousand pounds, but what was that, he said to himself, having the exalted notions peculiar to the young men of the period. For a young man, living at home in a handsome house, which cost him nothing, and where he could entertain his friends when need was, this was very comfortable; but if he married, and had to keep up an establishment of his own, things would appear in a very different light. The marriage he ought to have made was with some one, at least as rich as himself; he ought to have done as his father had done, whose wife had more than doubled his income. All this Frederick was deeply, sadly aware of. He knew that he ought to do exactly the reverse of what he

wanted to do; he knew that at the very least he ought to pause and consider carefully all the penalties, all the misery involved. But in the very midst of his wisest thoughts a sudden recollection would sweep away every scrap of good sense he possessed, as well as all that paramount regard for self which had carried him over so many hidden rocks and dangers of which he alone knew. Perhaps it would be wrong to say that love had triumphed over self in this struggle. It was a victory more subtle still —it was the triumph of the self of passion over the self of prudence and worldly well-being. It was gratification as against profit—delight against honour. I may, perhaps, judge him harshly, for this class of sentiment is one, I am aware, in which women are apt to show a want of understanding; but the reader will decide in how far the credit of a generous passion, scorning consequences, may be attributed to Frederick Eastwood. I do not call this kind of frenzy love; but there are many that do. Of the true being called Amanda Batty he knew next to nothing, and what he did know would, had he been in his sober senses, have revolted his good taste, and disgusted all his finer perceptions. Even now he had a vague prevision that he would be bitterly ashamed of her, did she belong to him; and

a certainty that he would be more than ashamed of her belongings, whom already he loathed; but the outside of her filled him with a hungry worship which overcame his reason, and all the sane portion of his mind. After he had forced himself to think over all the disadvantages, to represent to himself the descent into another sphere, the want of means, the horrible neighbourhood into which he would be thrown, there would suddenly gleam upon his mind that turn of her soft round shoulder when she flung away from him in disdain; the dimples in it, the velvet texture, the snowy whiteness just touched with tints of rose —and all his wiser self was at once trampled underfoot. Yet he stood out bravely, fighting with himself after the same fashion but more strenuously than he had done on other occasions, when not a lawful love, but a wild lawless desire for pleasure, possessed him. Never before had he made so long or so hard a stand. In the other cases not much had been in question— a bout of dissipation might carry with it a good many headaches, an empty purse, and, if found out, a slur upon that spotless character which it was Frederick's pride to maintain; but it could do no more; whereas this would compromise his life. Would it compromise his life? Might it not turn out for the best, as the other event did which had seemed to envelope him

in ruin. Could not he cut the Batty connexion altogether—make a condition that she was to be entirely handed over to him, and never inquired about more? And must not his own innate refinement, his constant companionship, reform the beautiful creature herself into all that could be desired? This flattering unction sometimes Frederick succeeded in laying to his soul; but to do him justice he much more generally perceived and acknowledged to their full extent the obstacles in his way, and made his fight honestly, knowing what it was he was fighting against.

Things, however, came to a crisis before very long. He did not himself know how long the struggle lasted; it absorbed him at last out of almost all consciousness of what was going on round him. He kept his usual place, got through, somehow, his usual work, ate and drank, and answered when he was spoken to, and knew nothing about it. During this period, perhaps Innocent was the greatest comfort he had. The spring had come with a bound in the beginning of April, after a long stretch of cold weather, and when after dinner he strayed out of doors to wander under the elms, and carry on his eternal self-conflict, it was rather soothing to him than otherwise when his cousin came stealing to his

side in the soft twilight. Poor child! how fond she was of him! it was pleasant to have her there. She put her hand softly within his arm, and held his sleeve, and turned with him when he turned, as long as he liked, or at least until his mother's sharp summons startled them both, and called in the unwilling girl.

"Why can't they let her alone when she is happy?" he said to himself on such occasions. "Women are so spiteful."

But when Mrs. Eastwood was otherwise engaged, or forgot, or got tired, as people will do, of constant interference, Innocent would stay with him as long as he pleased, saying scarcely anything—content only to be with him—making no demands on his attention. Sometimes she would lean her cheek softly against his arm, or clasp her hands upon it, with a touching, silent demonstration of her dependence.

"I am afraid they are not very kind to you," he would say, bending over her, in intervals when he had roused himself from more serious thought.

But Innocent made no accusation; she said, "I like you best," leaning upon him. Her mind was absolutely as her name. She thought of nothing better or higher in life than thus to be allowed to

wander about with Frederick, doing whatever he might want of her, accepting his guidance with implicit faith. He had been the first to take possession of her forlorn and half-stupefied mind, and no one else had room as yet to enter in.

This, as may be supposed, made Mrs. Eastwood very seriously uneasy, and produced remonstrances to which Frederick in his preoccupied condition paid not the slightest attention.

One evening, however, when he had come to the very verge of the crisis, she went out in the twilight, and took her son's arm.

"If you must have a companion, Frederick," she said, attempting a laugh, "I am the safest. You cannot turn my head, or have your own turned. I wish you would pay a little attention to what I say to you."

"Mother," he said breathlessly, finding himself forced at last into the resolution he had so long kept at arm's length; "for the moment it is you who must listen to me."

She was startled by the vehemence of his tone; but kept her composure. "Surely," she said, "I am always ready—when you have anything to say to me, my dear."

"I have something to say—and yet nothing—

nothing particular," he cried. "The fact is that circumstances—have made me think lately—of the possibility—of marrying——"

He brought out the last words with something of a jerk.

"Of—marrying! You, Frederick?"

"Yes, I. Why not? There is no reason, that I know of, why I should not marry. There are Nelly and Molyneux setting me the example. She is a great deal younger than I am, and he has nothing. I do not know what there should be to prevent me——"

"Nothing, my dear," said Mrs. Eastwood softly; "but before such an idea enters into a young man's head there are generally preliminaries. You intend to marry somebody in particular? not just the first that comes in your way?"

"You mean that I should have determined upon the person before I suggest the event?" said Frederick. "One does naturally, I suppose; but let us imagine that to be done, and there still remains a great deal to do."

"Is this all you can tell me, Frederick?" said his mother, aghast.

"Well, perhaps it is not all. It is all I have any right to tell you, for I have taken no decisive steps.

You must be aware, mother, that before I do so I must ascertain what your intentions are—what you are willing to do for me. I can't live with a wife and an establishment upon what I have. You would not like, I presume, to see your son in a back street, with a maid-of-all-work, living upon next to nothing."

"Frederick, you have never given me any reason to suppose that you were thinking of this; you have taken me by surprise. I cannot tell you all in a moment without any warning, without the least indication — Frederick, for heaven's sake," cried Mrs. Eastwood, struck by sudden terror, "tell me who is the lady? do not keep me in this suspense. You cannot surely mean——"

She was about to say Innocent; but with natural delicacy she paused, looking anxiously at him.

"I don't mean anybody that you have seen," he said impatiently. "What is the use of going into particulars? If I told you her name a hundred times over you would be none the wiser."

"I am the wiser already. I am relieved of one fear," said Mrs. Eastwood; "but, Frederick, more than ever, if this is the case, you ought to be careful about that poor child. How can you tell what fancies you are putting into her head? You

have made me most anxious, both on your account and hers."

"Pshaw! Mother, I wish you would put away those womanish notions of yours, and for once understand what a man is thinking of when he has a serious object in hand. Dismiss all this nonsense about that baby Innocent. If she is a little fool, is it my fault?"

"If I was in your position, Frederick, I should feel it to be serious, and very much my fault."

"Good heavens! this is how you treat a man when he wants to talk to you seriously. Will you pay a little attention to me for once without dragging in somebody else?"

"I have paid too much attention to you one time and another," said Mrs. Eastwood; "and unless you can speak to your mother, Frederick, with proper respect——"

"Oh dear, yes, certainly, as much as you like," he cried. "I don't suppose you want me to say honoured madam, or go down on my knees for your blessing."

There was a moment of silence, during which the fumes of this little quarrel dissipated themselves. He did not want to quarrel—it was contrary to his interests. And neither did she.

"We need not make a fuss about it," he said, in a subdued tone. "It is natural enough. I shall be seven-and-twenty presently, which is not so unripe an age. I have got on well enough hitherto living at home, though I have never had a penny to spare, and I daresay there are a few debts here and there to look up; but, of course, if I married, the thing would be simply impossible. We could not come and live with you here, even if we wished it, and unless you could make a tolerable allowance, of course it is useless for me to think of such a thing."

"A tolerable allowance! Frederick, that is what Mr. Molyneux is asking for Nelly."

"I'd see him at Jericho first," said Frederick; "a miserly old villain, who has money enough to set up a dozen sons. Why should he come to you? I need not point out to you, mother, the very great difference there is between Nelly, who is only your daughter, and myself, the eldest son."

"Has the lady anything?" asked Mrs. Eastwood, skilfully making a diversion. "I hope she is very nice, my dear, and very good, both for your sake and my own; and I would not for the world have you mercenary in your marriage; but still I should like to know—has she anything? I take it for

granted she has nice connexions, and everything else satisfactory."

"I don't know anything about her means," said Frederick, in a lordly and splendid way. "That is a question I never thought of asking. She may be richer than I am, though that is not saying much, or she may not have a penny. I cannot tell you. That is the last thing I should have thought it necessary to ask."

"And indeed you are quite right," said Mrs. Eastwood, faltering. She had herself inculcated this doctrine. Mercenary marriages she had held up many and many a time to the scorn of her family; but it is one thing to make a mercenary marriage and another to inquire whether the future partner of your days has anything—"for her own sake," said Mrs. Eastwood. But as Frederick was in a disagreeable state of mind, and ready to take offence on the smallest provocation, she did not take up this view of the question. The great revelation itself was the chief thing to be considered. "May I not know something at least about her, Frederick? Where did you meet her? So it is this that has absorbed you so much for some time? I have noticed it, though I did not know what it was. Is she pretty, is she nice? Do I know her?

You will not refuse to tell me something about her, my dear."

"I cannot tell you, for there is nothing settled. It would be unfair to her until I know myself," said Frederick; "but, mother, the first part is entirely within your power. And this is what I wanted—not to pour out any sentimental secrets into your ear, but to ask what I shall have to calculate upon. Of course," said the young man, whose veins were boiling with impatience, "unless I have some satisfactory settlement with you it would be dishonourable for me to open my lips at all."

Mrs. Eastwood was silent. She seemed to have lost the power of utterance. Was Molyneux right after all? Was it to be a struggle to the death from henceforth—the children trying how much they could get, the parent how much she could withhold? She had not heard this suggestion made in words; but something like it she asked herself piteously, confused, and startled, and more shocked at herself for the shock and revulsion of feeling which this demand produced on her than with her son for making it. Was it possible that she was not ready instantly on the spot to give to him and all of them whatever they wanted to make them happy? She had said it of herself, and she believed

it, that had they asked for the heart out of her bosom she would have given it, and a kind of horror of herself fell upon her, when she felt for the second time a rising of reluctance and almost resistance within her. On that well-remembered morning when the first appeal of this kind had been made to her, when Frederick had come to her bedside and told her he was ruined, no such feeling had been in her mind. She had cast about instantly what was to be done, and made her sacrifice, with poignant grief for the cause, yet with a distinct pleasure in the power of succouring her boy. But this demand upon her excited no such feeling. Is it possible that a mother can deny her child anything that is for his good? she had asked often enough—and now she herself was in the position of denying. It struck at the very root of all her past principles of action, of all that she had believed and held by throughout her life. What did she care for in this world except her children? What was there in this world that she would not give up for her children? And yet she had (it was incredible) arrived at a moment when two of them asked a sacrifice from her for their happiness, which in the depths of her heart she knew herself unwilling to make.

"You do not make me any answer, mother," said Frederick.

"I cannot all at once," she said, feeling desperately that to gain time was the best she could do. "You forget, Frederick, that I was totally unprepared."

"But you must have foreseen that such a thing would happen some day," he said.

"I ought to have done so, no doubt, but I don't think I had thought of it. Of course I hoped you would both marry," she said falteringly. Stray and vague thoughts that the marriage of her children should not have involved as a matter of necessity this attack upon herself floated through her mind—but she was so deeply penetrated by the absolute horror of her own reluctance to satisfy them, that she felt unable to suggest any possible blame except to herself.

"I must beg, mother," said Frederick, "that you will not speak of Nelly and myself as if we were exactly in the same position. Nelly has her fortune. Any further demand on her part is quite ridiculous. I, on the other hand, shall have the credit of the family to keep up. I shall actually be the head of the family on your death——"

On your death! Is there any human mind which

is not conscious of a startling thrill and wince when these words are said? Mrs. Eastwood nodded her head in acquiescence, but felt as if her son had calmly fitted and fired an arrow which went tingling into her heart. Of course, what he said was quite true.

"I will consider the whole question carefully," she said, in a tone which changed in spite of herself, "and I will ask advice. It is strange to take advice between my children and myself, but you have often told me, Frederick, I did not understand business. I must think it all over carefully before I can give you any answer. I have the boys to consider too."

This she said in a very low tone, not for Frederick, but for herself; for indeed it was at the bar of a private court of her own that she was standing, striving to defend herself, which was not easy. She said this humbly by way of explanation to the judge sitting there, who was a hard judge, and received no weak excuses.

"The boys, pshaw!" said Frederick. "If Dick goes to India, and Jenny into the Church, they are both provided for. I do not see that you need to trouble yourself about the boys——"

"If you had gone into the Church you would

have been well provided for," said Mrs. Eastwood. "Jenny may have difficulties too——"

"Oh, I would make short work with Jenny's difficulties!" said Frederick. That was totally a different question. He went on expounding his views to her about his brothers till Mrs. Eastwood found the evening cold, and went in shivering a little and far from happy. She had come to one of the enigmas of life of which the *fin mot* was yet to find, and out of which she could not see her way.

CHAPTER VII.

AMANDA.

Frederick's fever had come to a crisis. The next day was Saturday, and, without waiting his mother's answer, he went down to Sterborne in the afternoon. He could wait no longer. Sterborne is a little town with a large old church. It would be almost a village but for the minster, which gives it dignity; and all the people of the place are accustomed to consider their minster as their private property, and to exhibit it to strangers as something in which they themselves have had a hand, and for which thanks are due to them—and not only thanks, but shillings and sixpences. Frederick's arrival at the little inn was accordingly set down without doubt to the attractions of the minster; and while he ate his luncheon the guides who particularly attached themselves to that establishment collected outside,

to be ready for his service as soon as he should appear.

"The minster, sir? here you are, sir!" said one sharp, small creature, half man, half boy, with elf looks and unnaturally bright eyes. "I'm the regular guide," said another. "Them fellows there don't know nothing—not a single halter, or the names of the tombs as are all about the place." "I can do you a rubbing of the brasses, sir." "Here's photographs, sir, of all the favourite aspects."

Thus he was surrounded and beset. He could have knocked them all down, with pleasure, as they struggled in his way; but as that was not practicable, he threw their ranks into utter rout by saying plainly, "I don't want to go to the minster"—a speech which filled the crowd of Sterborne with absolute consternation, and almost produced an insurrection in the place. That any man should profess himself indifferent to the centre of their town and the world startled them beyond measure. What did he come to Sterborne for, if not to see the minster? While they dispersed from his path, with an assured conviction in their minds that he must be an infidel and revolutionary, Frederick called the imp who had first offered his services.

"I want to go to Mr. Batty's," he said.

"To old Batty's?" cried the lad, turning a somersault on the spot: "here you are, sir."

"He's going to old Batty's!" cried one of the assistants: and there was a roar of laughter, which Frederick did not understand, but which made him angry by instinct.

"Why did they laugh?" he asked, when he had left that mob behind him, and was following his guide through the High Street.

"We all laughs at old Batty," was the reply.

"For what reason?" said Frederick sternly; but his conductor only laughed once more. To tell the truth, there was no reason. The ragamuffins of the place had made a custom of it; they "always laughed," but they could give no reason why. Nevertheless, this very circumstance chilled Frederick. It was not powerful enough to stop him in his enterprise, but it chilled him. His old self—his serious self—sprang up at once, and looked his infatuated and impassioned self in the face, and asked him how he would like to be the son-in-law of a man at whom the very ragamuffins laughed. His foolish self replied that the die was cast, that he had committed himself, and had no way of escape—which, indeed, was a mere pretence, since he had as yet neither seen the lady of his love nor any one

belonging to her; but it answered his purpose, and stopped the mouth of the gainsayer.

Batty's house was in the outskirts of the little town. It was an old-fashioned house, low and straggling, opening direct from the road, with a little brass-knockered door, raised by one white step from the pavement. The door opened into a long passage, at the end of which was another door, which stood wide open, showing a large garden, green and bright with the afternoon sunshine. Mr. Batty was not at home, the maid informed him who opened the door; but if the gentleman would walk into the drawing-room or the garden she would see whether Miss Batty was visible. Frederick, in his restlessness and the agitation of his mind, preferred the latter, and went into the garden in a strange, tremulous state of excitement, scarcely knowing what he was about.

The house had looked pretty and small from the front, with rows of small twinkling windows and a low roof; but at the back the impression was very different. Various rooms built on to the original *corps du logis* stood out into the lawn, with great bow windows, with green turf at their feet and creeping plants mantling about them. One of these, evidently the drawing-room, displayed handsome

and luxurious furniture, of a tasteless but costly kind, through the softly fluttering lace curtains. The garden itself was large and beautifully cared for, showing both wealth and understanding. This gave a little comfort to Frederick's mind, for gardening is an aristocratic taste. He pleased himself with thinking that perhaps this was Amanda's doing: for no one could suspect Batty himself of caring so much for mere beauty. He walked about the beds and bosquets with a surprised sense of pleasure, finding the surroundings so much more graceful than he had hoped—and began to feel that his passion was thus justified. Presently she would appear, and fill those paths with light. It would be very different from the aspect under which she appeared in the London hotel. Here she was at home, surrounded by circumstances which she herself had moulded, which were sweetly adapted to her; and here, for the first time, he could see her as she was. A hope of something better than he had yet known, better than he deserved, stole over Frederick's mind. He had fallen in love with mere beauty— that beauty which is but skin deep, and which all moralists preach against. Could it be that in so doing he was to find goodness, good taste, and refinement too?

While he was thus musing, the sound of voices

reached him from one of the open windows. It was a warm afternoon, almost like summer. A glimmer of firelight made itself visible in at least two of the rooms, and in both of these the windows were open. Frederick had no intention of eavesdropping, but when he heard the voice which he remembered so well, he pricked up his ears. I am afraid there are few lovers who would not have done so. At first the talking was vague—not clear enough to reach him; but after a while it became louder in tone. The first to make itself heard was a voice which whimpered and complained, "After twenty years' work for him and his: twenty years!" it said; and it wavered about as if the speaker was walking up and down the room with agitation. Sometimes she would stand still, and address the person to whom she was speaking, varying from complaint to anger. Frederick did not know this voice. It was only when another speaker burst in, in a still louder tone, that the situation became at all clear to him. The second voice rang at once into his heart. It was melodious enough in its ordinary sound—a round, full voice, not without sweetness; but something altogether new and unexpected came into it with these sharper and louder tones.

"You are free to go away whenever you choose,"

Amanda cried. "I will not be troubled like this. You know what all the doctors have said, and how wicked it is to worry me. No one can know better than you do. You are a wretch, you have no kindness, no feeling. Because you have quarrelled with papa you want to kill me. What is the use of bullying me? You know you can go, as soon as ever you please. Go, and be done with it. You are always threatening, always saying what you will do——"

"Go!" said the other; "Oh, 'Manda, you to speak of feeling! when I have been here twenty years, and taken care of you from your childhood. But you are as cold and as hard as a millstone, though you are so pretty. Oh, if people only knew how you can talk, and how heartless you are, and the things you say to your mother's own sister—her that has brought you up and taken care of you for twenty years!"

"Taken care of me, indeed," cried Amanda; "any servant could have taken care of me. You have been a nuisance since ever I can recollect: always reminding one that mamma was not a lady, and pulling us down as far as you could. What were you? Nothing but a lady's maid. Here you've been tried to be made a lady of, and had handsome dresses

given you, and all sorts of things. Of course it was for our own sakes. What was there in you to make us take any trouble? You are old, you are plain, and vulgar, and disagreeable. What right have you to be kept like a lady in pa's house? You are only good enough to scrub the floor. Why have you always stayed on when nobody wanted you? I suppose you thought you might marry pa when ma was dead and gone, though it's against the law. Of course that was what you wanted—to be mistress of the house, and get him under your thumb, and rule over me. Try it, aunty! You won't find me so easy to rule over! Just try! An old, ugly, vulgar, spiteful creature, with no recommendation and no character——"

"'Manda, 'Manda," cried the other, "Oh, don't be so cruel!——"

"I will be cruel, if you call that cruel. There's more than that coming. What is the good of you, but to make a slave and a drudge of? Why should pa keep you, but for that? Aunty, indeed! He was a fool ever to let me call you so. And so he is, a soft-hearted fool, or he never would have kept you on for years and years. If he had but asked me, you should have been packed off ages ago. You to put on airs, indeed, and say you won't do anything you're

told to do! Go, this minute, you wicked woman, and don't worry me. Fancy, me! to sit here and listen to you as if you were worthy to be listened to—you who are no better than the dirt under my feet."

"'Manda, you dare to speak like that to your own flesh and blood!"

"I dare do a great deal more," cried Amanda. "I dare to turn you out of doors, bag and baggage; and I will, if you don't mind. You old Jezebel—you old hag, as pa says—you horrid painted witch—you wicked woman! Get out of my sight, or I'll throw something at you—I will! Go away! If you are not gone in one moment—you witch—you old hag!——"

Here a smash of something breaking told that the gentle Amanda had kept her word. There was a suppressed cry, a scuffle, a scream, and then the bell was rung violently.

"Oh, I suppose it's my fault," cried the other voice, with a whimpering cry. "Bring the bottle out of her room—the one at her bedside. Give me the eau-de-cologne. Here's she been and fainted. Quick! Quick! 'Manda! I didn't mean it, dear. I don't mind! 'Manda! Lord, you were red enough just now—don't look so dead white."

Was it Frederick's guardian angel that had made him an auditor of this scene? The loud voice declaiming, the string of abusive words, the clash of the missile thrown, were horrible and strange to him as the language of demons. He was thunder-struck. Her language had not always been pleasant to him, but he was not prepared for anything like this. He walked up and down in a state of mind which it would be impossible to describe. His first impulse was flight. There was still time for him to get away altogether, to escape from this horrible infatuation, to escape from her and her dreadful father, and everything belonging to her. Should he go? Then he reflected he had given his card, and so far compromised himself. Was this sufficient to detain a man who had just been subjected to the hardest trial in the world, a sudden disgust for the woman whom he thought he loved? Frederick stood still, he paused, his heart was rent in two. He was within reach of her, almost within sight of her, and must he go without seeing her, unworthy as she might be? It was not necessary, he said to himself, that anything should follow, that he should carry out the intention with which he came. That was impossible—however lovely and sweet and fair she might be, he would not take a low-bred terma-

gant into his bosom. No, no! that was over for ever. But how could he go without seeing her, after he had given his card and announced himself? This would be to expose himself to her wrath and her father's, in whose power to some extent he was. He could hear the voices through the open window as he wandered about the garden arguing with himself. Should he go? Should he stay? Strangely enough, though he had been told that agitation might be fatal to her, he was not anxious about her, though he surmised that she had fainted. His disgust took this form. If she were ill after her outbreak, she deserved it. On the whole he was almost pleased that she should be ill. She had humiliated him as well as herself, and he had a vindictive satisfaction in feeling that she was punished for it; but further than this he did not go. No; of course all was over; he could never be her suitor, never ask her to give him the hand with which she had thrown something which crashed and broke at her companion's head. Never! that was over; but why should not he see her, behold her beauty once more—give himself that last pleasure? He would never seek her again; she had disgusted, revolted, turned his mind away from her. But since he was already so near, since he had given his card,

since it would be known at once why he went away, this once, not for love, but for scornful gratification of his contemptuous admiration, just as he would look at a statue or picture, he would see her again.

This was the foolish reasoning with which he subdued the wiser instinct that prompted him to fly. Why should he fly? A woman capable of speaking, acting, thinking as this woman had done, could no longer have any power over a man who, whatever might be his moral character, had still the tastes and impulses of a gentleman. She had made an end of her sway over him, he thought; that dream could never come back again. Nobody but a madman would ask such a creature to marry him. To marry him? to be taken to his mother's house, and promoted into the society of gentlefolk? Never! He laughed bitterly at the notion. But, thank heaven! he had not betrayed himself. Thank heaven! that merely to see her would commit him to nothing. No, he ended by convincing himself the most manly course was to pay his visit as if nothing had happened, to see the syren who was no longer a syren to him, but only a beautiful piece of flesh and blood, whom he might look at, and admire like a statue. This was, he repeated to himself, the most manly course. The phrase was pleasant to

him. To run away would look as if he had no confidence in his own moral force and power of resisting temptation. But the fact was that there could be no longer any temptation in the matter. To see her and prove to himself that disgust had altogether destroyed the fierce violent wild love which had swallowed up all his better resolution, was the only manly course to take.

He was standing by one of the flower-beds, stamping down unconsciously with his boot the border of long-leaved crocuses which had gone out of flower, but quite unaware of the damage he was doing, when the maid who admitted him came back. She apologized for keeping him so long waiting. Miss 'Manda had been taken bad sudden—one of her bad turns—nothing out of the common—but now was better, and would he go up-stairs, please?

"Was she well enough to see him?" Frederick asked, with a momentary thrill of alarm, feeling his heart begin to beat.

"Oh, quite well enough. They don't last long, these bad turns. You will find her a bit shaken, sir, and she didn't ought to be excited or put out, but she's better," said the maid. Better! the scold, the termagant, the beautiful fury; but still Frederick's heart beat at the thought of seeing her again.

She was lying on a sofa close to the open window, looking very pale and languid, just as she had been on that delicious evening which he had last spent in her company, looking as if nothing but gentle words could ever come out of those lovely lips. The woman whom she had called Aunty, and whom she had been abusing, sat by her holding a white hand, which looked as if it had been modelled in ivory. Was that the hand? One of poor aunty's cheeks was red as fire, as if she had been struck on it, and she had evidently been crying. But she was full of solicitude for her charge, placing the cushions behind her comfortably, and whispering and soothing her. Frederick asked himself if he had been in a dream. Amanda held out her other hand to him with gentle languor, and smiled at him an angelic smile.

"Is it really you, Mr. Frederick Eastwood?" she said. "We have been wondering over your card. I could not think what could keep you here. Are you staying at the court? But Sir Geoffrey is not at home——"

"No; I had business in this part of the country, and thought I would avail myself of your father's invitation—that is, for an hour or two. I must return to town to-night," he answered, proud of his own

fortitude, but feeling, oh, such a melting and dissolving of all his resolutions.

"That is a very short visit; but I hope papa may be able to persuade you to stay longer," said Amanda. "You do not mind my receiving you on the sofa? I have been ill. Oh, you must not be too sorry for me," she added, laughing, "it was my own fault—entirely my own fault. I allowed myself to get into a passion. I am sure you never did such a thing. Mr. Eastwood, is it not shocking? I got angry at poor aunty, here. Yes, I deserve to be whipped, I know I do—and I always am punished, though not more than I deserve. They told me you were in the garden. I am so much ashamed of myself—did you know, Mr. Eastwood, what a naughty, naughty girl I was?"

"I heard—something," said Frederick, feeling all his armour of proof, all his moral courage, drop from him. This fair creature, pale with agitation and exhaustion, smiling softly from her pillow—caressing the hand of her homely attendant—confessing her fault—this a termagant, a scold, a fury! The thing was ridiculous. Let him disbelieve his ears, his eyes, all his senses, rather than give up his faith in her.

"I don't know how to look you in the face," said

Amanda, putting up her disengaged hand to hide herself. "Oh, I know I have been so very naughty. Please forgive me. It makes me so ill always. I am not let off. I get my punishment, but not more than I deservo ——"

"Don't speak of punishment!" said Frederick. He was ready to pledge his honour that no word which was not good and gentle could have come from those lips. Miss 'Manda sighed softly and shook her head.

"I have not a good temper. I never had. Unless it is born with you, you can never get it by trying— and then, when I am agitated, it makes me ill. Nobody must ever cross me, you know, Mr. Eastwood, or some day or other I shall die ——. It is dreadful to think you may die any day without having a moment's time to prepare." She rounded off this doleful anticipation with a gentle sigh. She lay back upon her pillows, with her colour beginning to come back, but with a delightful gravity on her face. She throw an inkstand at any one? it was totally impossible—though, indeed, there was a black mark on the carpet which a maid was mopping up, and a stain of ink on the front of Aunty's dress; but this must have been accidental. Frederick looked at her and forgot his knowledge of the world, and

threw away his independent judgment and the evidence of his senses. It must have been a mistake. He had all but seen it with his own eyes, but he felt it could not be true. If it had been true, would the assailed woman, she with the stain on her dress, be sitting by Amanda's side, still holding her hand, and soothing her? It must have been an accident. Nothing more easy than to push over an inkstand from a table. It was the simplest accident. He suggested it to himself first, and then he believed it strenuously. He drew his chair close by the sofa, and asked what he could do to amuse her. Could he read to her?—what could he do?

"Oh, no,—if you can only stay for an hour or two, talk to me," said Amanda, "tell me about town. I hate this horrid little place, where nothing ever happens. When any one dies it keeps us quite lively. That is the only kind of amusement we can get. Yes, Mr. Eastwood, sit there—you have town written all over you. It is so nice to see any one from London; tell me how the parks are looking, and what ladies are most talked of, and what sort of dress is being worn. Tell me if there is any gossip going, or stories about anybody in high life. —Oh, I am so glad you have come to-day, when I want rousing up. Do tell me all the London news."

Frederick, to do him justice, was not much learned in London news. Having been brought up by a good mother, he hesitated to repeat to this young woman the stories he had heard at his club; for there are always stories floating on the surface of society, and they are always to be had at the club. After a while, moved by her persuasion, he did tell her some of them, to her intense interest and gratification—a gratification which aroused Frederick's pleasure in telling, and made him forget his scruples. And while he amused her, and received the flattering reward of her interest and attention, he was again inflamed and taken possession of by her beauty. Everything in the shape of reason melted out of his mind as he sat by Amanda's side. All that he thought of was how to secure her,—how soon he could marry and bind to himself that beautifulest form, that fairest face. If these had been the days when rash proceedings were possible, Frederick felt that it was in him to have carried her away to his den, as a wild beast carries his prey. The first moment that it was possible, as soon as they were left alone together, he poured out the story of his passion. He could not live without her, he said—to go away again—to tear himself from her side, was an insupportable idea. Would not she have

pity upon him? Thus this foolish young man, notwithstanding all warnings, notwithstanding the immediate interposition of providence and his guardian angel to save him from it, rushed upon his fate.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT THE FAMILY THOUGHT.

AMANDA was not so eager as her lover. She held back. To do her justice, though she was glad of the prospect of marrying a gentleman, and doubly glad, for reasons of her own, to have an Eastwood at her feet, she was in no hurry to secure him; nor did she show any unbecoming exultation in her conquest. Her father did, who had set his heart on the match. But Amanda had too much confidence in her own charms and superiority to be unduly elated, or to give her consent without all the hesitation which she thought necessary to her dignity. I need not say that Frederick stayed till Monday—till the last practicable moment; that he loathed her father and everything surrounding him more and more deeply every hour; and that his devotion to herself increased in heat and strength, through all her coquet-

tings, her doubtfulness as to whether she liked him or not, and incapacity for making up her mind.

"I have known you such a little while," she said.

"And I have known you such a little while," cried Frederick.

"But that is quite different," she said demurely, casting down her eyes; "a woman's happiness depends on it so much more than a man's."

This was a pretty speech entirely in her *rôle;* but as coming from a woman who the other day had thrown an inkstand at somebody's head, the reader may perhaps be doubtful how far it is true. But it made Frederick more mad with passion than ever. The more she held back, the more eagerly he pressed and urged his suit. For this there were other reasons besides his love. He was a proud man, notwithstanding all the many voluntary humiliations to which he stooped, and Batty was insupportable to him. He despised and hated and loathed the man who knew his weakness, and had thrust himself into his confidence. He would have loathed any man who had done so; but every point in Batty's character exaggerated the intensity of his feeling. His warm cordiality, his friendliness, his satisfaction and good wishes, made Frederick recoil as from something poisonous and unclean. He could hardly restrain

himself even while Amanda held his "fate" in her hands. Once the decision was made, he determined to lose no time—to press for an immediate marriage—to carry her away out of this man's reach—anywhere; he did not care where, to get rid of him at any cost. And with the usual folly of men under such circumstances, he actually believed that he should be able to do this; that he could impose his will upon Batty, and mould Amanda to his way of thinking; and that from the moment when he succeeded in marrying her, all would be right. He could crush all the bonds of nature; he could subdue temper and disposition, and triumph over circumstances. All these Frederick was quite ready to tackle, and did not doubt his power to overcome. The first step was the only thing that depended upon another; but when Amanda had consented—when she was his—then everything would become easy and plain. In the meantime, however, he was received as lover on probation, and had to make a number of pilgrimages Saturday after Saturday before the decision was at last formally made, in his favour. During this time his family were in the dark, knowing little about Frederick. I need not say that their curiosity and ingenuity were warmly roused to find out his secret. This anxiety took a

more practical form in the mind of Dick and in that of Molyneux, to whom, of course, Nelly had communicated the family perplexity, than in those of the ladies themselves, who did not know how to find out anything except in the legitimate way. Molyneux, however, managed by accident to stumble against Frederick at the railway station, and thus discovered where he went; while Dick by means of one of his fellow victims, who was reading with him under the same "coach," procured a natural history of Sterborne of an exhaustive character. When the name of Batty was mentioned, Mrs. Eastwood and Nelly looked at each other, and the whole became clear to them. They had not forgotten the name which they had but once heard. A great beauty—the daughter of a country doctor. Now, indeed, everything became clear.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, mamma," said Dick; "Trevor has often asked me to go home with him on a Saturday. I'll go—and I'll manage to see her, and bring you back the news."

There was an eager assent on all sides to this proposition; and the mind of the family was kept in much suspense until Dick's return. For as Mrs. Eastwood justly remarked, a country doctor might be anything; it might mean a gentleman, highly

considered and well to do; or it might mean a bustling little country practitioner, with no position of any sort. Without further information it was quite impossible to divine which of these two were meant; and everything depended upon the clearing up of the question. As for Molyneux, he was disposed to take the very gloomiest view of the matter. He thought that Frederick should be "spoken to," and remonstrated with. The son of a Q.C., hoping shortly to be the son of a judge, does not look forward with any pride or satisfaction to the thought of becoming connected with "a country doctor." Ernest argued that a man of high standing would never have been so described; a country doctor, he declared, could mean nothing but the most homely specimen of the profession—the workhouse doctor, the village apothecary. He was uneasy on the subject. He thought Mrs. Eastwood ought to be "very firm," and that Frederick, for his own good, should have all the disadvantages of such a mésalliance pointed out to him.

"It is not only a man's own comfort that is destroyed, but that of all his connexions," said Molyneux; "everybody belonging to him suffers," and he insisted once more very sharply on the duty of the mother to be "firm," so strongly, indeed, that

Mrs. Eastwood took offence, though she did not say anything direct on the subject.

"Ernest seems to be afraid that his connexion with us may do him harm in the world," she permitted herself once to say to Nelly.

"Oh, mamma, why do you judge Ernest so harshly?" cried the poor girl. But Nelly, too, felt that if Frederick should marry the daughter of a country doctor, her own lover would be deeply annoyed; and she, too, was wounded and offended by this, though perhaps unreasonably. So many of the feelings which make our weal or woe are unreasonable, and not to be excused.

The household awaited Dick's return with much anxiety. He came up by a very early train, with a cold in his head, and misanthropical tendencies generally. And Dick's report was not such as made the family more happy.

"I met Frederick yesterday," he said. "The fellow accused me of coming to spy upon him. I asked him how I was to know where he went to amuse himself in secret? I was at the Trevors, where I had often been asked. He blessed me, and that was all; he dared not say any more. But wasn't he in a rage! I did not feel very nice myself; for after all I was a kind of spy."

"Indeed I never thought of it in that light," said his mother. "You went to find out something about Miss Batty—not to spy upon Frederick."

"Oh, Miss Batty! Miss Batty!" cried Dick; the recollection took away his power of speech. "She is a big, fat, fleshy sort of a creature, with red cheeks, and fuzzy hair in her eyes," said Dick, "a fringe of it hanging over her forehead, as you see some queer people in the streets; said forehead about an inch high, dimples in her fat cheeks, and that sort of thing. A figure like a feather bed, with something tied round the middle to make a waist. Beautiful! if that is what you call beauty!"

Dick's taste was towards the slim and slight. This was his way of representing all Juno or Rubens-like beauty. Amanda's magnificent sweep of shoulder and limb, her splendid fulness, represented to him weight and fat, nothing more. I need not attempt to describe the cries of dismay with which his mother and sister received this description. Mrs. Eastwood gave a scream when he came to talk of Amanda's figure, and put her handkerchief to her eyes. As for Nelly, she took her brother by the shoulders and shook him, as much as it was in her power to do.

"You are not giving us a true account," she said,

"mamma, don't mind him; it is plain he likes tiny people best. Tell us the truth, you wicked boy, I am sure she is handsome; she must be handsome, even from what you say.

"As you like," said Dick, "it is all the same to me."

"She is like a lady at least?"

"Well, if you think that is like a lady. She must weigh twelve stone; not an ounce less."

"If that is all you have to say against her," said Mrs. Eastwood, who was herself a good weight; "but Dick, dear, don't talk any more nonsense. People have different ideas about beauty. And her father, the doctor? Is he a proper sort of person? Is he a gentleman? So much will depend upon that."

"Her father, the doctor!" said Dick, with increasing contempt. He made a pause before he said any more, to increase the effect. "He is a vet., and a horse-dealer, and a man without a bit of character, the jest of the place."

Mrs. Eastwood gave a painful cry. Nelly echoed it feebly, standing in the middle of the room, with her face suddenly like ashes. Nelly's mind was not primarily concerned with Frederick. The idea which flashed through it was, must Ernest know

this? must he be told? She felt the humiliation keenly, with a pang such as she had never known before. It would humiliate her before him. He would feel humiliated by his connexion with her. For the moment it seemed to Nelly too bitter to be borne.

"Are you quite sure, Dick?" she said faltering. "Is there no mistake?"

"I will write to old Miss Eastwood," said the mother. It was something to be able to get up, to hurry to her desk, to feel that she could do something, could inquire, at least, and was not compelled to sit down idle after receiving such news.

"What good can old Miss Eastwood do?" said Dick, who felt the authenticity of his own report to to be called in question; and, indeed, old Miss Eastwood could do no good; to write to her, to get further information, seemed a kind of ease to the excitement of the moment. Before the letter was finished Mr. Vane came in, to make an innocent call, and hearing where Dick had been, and how he had caught such a dreadful cold, proceeded to discourse upon Sterborne, lightly and easily, as strangers often do upon points of deadly interest to their hearers.

"I have been all over that country," he said, "I used to know the Eastwoods, your relations, very

well; indeed, I have a little box of a place close to Sterborne, which my sister is rather fond of. The minster is the great attraction. Out of St. Peter's at Rome, I don't know a service so high—and she goes in for that sort of thing."

"Do you know anybody called Batty?" cried Nelly, in her haste. She had come to have a great confidence in the man who looked at her so kindly, with eyes that had a certain regret in them—regret which flattered and consoled her somehow, she could not tell why.

"Ellinor!" cried Mrs. Eastwood, in dismay; but it was too late.

"Batty, oh yes, I know Batty. He is very well known to the ingenuous youth of that part of England," said Mr. Vane, "though I admire and wonder to think you should ask for him. Stop a moment, however, I know; he has a beautiful daughter."

"Then she is beautiful!" cried Nelly.

"Red and white, flesh and blood—big Dutch doll of a thing!" cried Dick, thrusting himself into the conversation, in eager self-defence, without thinking of the contradiction in his words.

"I suppose we are all flesh and blood," said Mr. Vane, "but I rather incline to Dick's view of the matter, on the whole. At the same time she is a

beautiful creature. I don't believe she has any more soul than Mahomet would allow; but she is the perfection of flesh and blood. By the way, she was once said to be engaged to one of the Eastwoods, I forget which, not Sir Geoffrey, but one of his brothers. I don't know how it was broken off."

"I heard of that too," said Dick, putting on an air of injured virtue; "you listen to all he says, but you don't put any faith in me."

"No, I can't tell you exactly how it was broken off," Mr. Vane went on, trying to recollect the details which might, he thought, interest in an easy way the relations of Charlie Eastwood. "But these stories are always disagreeable," he added, "there is sure to be something discreditable on one side or the other. It is a blessing, however, to know that he did get out of it, which was the chief thing to be desired."

In the dead pause that followed, in the look of despair which was exchanged between Mrs. Eastwood and Nelly, and the absence of all response to what he said, Vane, who was quick-witted, felt instinctively that something more was involved. He turned the conversation at once to other channels, and after a while Mrs. Eastwood withdrew with Dick, whose cold was becoming more and more demonstra-

tive. When they had left the room there was another pause, which Mr. Vane made no haste to break, for if Nelly chose to be confidential with the man who was a "connexion," as he thought she had once or twice shown an inclination to be, John Vane was very far from having any objection. On the contrary, he was disposed to cherish the inclination. He was "interested" in Nelly. He thought there was a dissatisfaction and confused want in her, which it was sad to see. He thought Ernest Molyneux not half worthy of such a girl, and wondered what she could see in him; and if he himself could be of any comfort or help to Nelly, why, what was the good of him but to be of use? He waited, leaving her to speak, to ask his advice, or confide in him, if she choose.

"About this Mr. Batty?" she said hastily. "Oh, Mr. Vane, pardon me for troubling you. You say it was a blessing that Charlie Eastwood got out of his engagement. I hate that way of talking, as if a girl's happiness went for nothing. But I don't think you meant that; is this Mr. Batty such a man that to be connected with him would be a disgrace?"

"Disgrace is a strong word," said Vane. "I do not think I would use such a violent expression; but as a matter of feeling, I would rather not be con-

nected with him; and pardon me if I say what per haps may shock you—I would like still less to be connected with her."

"The girl?"

"Yes, the girl. It sounds brutal, I know; but she is just the kind of girl whom one would tremble to have anything to do with. Beautiful, passionate, uneducated, undisciplined, taught to think of nothing but the gratification of the moment. I am afraid of such a creature. The Lorelei is a joke to her. When you got into the hands of the syrens you were doomed, and there was an end of you; but a woman like that with the command of a man's life——"

"Oh, Mr. Vane!" cried Nelly, with her hands clasped, following every movement of his lips with her eyes, breathless in her interest; and then she burst suddenly into hot, momentary tears, and cried, "Poor Frederick! poor Frederick!" wringing her hands.

Mr. Vane got up hurriedly from his chair. "Miss Eastwood, don't think I heard you, or will ever recollect, or attempt to connect with what we have been saying"—he began. Then looking at Nelly, who was crying, the man's heart melted within him. "If it will do you any good or give you any ease, tell me," he said, going up to her and standing behind

her; "you may trust me never to say anything."

"Oh, yes, I can trust you," said Nelly; and then clasped her hands, and looked up at him. "You are a man; you are a connexion; you are supposed to know better than we women do. Could *you* speak to him, Mr. Vane?"

He looked at her again, and shook his head. What could he say? "I am not a friend, and no one but a friend could interfere. Even a friend would not be listened to in such a case," he said; and then he added, "If he loves her he may have an influence upon her; he may be able to make something better of her. And your influence and your mother's——"

Poor Nelly shivered. "It is not entirely of Frederick I am thinking," she said, with a low, suppressed moan; "I am selfish too."

Mr. Vane seized his hat suddenly, and shook hands with her, and rushed away! Nelly could not imagine why. She thought he was unfeeling, and she was very, very vexed and angry with herself for having confided in him. The last words had escaped her in spite of herself; but, then, he could attach no meaning to them, she was sure.

When Frederick came home that evening there was a grand *éclaircissement*, not of a perfectly peace-

able nature. He accused his mother of having sent Dick as a spy after him to find out his movements, an accusation which had a certain truth in it. Dick fortunately was shut up in his room with his cold, so that no quarrel between the brothers was possible. When Frederick intimated that he was an accepted lover, and that his marriage was to take place in six weeks, his mother and sister made an appeal to him, into which I need not enter. After a little fine indignation and heroic defence of his Amanda, Frederick became *attendri*, and gave her up to them as a burnt offering, and presented himself in the aspect of a martyr of honour, as men are in the habit of doing; and they ended by taking his part, and weeping over him, and consoling him. They agreed to endeavour to "make the best of it," to "stand by the poor boy." Where is the family that has not in one way or other had a similar task to perform?

There was but one other member of the house by whom the intelligence had yet to be received. Innocent heard it without any appearance of emotion. She had been wistfully curious about Frederick's absence, and had wandered about the garden disconsolately in the evenings, baffling by her strange deadness and silence all the attempts

which the others made to replace him. Jenny, who had by this time come home for the holidays, did more for her than any of the others. He announced in the family that he meant to experiment upon her; he took her out into the avenue, and declaimed Homer to her, to try what effect would be produced,—and he said she liked it; I am of opinion also that she did. She had begun to feel a certain solace in company so long as no response was demanded from her, and no attempt made to interest her and make her take part in feelings and opinions totally unknown. Jenny and his Greek were a consolation to her; she did not understand, therefore she would not be asked to feel, and he required no answer. She went through two or three days of this after Frederick's marriage was announced, and I suppose in the silence her faltering thoughts took shape; for Jenny was nothing to her, nor Ellinor, nor their mother, no one but Frederick—and slowly she began to feel that this strange new event would separate her from him. It was from Dick that at last she asked help for the solution of her thoughts.

"Frederick is to be married," she said, addressing him one day when they happened to be alone. It was in the garden, which in summer was the home of the family, and the slow, lingering spring

had changed into summer that year almost in a day.

Dick was almost as much surprised as if the lime-tree under which he sat had suddenly disclosed a questioning Dryad. "Frederick? yes, he is going to be married, more fool he," cried Dick, shutting up, on the chance of conversation, the book which he did not love.

"What does it mean?" said Innocent again. She had come to his side, and was standing by, questioning him with her great, steady eyes. The good young fellow thought to himself that she must be an absolute fool to ask such a question, and did not know what to reply.

"Mean?——" he said, confused, casting about for words.

"Does it mean that he will go away from here?" said Innocent. "I do not know English ways. Will he go away—will he have her with him instead? Will he never come back, never to live, to be here always? That is what I want to know."

"Of course not," said Dick. "Why, any child knows that when a man marries he goes away with his wife to a house of his own."

"Will Frederick have a house of his own?"

"Of course—I suppose so—if he can afford it," said Dick.

"And she will be with him always?" she asked in a musing tone.

Upon which Dick burst into a great laugh, which silenced Innocent; but she had not the least idea why he laughed. Her mind was too much intent upon one subject to mind anything else. Frederick had brought a photograph of his betrothed to exhibit to his mother, and Innocent was seen bending over it and examining it long and closely. Next morning it was found on the table, torn up into little fragments. The house was disturbed by this, for Frederick gave his mother and sister credit for the destruction of the image of his love, and accused them of want of consideration for himself, and many another sin against his mightiness. Both the accused ladies, however, suspected how it was; Innocent had torn it up quickly and quietly after she had looked at it. She had done it with no vindictiveness, but with a quiet solemnity, like an administration of justice. "Why did you tear it up?" Nelly said to her, a day or two later.

"Because I do not like her," said the girl steadily, not rejecting the blame.

"But, Innocent, though we may dislike people we

cannot destroy them—nor even their portraits," said Nelly.

"No," said Innocent, "but it would be better if she could be destroyed," she added, speaking low.

"Hush—hush—why do you say so? She has not done anything wrong——"

Innocent made no immediate answer. Her face had changed from its wistful blank, to an almost haggard look of sadness and pain. She turned away from Nelly, who was half angry and half sympathetic. The strange thing which they could not understand was, that she had no apparent anger against Frederick, or painful feeling towards him. She was not angry. A sinking sense of loneliness came over her when she thought of his departure, but no offence against him.—She was as ready as ever to go to him in the garden, to walk with him, to cling to his arm—Once, even, she ventured to do what no one else did—she remonstrated. This was within a few days of his marriage, when all opposition was stopped, and nobody made any attempt to change the inevitable. They had been walking up and down together for some time, he saying nothing, she to all appearances passive as usual—when, quite suddenly, without any warning, she spoke.

"Frederick! I wish you would not marry—Why

should you marry and go away? I do not like her face. If I had known that you would go away, I should have stayed in Pisa. Cannot you give it up?—I do not like you to marry. Oh, stay with us, stay!"

Frederick had stared at her when she began—now he burst into fits of unconquerable laughter. There was something insulting in its tone which touched some chord in Innocent's nature. She went away from him without a word, and for days spoke to him no more.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER A YEAR.

It is impossible for any story, unless comprised within a very short space, to be written in full detail, and therefore I must beg the gentle reader to pardon me if I pass over a little more than a year jumping over the marriage of Frederick Eastwood, and all its attendant circumstances, which, indeed was not pleasant to dwell upon. To make this event possible Mrs. Eastwood had to sacrifice a portion of her income, which she did with a pained and miserable sense of unwillingness. It would be impossible for anything to have been more repulsive or disagreeable to her than the marriage itself, and yet she had to subtract largely from her own living to render it possible. I cannot rightly tell why she did not resist this claim. It was partly, I think, out of horror at herself for being reluctant to sacrifice

any thing or every thing to secure "the happiness" of one of her children—a fictitious motive, but one which had great force with her. The consequence was that old Brownlow, who had seen all the children grow up, and to whose services and lectures they had been used all their lives, had to be "put down" like the carriage. Mrs. Eastwood could no longer afford a costly and solemn butler; she laughed tremulously at the idea that this was a grievance, and declared aloud that she had always preferred having maids to wait at table. But it was a grievance, for Brownlow was an old and faithful servant, upon whom Mrs. Eastwood had relied much, and he married the cook, also a most important functionary in the house, and disordered the establishment from top to bottom. Nobody but the Molyneuxes thought the less of Mrs. Eastwood because the door at The Elms was now opened by a nice-looking maid; but *they* did note her descent in the social scale, and this was very irksome to her. Brownlow became the greengrocer of the district, and was always at hand round the corner among the beetroots and cabbages, ready to respond to any call, and to wait at all the dinner parties; but still it was not the same thing as having a man in the house. No carriage and no butler! These things she had given up for Frede-

rick, and what was she to give up for Nelly when the time came? The fact was, however, that Nelly would not allow the time to come. Things remained almost exactly in the same position as they had done at the beginning of this story, so far as Nelly was concerned. Ernest Molyneux still went and came, occasionally taking upon himself the aspect of son of the house, but quite as often making himself generally disagreeable, making speeches which were sharply sarcastic or ill-tempered, under the guise of civility, to Mrs. Eastwood, and torturing Nelly with heats and chills of feeling. He had taken no step to make the marriage possible in his own person. He was as idle as ever, lounging about his clubs and The Elms, interfering with all their arrangements, a man with nothing to do. Now and then he wrote an article in the *Piccadilly* or in the *Daily Treasury*, and thus kept up the character of being a literary man, and making a great deal of money by his writings. But his profession was just as much and as little to him as on the day when he had told Mrs. Eastwood that he would not press for an immediate marriage. He did not press for it now. He felt with all the clear-sightedness of personal extravagance how many disadvantages there would be in having to set up an establishment of his own, and felt that the changes

involved would bring more discomfort than additional happiness. A little more of Nelly would be purchased somewhat dearly by the change in position, in money to spend, and in responsibility of every kind; and at present he could have a very sufficient amount of Nelly's society without these attendant troubles. His father, for his part, held himself good-humouredly ready to "do as much as the other side," whenever, as he said, Ernest and his young lady made up their minds, but in the meantime regarded the whole matter with a certain cynical amusement, watching the process by which, as he thought, "the old mother" staved off the moment when, along with her daughter, she would have to part with some of her money. "Knows the value of money, that future mother-in-law of yours," he would say to Ernest, chuckling; "you don't get it out of her so easily as you do out of me." And this was Ernest's own opinion. To get as much as he could out of her was clearly the principle on which he must go if he married. She was "the other side."

This is, I suppose, a very common state of affairs, and one which is found existing everywhere; but it is difficult to describe the effect it produced in the house where a little while ago each believed himself and herself ready to give up anything or everything

for the other, and in which there was but one heart and one aim. Mrs. Eastwood was driven from her old standing-ground altogether. She had no longer any faith in herself or her motives. She felt all the gentle security of well-doing, which had been in her life, to glide away from her. She was not willing, as she thought she had been, to denude herself for her children. Their desire to get as much as they could out of her revolted her mind and chilled her heart. Frederick had left her in no doubt that this was his sentiment. And Nelly? Could Nelly be of the same mind? Oh, no, not Nelly! but, at least, Ernest, who was to be Nelly's husband, who would take her from her mother, and no doubt persuade her to think with him—at least, when she was his wife. Mrs. Eastwood felt that the virtue upon which she had made her stand, the great principle of her life, no longer animated her, and she no longer believed in herself. She felt that her children were no longer wholly hers, but had become separate, and even antagonist powers, thinking chiefly of themselves; and she ceased to believe in them. Thus her entire moral atmosphere was changed, the foundations of the very earth unsettled, the time put out of joint. She groped vainly for something to guide her out of the maze, and found nothing. Her comely

face became full of anxious lines, and care crept over her like a cold shadow. This was how the changes, present and to come, in the family existence, affected its head.

Nelly was, if possible, still more painfully divorced from her old gentle ease and sprightly quiet. She had begun life for herself, and the beginning was, like all beginnings, a fight and struggle. The new required her to be faithless and disloyal to the old; the old could not conceal a certain grudge and painful antagonism to the new. She was placed between, feeling herself dragged on either side—dragged asunder, the peaceful unity of her existence turned into a perpetual struggle to please both parties, to serve two masters, to be loyal at once to her lover and to her mother. Nay, the struggle was still more complicated: for Nelly had not only to serve two masters, but to content and satisfy a third party, a new being altogether—herself—another Nelly, who had risen up and sat in judgment upon her. No inquisitor was ever so hard upon a poor girl as was this other self—this new, severe, enlightened Nelly, who sat, as it were, at the very springs of her life, and watched them from their earliest outflow. Even when the poor Nelly in the flesh had made what seemed to her a very successful compromise, when

she had done her very best, and had pleased both sides, and served both masters, the spiritual Nelly would come down upon her like a wolf on the fold—would convict her of falsehood, of paltering with what she knew to be right, of mean expedients, and a base policy of time-serving. Poor child! it was true she had become a time-server. She said one thing to the one, another to the other. She tried in a hundred little stealthy ways to "bring them together," to resuscitate the ancient friendship between them. She told each of pretty speeches the other had made, and kept a dead silence as to the speeches, anything but pretty, which she had often enough to listen to. Not only was her heart torn asunder, but her mind was confused in its sense of right and wrong. Many things which seemed abstractly right had become impossible to her; and some that were wrong were so natural, so necessary! She was unhappy in her home, and, with cruel mortification, she perceived that the other home, to which she had naturally looked forward, was receding into the distance. It was to be purchased only by despoiling the present. A certain impatience, almost, by moments, ripening into disgust, sometimes moved her in respect to her betrothed. Her heart sickened sometimes at his suggestions—at the tone in which

he spoke. He wanted all the rest of the world to bestir themselves on his behalf; but he himself had no idea of bestirring himself. He thought it natural that sacrifices of all sorts should be made to bring about his happiness—only not by him.

"But we are young," poor Nelly would say; "we can put up with anything. What does it matter?"

"It matters a great deal," Ernest would answer. "We are young; it is our time for enjoyment. They have had their day. You don't suppose our fathers and mothers feel half as keenly or enjoy half as much as we do? Then why shouldn't they give up, and let us have the means of enjoying? I don't understand that sort of dog-in-the-manger philosophy," said the young man, with a loftiness of moralizing which almost impressed Nelly, in spite of her higher perceptions.

She was seated in a low basket-work chair under the lime trees, looking up with puckers of care upon her pretty forehead which had no business there, at the self-absorbed countenance of her lover. He was cutting down the young lime-shoots which grew up in a miniature forest round the trees, with a little cane in his hand. It was autumn, and the leaves fell at every stroke. He had one hand in his pocket, careless, yet disappointed; laying down the law, and

feeling himself above its action. Nelly gazed at him with a mute inquiry—a close, anxious, silent investigation, which she could not herself have explained. Yes, she was interrogating nature and circumstances, and the present and the future; puzzled between her own instincts, her own ancient certainties of belief, and the philosophy of him who ought to be more to her than all else on earth. He was cleverer than she was, better able to express himself: was he more right than she? Or was he wrong, all wrong—wrong in feeling, in principle, in all that makes a man? What a question this was for a girl to ask herself! And she did not ask it; but only looked up at him, mutely wondering, trying to penetrate the real meaning that was in him—a meaning which must, she felt, be better and higher than anything he said.

Through the same old garden in which these two were seated another figure was visible, passing and repassing under the distant trees. This was Innocent, who had changed too, and developed in her way, during the interval which had been of so much importance to her. Her face had scarcely altered, for her mind was waking up but slowly, and it still retained the half-vacant, half-dreamy look habitual to it. But a change had come over her aspect generally.

She had been assimilated in appearance, as much as circumstances permitted, to other girls of her age. Her hair had been put up, much against her will, though she had strenuously resisted all the modern mysteries of hair-dressing. In this point Alice had been invaluable to her; for Alice was old-fashioned, and looked with grim contempt at the devices, which even Nelly was not strong-minded enough to reject, for increasing the volume of piled-up hair with which the young ladies of the day disguise the shape and exaggerate the dimensions of their pretty heads. Alice drew Innocent's hair into a knot behind, loosely coiled and of no great magnitude. Even thus it was seldom "tidy," I am sorry to say, being somewhat short for such treatment, and often fell loose in a wandering, half-curled lock upon her shoulders. Her dress, too, was still simply made and free from furbelows; but it was kept within a respectful distance of the fashion—enough "not to be remarked," which was Mrs. Eastwood's horror. Mrs. Eastwood, indeed, felt that Innocent was scarcely safe from that misery of being remarked; but consoled herself that, though the girl was nearly eighteen, she was scarcely, properly speaking, "out:" and in such cases, as everybody knows, plainness of dress is in the best taste and a mark of

distinction. What was still more remarkable, however, was that Innocent held a book in her hand as she went up and down the Lady's Walk under the arching trees, which now and then sent down a leaf flickering through the softened daylight upon her, or upon the open page, an occurrence which sent her thoughts astray continually. The girl would look up with a vague soft smile on her face when this occurred, up and round as if half hoping to see some concealed playmate among the branches or behind the bole of a tree, and then would breathe a gentle little sigh and return to the book. Innocent was struggling with the difficulties of education at this moment. She was reading, or trying to read, history, endeavouring, now and then, by help of her own voice, by whispering it half aloud, and thus cheating herself into attention, to master something about Elizabeth and the Marys, her of Smithfield and her of Scotland. She had undertaken this study by her own desire, curiously enough, having come to feel herself deficient. When a girl of nearly eighteen feels herself deficient in education, what can the most well-meaning of friends advise her to do? I need not say that Mrs. Eastwood's sense of propriety had long ere now secured a music master for Innocent, and that by this time she could play a little

on the piano, not cleverly, but yet with a certain dreamy faculty, amusing herself with long-drawn chords and fragmentary combinations of her own. She could speak French and Italian, and even a little German, thanks to her foreign education, and she had no taste for drawing. What more than this could be done in the way of education for her? She had the same novels to read if she chose which came from Mudie's periodically for the rest of the family, and she was recommended to "take a book" by everybody who saw her seated, as she was seen so often, with her hands in her lap, doing nothing. But it was only within a very recent time that Innocent had begun to take this advice. She had been laughed at for her ignorance, and the laugh had touched her for the first time; and here she was accordingly, poor child, on this sunny, hazy autumn afternoon, straying up and down, up and down the Lady's Walk, reading half aloud to herself, about the dead controversies, the national struggles of which she knew nothing. The Queen of Scots even was to her but a printed name. She knew nothing of the story, nothing of the woman for whom partisans still fight, though she has been dead these two hundred years. She read over with her whispering lips the curt record of events which once made blood

flow and hearts beat, insensible to them as though they had been mere revolutions of machinery. The leaf which dropped on her book was real, and so were the pebbles which caught her foot as she strayed on, not looking where she went; but the history was a dead thing so far as Innocent was concerned, and she herself was no more real than the history. What did she there, a stray, half-awakened soul, among the facts of that ordinary every-day scene? She was an embodied dream, scarcely realizable even by herself, and her occupation was as unreal as she was, as she strayed like a vision, appearing and re-appearing between the openings of the trees.

"Is it really true," said Molyneux, suddenly departing from the graver subject, "that old Longueville has fallen in love with that child Innocent? It isn't forbidden, I believe, to marry your grandfather, but only your grandmother, eh, Nelly? Are you jealous? First of all he wanted you——"

"He never wanted me."

"Oh, it is very well to say so now; but it was that, you know, that brought me to the point."

"If you did not want to be brought to the point, it is a pity that it should have happened through a mistake," said Nelly, driven into momentary crossness by the complication and confusion of her feel-

ings. But Molyneux did not want to quarrel. He only laughed lightly.

"Perhaps I am the best judge whether it was a mistake," he said, "but in the meantime he is going in for Innocent? Is it true?"

"He has said something to mamma; but not enough to build any story upon, or to be talked about——"

"By George!" cried Molyneux, "it is about to come to a crisis before our eyes. There is your mother calling for Innocent, and I know Longueville's there——. Now this is what I call exciting. Innocent! Innocent! don't you hear your aunt calling you? She's got a new doll for you," he said laughing, as the girl came slowly past them. "A good strong india-rubber affair, warranted not to break, that can walk and talk, and say——." "She doesn't take any notice," he added, with some disappointment. "What is she always dreaming about? She has got over all that nonsense about Frederick——"

"Please don't talk so lightly," said Nelly, still cross, in spite of herself. "There never was any nonsense about Frederick. She liked him best, for she knew him first. She has never taken to us very much. I don't know whether it is our fault or her fault; but there was nothing like what you say."

Molyneux laughed again. "It does not matter," he said, "though you are very contradictory, Nelly. Of course you *are* jealous, that's what it is. Lady Longueville, with a handsome house in town, and half-a-dozen in the country, with diamonds and an opera-box, and every thing that's heavenly. Confess now you do feel it. All this going to your little cousin!"

Nelly's eyes flashed. Few people see the joke of which they are themselves the subject, and Nelly was not superior to the rest of the world; but she had learned the wisdom of restraining her first outbursts of feeling. She rose from her seat under the tree, and, going a little apart from him, watched Innocent making her way slowly through the gleams of sunshine and bars of shadow to the drawing-room windows, which were open. When the girl went slowly in through the open window, Nelly breathed forth a little sigh. "Poor child!" she said. She was thinking more of her own strange position than of any thing that could come to her cousin. How little she had foreseen the perplexities, the chill doubts, the weakening of faith, the diminution of feeling, the irritation and weariness which often filled her now! Innocent could have no such experience; she was not capable of it but the one girl threw

herself into the position of the other, with a liveliness of feeling which the circumstances scarcely called for. She forgot that Sir Alexis was as unlikely to inspire love as Innocent was to feel it. "I wonder what she will say?" Nelly murmured, with her eyes fixed on the window by which Innocent had disappeared.

"Say? nothing! there is one advantage of taciturnity. She will let it all be settled for her. A lucky girl, indeed; your mother must have played her cards very well," said Molyneux, with real approbation, "after you and I foiled her, Nelly, by our precipitation, to catch the great prize for her niece. You look angry? I think it was extremely clever of her, for my part."

"Ernest," said Nelly quickly, "I wish you would go. If you don't, I feel sure we shall quarrel, and I would rather not quarrel," cried the girl, with tears in her eyes. "Please go away."

"Why, Nelly? you are out of temper——"

"I am out of everything," she cried, "out of heart, out of hope, out of——"

"Not out of love?" he said, drawing her hand through his arm. He, at least, was not out of love. And Nelly cried, but let him soothe her. Was not she his, bound to him for ever and ever? Was it not

hers to forgive, to tolerate, to endure all things? If he seemed to think amiss, would not that mend? All this went through Nelly's heart as her brief hot passion of tears relieved the irritation in her soul; but still the irritation was there.

CHAPTER X.

A PROPOSAL.

INNOCENT walked in unsuspectingly through the great open window in the drawing-room, which looked dusky and dim after the sunshine. The flowers peeped through the glass doors of the conservatory, and her own image in the great glass over the mantelpiece seemed to confront her as she came in. Mrs. Eastwood rose from the sofa, close to the window, where she had been sitting beside Sir Alexis. She took Innocent's hand. The other hand still embraced the history book, which she was holding close to her breast. Mrs. Eastwood looked into the girl's face tenderly, with an anxious gaze, to which Innocent gave no response. "I wonder if she will understand?" she said, turning to Longueville, who had risen from the sofa. "I think I can make her understand," he said. And

then Mrs. Eastwood put her arm round the girl and kissed her. Innocent had ceased to be surprised and impatient of the kindness by which she was surrounded. Though she still took little part in the life of the family, it began to seem natural to her that people should feel, and that they should talk and laugh, and cry, and conduct themselves as it once seemed so strange for them to do. She was not surprised now at any "fuss" that was made. She accepted it quietly, taking little part in it. But for the moment this scene did indeed appear like a dream; the unexpected kiss, the words to which she attached no definite meaning, the something evidently connected with herself, which they settled before her eyes; even the air of the room seemed full of a certain whispering curiosity, interest, and suspense. Innocent felt that something was about to happen, without knowing how. Was she to be sent away? Had something occurred that involved her fate? She looked, no longer quite passive, with a little tremulous wonder and doubt from one to the other. Then Mrs. Eastwood, who had been holding her hand, kissed her again, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Sir Alexis has something to say to you, Innocent. Give him your attention," said Mrs. Eastwood,

"and when you want me, you will find me in the dining-room. My poor dear child—God bless you!" cried the kind woman, and hurried away as if afraid to commit herself. Then it was the turn of Sir Alexis to advance, which he did, looking, as Innocent thought, strangely at her, as if he had something terrible to communicate. He, too, took her hand, and led her to the sofa, to the place from which Mrs. Eastwood had risen. "Innocent," he said softly.

She looked at him with scared and anxious eyes. She was not as she had been. Had she been asked whether she loved her relations, she would probably have stared at the questioner, and made no reply; but the thought of leaving them—of going out into the strange world—struck her with a sharp pang. "Am I to be sent away?" she cried; "is that what you have to tell me?" and a dull dread, which she could not struggle against, took possession of Innocent's soul.

"To be sent away! No, that is the last thing I could have to tell you," he said, looking at her with something in his eyes which surprised her, which confused her; which in her simplicity she could not understand, yet felt moved by strangely. Her foolish terror died away. The faint, vague smile,

with which she had looked round at the falling leaves, came upon her face again. This smile was quite peculiar to Innocent. It moved some people almost to tears; and it frightened others. It was like the look of some one smiling in a dream. The smile altogether overpowered the old veteran and man of the world beside her. There was something in it half-imbecile, half-divine; and, indeed, Innocent stood at the very climax of these two extremes—almost a fool, almost the purest visionary development of womankind. In her present stage of being it seemed impossible to predict on which side the balance would drop.

"Innocent," he said very softly, and then made a pause; "I am as old as your father," he added after a moment, in which he seemed to take breath.

"Yes."

"As old as your father; and you are but a child—not a grown woman. Young in years, younger in mind——"

"You say that because I am not clever," said Innocent, with a look of pain.

"No, indeed. I do not want you to be clever—not anything but what you are——"

The girl looked up at him again with that soft,

vague smile. She made a movement as if to place her hand in his—then checked herself, having learned that such ways of testifying her pleasure were not generally approved of. Sir Alexis had been very kind to her. He had petted her as a man of mature age is permitted to pet a child, bringing her flowers and fruit and pretty things, and asking no comprehension, no reply, except the smile. She felt at her ease with him. It did not even occur to her to inquire what he could want now. And it is impossible to describe the bewildering effect which this had upon the mind of the man who wanted to present himself to Innocent as her lover. He was struck dumb. He looked at her with a wondering gaze—baffled, silenced, in all his superior sense and knowledge. But he had brought her here for the purpose of making this disclosure of his wishes; he had been left with her under this special understanding, and he felt that only ridicule could be his fate if his courage failed him. To be daunted by Innocent! The thought was too absurd. And yet when he looked at her he felt daunted still.

"Innocent," he said, "I have a great deal to say to you; but you are so—young, that it is difficult to say it. You were afraid just now of being sent

away. Did it ever occur to you that you might some time go away of your own will?"

"I go away? Where should I go?" said Innocent. "I should have liked to have stayed at Pisa; but now I know better—I have nothing, no money, no home. I could not go away. And, besides, I do not wish it. It is best here."

"You are fond of them, then, now?"

Innocent made a little pause, looking at him as if to fathom his meaning, before she said simply, "Yes;" and Sir Alexis, with all his experience, grew red under the girl's look; but in reality she had no thought of fathoming what he meant. She never asked herself whether he meant anything; she paused only to collect her wandering intelligence. Was she fond of them? She had scarcely asked herself the question,—her feelings towards them had been passive more than active—"Yes,"—no more than that; no girlish enthusiasm or effusiveness was possible to her.

"And Ellinor is fond of her mother—fonder than you can be; but yet some day soon she will go away——"

"Nelly?—ah, that will be when she is married," said Innocent, with a livelier tone.

"And you, too, will be married some time."

"Shall I?" she said, with a smile. "No, I do not think so—Why? Some people are never married; and some——" here she stopped short, and a sombre look came over her face. Sir Alexis, following her eyes, imagined that they rested on a portrait of Frederick, and the thought gave him a pang.

"Some would have been better if they had not married," he said. "Innocent, what should you think of marrying me——?"

"You!" She looked somewhat amused, undisturbed, at him, making him feel more disconcerted, more baffled than ever.

"I am serious," he said, almost with impatience, taking her hand and pressing it somewhat tightly, to keep her attention alive—"I want you to think of what I say. You are dependent here, dependent upon your aunt, who some time or other may feel you a burden; and I could make you rich, and put everything at your feet. You, who are a poor girl, would become a great lady if you married me, Innocent. You would find it pleasant in many ways. You should do what you like, and have what you like, without asking any one's leave. Yes, and go anywhere—to Pisa, if you pleased. I would do whatever you wished, and spend my life in trying to

please you—for I am very fond of you, Innocent," said the man of the world, in a tone of appeal which was almost a whimper.

What a curious scene it was! she so passive, so unexcited, not understanding nor caring to understand: and he, the wise man, agitated, perplexed, anxious. He had meant that this should be a very different scene. He had meant to put forth his hand and take her to himself, as he might have taken a flower; but this no longer seemed so easy as he looked upon the blankness of her beautiful, wistful, unresponsive face.

"Have you no answer to give me?" he said, almost humbly, holding her slender hand between his.

"I don't think I understand," said Innocent slowly. "I am—stupid, as the servants say. Nelly would go, perhaps, if you were to ask her."

"But it is you I want—you, Innocent! Try to understand—I want you to marry me—to be my wife."

"Like Frederick and—his wife?" asked Innocent, with a shudder.

"Pshaw — like any man and his wife," he said. "Innocent, you are not so foolish as you try to make people think. You must be able to

understand this. Do you like me? Tell me that first."

"Yes," she said calmly, looking at him, grave and curious and unabashed.

"Then will you marry me? Tell me yes or no."

"Please, no!" said Innocent, with a troubled look. Please, no ——"

Sir Alexis dropped the hand he had been holding, and got up and walked about the room. To tell the truth, he was impatient, half angry, annoyed rather than wounded, as men generally are who are refused. Even in the midst of his annoyance, he was half inclined to laugh. He had made up his mind to marry her, whether she chose or not; but to be refused point-blank by this child was a thing which had scarcely appeared to him possible. It irritated, and vexed, and half-amused him, without in the least altering his purpose and determination. A comical half-wish to have her whipped mingled in his mind with vexation at having made so little impression upon her. After a few moments, during which he calmed himself down by his promenade, he came back and took his seat again, and her hand, which she gave to him smiling. She was glad he was not angry. It was a relief to her mind to find

that he did not "scold" her, as so many people felt themselves at liberty to do.

"Innocent, my dear," he said, "I want you to think over this carefully. Should not you like to go into the world with me, to see everything that is to be seen; to go everywhere, and buy what you liked, and live where you pleased? I would do anything to please you. I would go with you everywhere to take care of you. Before you say No, think what it is you are refusing; and speak to your aunt, and let her advise you. She knows better than you do. I know better than you do," he said, with a smile, which indeed was a smile at himself, so odd and strange was his position. "I advise you to accept me, Innocent. Longueville is a beautiful place, much finer than anything you have seen in England; and we could go to Pisa if you liked."

"Ah, I should have liked it once—a year ago," said Innocent; "but now it is best here. I don't want to go away——"

"Not to make me happy? Suppose you take that into consideration? to make a man who is fond of you happy."

She gazed at him with wondering eyes. She did not understand the language even which he was

speaking. Had it been warm, youthful love, probably Innocent would have known what he meant. But this middle-aged fondness for the beautiful strange young creature, so strangely young, so unusual in her type of beauty, conveyed no idea to the mind which was but half alive. I don't think she believed this last speech; it seemed to her, though she had a very limited perception of humour, that it must be a joke.

"Innocent," he cried, growing excited, and raising his voice, as if she had been deaf; "is it possible you do not understand me? I love you—is not that plain? I want to have you always with me, to have you for my wife. I want you to marry me. All girls marry; it is natural—it is necessary; and you say you like me. Shall I call your aunt, and tell her you have consented, and will be my wife?"

"Oh, please no! please no!" cried Innocent, putting her hand on his arm in sudden fright. "If she said so I would have to do it. Do not make me go away. I am not—clever. Don't be angry or scold me. I am beginning to know a little better." She put her hands together instinctively like a child. "It would be as dark again as when I came here; do not make me go away!"

"Nobody will make you do anything; but I love you, Innocent. Come with me of your own will. Nobody will make you go away."

"Ah, thanks!" she cried, with a long-drawn sigh of relief. She did not seem to notice his other words—only the last, which relieved her. She put her clasped hands to her side, and looked at him with her dreamy smile. "I was frightened for a moment," she said, "but I knew you were too kind. Feel how it made my heart beat. You are not angry? It was wrong not to care when I came here; but it cannot be wrong to wish to stay now? I could not bear to go away."

"You will think differently after a while," he said, "and then——" The man was piqued by her perfect insensibility to the honour he had done her. But before he uttered the threat which came to his lips, better feelings came over him. "Yes, Innocent," he said, "I made a mistake; I have been premature. But now listen to me. If ever you change your mind—if ever you wish to go away—if the time should come when you may be glad to think you have another home ready for you, and some one who loves you—then will you think of me? I will not be angry if you will promise this."

"Oh, yes," she cried gladly. "Yes, I will pro-

mise. I will think of you; I will run to you. It is not likely," she added, half to herself, "that they will send me away, or that I shall wish to go; but if——"

"In that case you will come to me?"

"Yes, directly. I will remember. I promise—faithfully, faithfully!" The vague look brightened up into warmer intelligence as she held out her hand to him. I am not sure that the intelligence suited the face so well as its usual passive visionariness. This gleam of light made her more like a child than she had ever been before. Sir Alexis rose gravely, and, stooping over her, kissed her forehead. She shrank a hair's-breath; but yet received the salute gravely too, without a blush, looking at him with a wondering endeavour to investigate his countenance. He could not be angry since he gave her this sign of amity. As for the discomfited lover himself, he took his hat, and went away very gravely, disappointed it is true, but touched and rendered serious, he could not quite tell how. He did not feel like a man who had been refused, but rather like one who had rashly thrust the vulgar questions of life into some mysterious intermediate region between earth and heaven. He had spoken earthly language to a creature, half idiot, half angel, whose spotless

mind had no thoughts or impulses in it which could make it possible for her to understand him. He was half ashamed of himself, half solemnized as by a vision. As this impression wore off, however, which it did in time, Sir Alexis was not discouraged. He could not have her now; but one day he would have her, and his love was not of the hotly passionate kind which cannot wait. Perhaps, indeed, he wanted Innocent only as he would have wanted a lovely picture, a rare flower. He had never seen any one the least like her, and he did not require a helpmate or a companion; it was a supreme luxury, the rarest he could think of, that he wanted. And with such sentiments a man, especially when he is fifty, may be content to wait.

When Mrs. Eastwood heard the door close she came back anxiously to the drawing-room. Things had gone badly for Sir Alexis, she felt sure, from the mere fact that he had gone away. Innocent was about to step out again through the open window when her aunt came up to her. She laid her hand upon the girl's shoulder, detaining her. Innocent had still her history-book clasped in one hand against her breast.

"Where is Sir Alexis?" said Mrs. Eastwood. "Have you sent him away?"

"Oh, no," said Innocent, the gleam of intelligence which I have already described still brightening about her face, and changing for the moment into a kind of clever imbecility the usual pensive dreaminess of its expression. "He went away himself, quite of his own will. And he was not angry. We are friends as much as ever."

"Then you refused him, Innocent?"

"I don't know what you mean by refused. I asked him not to ask you to make me go away. I don't want to go away. Did you wish me to go?" the girl asked, with the old, wistful look coming back into her face. It was the first time this thought had struck her, and a chill stole into her heart.

"No," said Mrs. Eastwood, drawing her close. "I am glad you are not going, Innocent. Only it might have been better for you, my poor child. He is rich, and he is fond of you. He would have been very kind; he would have given you every advantage, more than I can give you. And if anything was to happen to me—— But you don't understand such calculations. It would have been a comfort to have you settled," said Mrs. Eastwood, with a sigh.

"Is Nelly settled?" asked Innocent.

"God knows!" cried Mrs. Eastwood, in sudden trouble; and then she turned to the girl whom she had adopted with an instinctive appeal for sympathy. "If I was to die, who would think of you, who would care for you—Nelly and you? There would be no one but Frederick—and Frederick's wife."

Innocent did not make any reply—a faint colour flickered over her cheek. She turned away from her aunt, twisting her fingers together with a helpless gesture. Then she said, very low, "Frederick—would always take care—of me."

"Oh, my dear," cried Mrs. Eastwood, "you must not think of Frederick. I am afraid when he is kind to you he is thinking more of himself than you. That is one reason why I should have been glad, very glad. Frederick belongs to his wife."

"May I go now, and read my history?" said Innocent, after a pause. She went back to the path overshadowed with trees, and opened her book; and whispered to herself again, half aloud, how Mary plotted and wove her spells, how Elizabeth lay in wait for her like a spider. She resumed at the same sentence as if nothing had happened. How much of it went into her mind? How much of the other had gone into her mind? Sir Alexis, Frederick, all the surrounding figures, were they ghostly and dim

to her as Mary of Scotland and the great Elizabeth? But no one could answer this question. Amid the strange light-gleams and weird darkness of her own little world she dwelt alone.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. FREDERICK.

THE evening of the day on which the above incidents occurred was that of a periodical banquet, feared and staved off as long as possible by all the Eastwoods. Since the time of Frederick's marriage it had been considered necessary that he and his wife should be invited to dinner formally from time to time, in order that it might be visible to the world and "Mrs. Frederick's family" that full honour was done to her. Nelly and Mrs. Eastwood had made a great effort to adopt Amanda, if not into their hearts, at least into their society, after the terrible event was actually accomplished which made her their daughter and sister. But I need not say that this was a very hopeless attempt, and that as familiar companionship gradually failed between people who resembled each other so little, the periodical dinner

gradually gained importance as the only practicable way of keeping up "a proper intercourse." Mrs. Frederick had come to London with very great ideas. She had hoped for nothing less than an entry into the fashionable world, and all the glory of associating with lords and ladies. The visits she received from the ladies of Mrs. Eastwood's circle disgusted and disappointed her. What! Marry and come to London for no better purpose than to be visited by ladies from the suburbs, who lived there always—ladies with no better title than Mrs.; some of them, like Mrs. Eastwood herself, paying their visits in flys, or in the plainest of little broughams, no better than a fly. Visions of splendid vehicles, with embroidered hammercloths and celestial flunkeys, had entranced Amanda's imagination. The Eastwoods were county people at Sterborne—they were a baronet's family—magnates in the neighbourhood; and the beauty had no means of realizing that a country baronet is no great personage in London, much less a country baronet's cousin. The disappointment was bitter, and she was not the woman to conceal it. Gradually, however, she fell into a kind of society, or to use her own words, formed a circle, which pleased her well enough. This consisted chiefly of the men who had

been her father's visitors in former days, several of whom had handles to their names. They were not as a general rule much credit to know, but they suited Amanda better than the Mrs. Everards, and other humdrum persons, who had welcomed her first to her new position. When she had yawned through one or two dinner parties painfully got up for Mrs. Eastwood's sake, to make the best of a bad business, by the society which frequented The Elms, Amanda had declared her determination to have nothing more to do with "Frederick's old-fashioned set." They were not much in sympathy with her, to tell the truth; and dinners at Richmond, with Lord Hunterston and his kind in attendance, were a great deal more to her liking. Amanda held, in fact, the opinion which poor little Innocent had expressed innocently as a reflection of the sentiments of her father. She disliked women. They were all jealous of her beauty she believed; they were her critics or her rivals—never her friends; spite was their chief characteristic; envy their main sentiment. The men of Amanda's set were of her opinion—so are a great many clever persons, it must be allowed—at least in books. Therefore it is not to be supposed that Amanda looked forward with more distinct gratification than that felt by the ladies at

The Elms to her periodical dinner. She put on her handsomest dresses and her finest talk to dazzle them, and she made it a subject for her peculiar wit for some time before and after.

"I am going to dine with my old mother-in-law," she would say to the young men, few in number at this season of the year, who filled her little drawing-room in the afternoon. "Such a set of old guys she has about her, to be sure. Why she should insist upon having me, I can't imagine, for she hates me, of course. But duty before everything. I shall have to go."

"Why should you have to go?" said one. "And by Jove, I'll come to-morrow to hear all about it!" said another. The lively sympathy of this chorus did Mrs. Frederick good.

"Oh, you shall hear the whole account," she said. "It's like Noah's Ark. There is the regular clergyman, and some old fogies of lawyers, and a horrible man called John Vane——"

"Oh, come, Mrs. Eastwood, John Vane's no end of a good fellow. I know him as well as I know myself," said one of the interlocutors.

"That may be—but he ain't a good fellow at The Elms. The Elms! only fancy. Doesn't it sound like Hampstead Heath? He is related to the mad

girl I told you of—and he's after my prim little puss of a sister-in-law, in a quiet way; for she is engaged, if you please, and oh! does give herself such airs on the strength of it. But the women! You should see the women! In old silks and satins that belonged to their grandmothers, with turbans and I don't know what—all looking as if they could eat me."

"That, of course," said one of Amanda's court, with a laugh.

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Frederick, giggling slightly in response; "and to hear them lay down the law! what one should do, and what one should not do. And, then, mamma-in-law herself! But there are some things too dreadful to be talked about. Mothers-in-law are one of these things. Tell me about Hurlingham, or something pleasant. If I go on thinking of what's before me, I shall die!"

Thus it will be seen the dispositions of Mrs. Frederick were little likely to promote harmony. On the other hand, Mrs. Eastwood and Nelly had their private conference, which was not much more hopeful.

"Try to avoid unpleasant subjects," said Mrs. Eastwood. "Talk of Brighton, and that sort of

thing, Nelly. Or stay, as they have been abroad for their holiday, get her to talk about Switzerland. That must be a safe subject. She will think it is fine to talk about Switzerland, as she was never there before; and keep her off her grievances, if possible. Frederick looks so black when she begins; poor Frederick, how he is changed!"

Nelly made no response on this point, for she was not so deeply convinced as was her mother that Frederick had been a great deal "nicer" before he was married. This is, I am sorry to say, a very common opinion among a man's female relations. But Nelly had not been so much deluded about the "niceness" of her brother in his previous state as many sisters happily are. She maintained a prudent silence, so far as Frederick was concerned.

"If I try to keep off her grievances, you must try to keep her off Innocent, mamma," said Nelly, and this was the bargain with which they concluded. I am not sure that Mrs. Eastwood was quite right in her selection of guests to meet Mrs. Frederick. Had she invited Sir Alexis, that imposing person might have kept her in order; but what did Amanda care for Sir Timothy Doul, who had been Governor of Barbadoes, or for Mr. Parchemin, though he was a great lawyer?—any more than

she would have done for great poets and such people, in distinction to the really great, the dukes and countesses for whom her soul longed. Sir Timothy and Lady Doul were the only strangers present on this occasion, for, as the reader is aware, Mr. Parchemin was one of Mrs. Eastwood's councillors. Ernest Molyneux had failed at the last moment, and had been hurriedly replaced by Mr. Vane, who was always ready to do a kind action, and who of late had been a great deal about The Elms. Molyneux objected much to meet Mrs. Frederick. Vane objected to nothing. Perhaps the difference lay in the fact that one of the men had attained all he wanted, and was no longer anxious about Nelly's favour, but considered it her duty to please him; whereas the other, foreseeing the possibility of a catastrophe, felt himself (though despairingly) on his promotion, and deemed it wise to be on the spot, in order that if anything offered he might have full advantage of the chance. This, I fear, was Mr. Vane's reason for keeping so much in the foreground. It is impossible to describe the use he was at The Elms. He was never out of temper, and Ernest was very often out of temper. He was satisfied with all the arrangements made by the ladies, and Ernest found fault continually. Nelly,

with a guilty sense of treachery in her mind, had felt herself turn to the man who was "a connexion" for rest and sympathy, when she could not turn to her lover. This was a very terrible state of affairs, but no one was quite conscious how far it had gone.

Mrs. Frederick made her appearance in a dress of pink silk, with a train almost a yard long. Her beautiful shoulders were bare, and her arms. Her hair was dressed in the most elaborate way which an excited hairdresser could devise: a soft little curling fringe of it half covered her low but white forehead, and great golden billows rose above, increasing at once her height and the size of her head. All the glow of colour, all the roundness of outline, all the flush of physical beauty which had maddened Frederick, remained undimmed and undiminished; but Frederick stalked in behind her like a black shadow, gloomy, disappointed, dismal, more like Charles I. than ever. Wherever he went, all the ladies were sorry for Frederick. Poor fellow, he had made a mistake in his marriage, and how he felt it! He writhed when his Amanda began to talk fine, and to display her knowledge of great people. He looked at her morosely whenever she opened her lips, and followed her into the room with a gloom

upon his countenance which here he did not think it necessary to conceal. His mother at least had forgiven all the faults that Frederick had ever committed against her, in consideration of his present sufferings. The fact that he was discontented with the toy for which he had paid so dear (and for which, alas ! Mrs. Eastwood, too, was paying dear) seemed to cover all his previous sins. Had he put a better face upon it, and endured cheerfully the doom which he had brought upon himself, his mother, and womankind in general, would have thought less well of him; they would have concluded that he was happy, and would have despised him; but they were sorry for him now, and elevated him to the rank of a martyr, in consideration of his gloom and disgust. Nelly was almost the only rebel against this universal tenderness.

"He married to please himself," said Nelly; "he ought to make the best of it now, and not the worst. It is mean of him to pose in this gloomy way. I should like to shake him," cried the impetuous girl.

"Nelly, don't be so hard-hearted," her mother would say, with piteous looks.

Thus Frederick was generally successful in his gloom—at least among the feminine half of society.

He came in behind Amanda's train, which he looked at with disgust, as it curled about his foot. Nevertheless, he was pleased to see that his gorgeous wife made an impression on the old fogies who sat by his mother's side—Sir Timothy and Lady Doul.

"I am pretty well, thank you," said Amanda, "as well as it is possible to be in London at this time of the year; when all one's friends are gone, and when the place is full of outlandish country-looking people, or strange fishes from abroad, it is such a bore to stay in London. You don't feel it out here in the suburbs—you have your little society of your own, which pays no attention to the season. I am sure I wish I was as well off."

"Dear me!" said old Lady Doul, with the admiration and wonder of ignorance. "I think London is always so exciting. I could not bear too much of it. Sir Timothy and I were just saying what a racket it was. To be sure we are living in Half-moon Street, in the centre of everything," the old lady added, with simple pride. Her cap had been made in Barbadoes, and so had her gown; she had not been "in town" for more than twenty years.

Amanda gave her a stare in passing. She was never civil to women.

"I should think you would find the desert lively

if you think Half-moon Street exciting," she said. "Give me a nice country house choke full of people, with luncheons at the cover side, and dances in the evening, and all sorts of fun going on. But when one marries a poor clerk in a public office, one has to put up with many things," she went on, turning to old Sir Timothy, who, startled and embarrassed, did not know what to reply.

"Oh, ah, oh, of course," said the old man; "very good—very good. Everybody suffers from a penurious government. I assure you, my dear young lady, the fine young fellows one meets out in the world—*attachés*, and such like—wasting their time, as I always tell them, upon twopence-halfpenny a year. Why, I had a secretary once, a young man of excellent family——"

"But I hope you did not allow him to marry," said Amanda. "It is always upon the wives that the hardship falls. If you saw the little hole of a place we have to live in—and back to London in October—only fancy! I wonder what we are supposed to be made of. The men are much better off with their clubs, and that sort of thing. They know at least all that is going on; they hear the gossip, and see every stray creature there is to see; but as for us, poor ladies——"

"Tell me how far you went in Switzerland, Amanda," said Nelly. "You must have enjoyed that. We have only been once among the mountains; but what a pleasure it was!—did you go to——? But I remember Frederick wrote you had changed your minds——"

Nelly spoke with the artificiality of a made-up digression, and Sir Timothy thought her but a poor little shadowy thing by the side of her beautiful sister-in-law.

"Oh, I never go into raptures I don't feel," said Amanda. "I don't care twopence for Switzerland; I hate mountains; I would rather go to Margate any day—that is, if nothing better were to be had," she added, remembering that Margate was hardly consistent with the splendour of her pretensions—"Don't ask me about places, as if I was a guide book. I like people, and talk, and to see new faces, and the play, and all that's going on."

"Very pleasant," said Sir Timothy, "and very good taste, and I quite agree with you. I have promised Lady Doul and myself the pleasure of the play to-morrow."

"The play—to-morrow!" cried Amanda, putting out her hand with an air of horror—"The play!

At this time of the year? You must be out of your senses——"

Here Brownlow made his appearance at the door, and the party went in to dinner.

"You did not tell us that Mrs. Frederick was a beauty," said Sir Timothy, in Mrs. Eastwood's ear, "and so completely one of the *beau monde*. You said *Mrs.* Frederick surely? Not a title? Ah, now you set my mind at rest. I was rather afraid to hazard a name. Allow me to congratulate you on such a charming daughter-in-law."

"Yes—she is very handsome," said poor Mrs. Eastwood.

"Handsome! A divinity, my dear madam, quite a divinity!" cried the old man. For half the dinner through Mrs. Eastwood was silent, wondering whether her old acquaintance had become imbecile in the climate of Barbadoes; or if he was venturing to joke at Mrs. Frederick's expense. It was difficult to solve this question, for old Sir Timothy set up a lively flirtation with the beauty, who was placed at her mother-in-law's other hand. All through the course of dinner, during which banquet Mrs. Eastwood lost much of her accustomed good-humoured ease, the old man went on. Was he drawing out Amanda's folly; or was he dazzled by her beauty

with the usual incomprehensible weakness of men? Mr. Vane, who sat between Mrs. Eastwood and Amanda, added this to his many attractions, that he was not dazzled by her; and he, too, was somewhat silent, finding little to say in the cross-fire which the others kept up. As for Frederick, he sat gloomy and grand at the foot of the table between Lady Doul and his sister, and was not conversational. Lady Doul had a pleasant little chattering tongue, and told him she remembered him as a baby, and congratulated him on his beautiful wife.

"Mrs. Frederick seems to have been a great deal in society," the old lady said, with a keen glance at him, which belied the simplicity of her question. And Frederick, with the consciousness of Nelly's eye upon him, did not know how to respond.

"Oh, ah," he said, giving a tacit assent, and wondering all the time what she was really thinking, and why that muff, Molyneux, was not there. If it was a mere quarrel between Nelly and her lover, or even if Molyneux had declared off, Frederick would not have disturbed himself much on the subject; but he could not but recollect that Molyneux had been absent the last time he and his wife had dined at The Elms. If he were to behave badly to Nelly it would be bad no doubt; but to give himself airs

with Frederick was a still more dreadful offence. "Confound his impudence," he muttered between his teeth.

As for the other members of the party, Innocent was very passive, and Mr. Parchemin, with his spectacles pushed back upon his forehead, ate his dinner with serious devotion, and troubled himself about nothing which might be going on.

After dinner, the ladies, being so few in number, made a little group in the drawing-room round Mrs. Eastwood's chair. It was then that Innocent attracted Amanda's attention.

"What a great girl she is growing—almost grown up," she said. "What do you intend to do with her?"

Innocent was leaning against the back of Mrs. Eastwood's chair. Her attention was directed quite otherwise, or rather, she was attending to nothing, gazing across the room vacantly with her eyes fixed on the door. Whether this was mere chance, or whether it was the lingering remains of the old adoration for Frederick, Nelly, who was watching her very closely, could not tell. The girl was not attending—but she woke up and stirred slightly at this allusion to herself.

"What am I going to do with her?" asked Mrs. Eastwood in dismay.

"Yes—I mean do you intend to send her out as a governess, or anything of that sort?" said Amanda, plucking a flower to pieces which she had taken from the dinner-table. It was bad enough to abstract the flower from a bouquet which Nelly had arranged very carefully; but, having abstracted it, to pull it to pieces, throwing the petals on the floor, was almost more than human patience, personified in Nelly Eastwood, could bear.

"Now she has grown up," continued the beauty, "I suppose you mean her to be of some use. You can't keep her always in idleness to the injury of your own children——"

"We must not talk about the questions you don't fully understand," cried Mrs. Eastwood, with flushed cheeks. "Innocent, my love, go and fetch a cushion for Lady Doul. And perhaps Mrs. Frederick will give us a little music, Nelly, if you have anything new to tempt her."

"Oh, I never play till the gentlemen come in," said Amanda; "but I don't see why you should take me up so sharp about Innocent. Now you've given her her education she ought to be made to do something. I'll look out for a companion's place, if you like, among my friends. Why shouldn't I understand? it's easy enough; and I am sure all your

children have a right to interfere. Why should a girl that is only your half-niece take the bread out of their mouths! Ask any one if I am not right. Every penny you spend on her will be so much less for your own."

"We need not trouble Lady Doul with our family concerns," said Mrs. Eastwood, with a tremendous effort to keep her temper; and she addressed a question to the old lady, upon which Amanda again broke in.

"Oh, I assure you Frederick and I often talk it over; he thinks as I do. If she couldn't be a governess she might be a companion. It would be quite easy; I, myself——"

"Come and look at something I have got here," cried Nelly, at the table, sending meaning looks at her mother.

"Leave me alone, Nelly. I think it's my duty to speak. As the wife of the eldest son I have a right to interfere; the Eastwoods are not so rich that the little they have should be spent on strangers."

"My dear Mrs. Frederick," said Mrs. Eastwood with a forced smile, while old Lady Doul hurried to the other end of the room to speak to Nelly, "I have been used to manage my own affairs

without reference either to my sons or my son's wife."

"And so much the worse for you," cried Amanda, with flushed cheeks. "What can you know about business?—women never do—you ought to take sensible advice; you ought to consider your own children, and not a lot of hangers-on; you ought not just to take your own way, without ever thinking of us, starving our children for a pack of poor relations. Oh, I know what I am saying, and I ain't to be put down by looks. I'm one of the family; and a poor enough thing for me, too, with my looks and my expectations; but to see a great beggar girl eating all up with her useless ways—what ought to come to us and our children. I cannot put up with it. I *will* say what I've got to say."

"What is the matter, Amanda?" said Frederick behind her. He had heard the raised tone of his wife's voice, and had rushed in, in dismay. He found his mother risen from her chair, indignant and burning with suppressed anger, and his wife standing before her, aiding her words by gestures, her white arm raised, her cheeks deeply flushed, her breath coming quick, and her eyes flashing red fire. He put his hand on her arm, "Come and sit down here on the sofa; the other men are just coming in.

For heaven's sake, Amanda, compose yourself. Do you want to be ill again? do you want to make a scene?"

"I don't care twopence for making a scene. I want to have it out now it's been started, cried Amanda. "I say that great girl oughtn't to be kept up in idleness and luxury. She ought to be sent out into the world to make her living. Ain't we the natural heirs, and haven't we a right to speak? Oh, what do I care for the men coming in? let 'em come in. It's only right and justice; since you haven't the heart to speak up, I must. Innocent, indeed! a nice sort of Innocent, to eat up what ought to be for us! There isn't so much of it; and a pack of younger brothers already, and that sort. "Oh, I have no patience; let me have it out."

"For God's sake, Amanda——"

She made an ineffectual attempt to go on, but breath failed her, and she allowed herself to be drawn to the sofa, and laid herself back upon the pillows panting, her white shoulders and forehead stained with patches of vivid pink. "It's all very well to say, 'Don't excite yourself,'" she said. "How can I help it, when people are so self-willed and stupid?"

The unhappy Frederick sat down by her and

endeavoured to soothe her. Surely a little recompense for his many offences was doled out to him that evening; he talked to her in a low tone, expostulating, entreating. "Think of your health," was the burden of his argument. He fanned her, he held her hand, he wiped her hot forehead with her laced handkerchief. Poor Frederick! He had pleased himself, and he was paying the penalty. Nelly and Lady Doul had rushed with a common impulse towards the door to meet the other gentlemen, and stood there involuntarily pointing out old pictures to their admiration, and plunging into depths of conversation which bewildered the newcomers. Mrs. Eastwood, too angry to think for the moment of keeping up appearances, had pushed back her chair as far as it would go, and after sitting down in it a minute, had risen again to look for Innocent, who stood with one hand upon the table, gazing with wide-open eyes at Frederick and his wife. No sort of offence was upon Innocent's dreamy face. Awakened attention, a slight startled wonder, but nothing painful was in her expression, and perhaps that wonder was more roused by the sight of Amanda's excitement and exhaustion than by anything she had said. Mrs. Eastwood hastened to her, took the girl into her arms,

and held her close. "My poor child, my dear child. You must not mind her, Innocent," she said.

"Is she ill?" asked Innocent, wondering.

"I am sure I wish she was!" cried Mrs. Eastwood, "she deserves to be, venturing to dictate to me, the little vulgar intruder, a girl not fit to be in the same room with Nelly and you!"

"Little!" said Innocent, with an amused smile. "She is not little. She is the biggest of all. Are you very angry? Did she scold you?"

"I am very angry; but don't you mind, my dear. Never think again of what she said, Innocent. She is a passionate selfish fool; don't pay any attention to what she said."

"No," said docile Innocent; "but I should like to be of use—it would be pleasant to be of use," she added, after a pause. "Let me do something. What is a companion? How strange that she should be so red and so breathless? Is it all about me?"

"It is because she is a fool," said Mrs. Eastwood, though indeed she herself was flushed and excited too.

"But what is a companion?" asked Innocent.

"You are my companion and Nelly's," said Mrs. Eastwood; "my dear, don't think of it any more."

"And she is Frederick's," said Innocent, contemplating with a strange abstract spectatorship the group on the sofa. There was no enmity, only a wondering contemplation in her eyes. "Can he never be without her? Will she stay with him for ever and ever?"

"As long as she lives," said Mrs. Eastwood, with a profound sigh.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW COMPLICATION.

This evening was an eventful evening at The Elms. When Mrs. Frederick had rested sufficiently and calmed down, she was carried off by her husband with the very briefest and driest of leave-takings. Old Sir Timothy and his wife had gone off before, as hurriedly as was consistent with good-breeding, shaking their old heads over the family fray they had witnessed, and forming suppositions as to the origin of Mrs. Frederick which did her injustice, unexalted though her antecedents were.

"I don't know what Mrs. Eastwood could mean by asking me to meet such a person!" cried Lady Doul in high dudgeon.

"Hush! my dear, hush! the poor woman was trying to make the best of it," said Sir Timothy

"and though she's evidently a termagant, she's extraordinarily pretty, wonderfully pretty."

"I have no patience with you men," said Lady Doul. "Pretty! what has pretty to do with it? Do you think a pretty face is like charity, and covers a multitude of sins?"

"A great many, my dear," said old Sir Timothy, with a chuckle. And so the old pair jogged on to their lodgings, half sorry, half shocked, half indignant. The party they left behind was more seriously excited. The first thing Mrs. Eastwood did was to hurry off Innocent to bed, accompanying her to her room with a fear for the effect of Amanda's ravings upon her feelings which was really uncalled for, for Innocent's feelings were too little on the surface to be moved by any such assault. It had given rise to vague thoughts in her mind, but no wound—thoughts which, when her aunt, with many caresses, had left her, she expressed to old Alice with more freedom than probably she would have ventured upon with any one else. Innocent's habitation was now in the old schoolroom to which she had taken so great a fancy. And here Alice waited upon her with a care which amazed the other servants, for Innocent had nothing to give in return, not even thanks or caresses, and was considered

"proud" and "stuck-up" in her dreamy habitual silence.

"She said I might be a companion," said Innocent. "And Sir Alexis said something too—a companion! I am Nelly's companion and my aunt's, she says—Frederick's wife meant something different. Alice, you are old; you know a great many things——"

"I know you're but an innocent, my poor bonnie bairn," said the old woman with a sigh.

"Of course I am Innocent; but that is only my name. Companion is not a name; it is a thing. She is Frederick's companion. My aunt says he will never be rid of her—never—so long as she lives. What a pity that she cannot be made to stop living! She scolds—like—like—she grows red like the women we once saw quarrelling in the street."

"When you stoppit to tell them it was ugly," said Alice; "and why should they scold each other?"

"Yes," said Innocent, "to scold children is natural, I suppose, at least everybody does it, even you, Alice; but Frederick's wife—and he cannot send her away. I wish she might die, and then Frederick would be free."

"Bairn, bairn, hold your tongue!" cried Alice. "Are you no aware that it's a sin, a great sin, to

wish anybody dead? Never let me hear you say such a thing again."

"But I do think it," said Innocent; "she makes herself ill; she suffers; she makes everybody else unhappy. She scolds, it does not matter whom. Why should people go on living when they do so much harm?"

"But you would not do her harm?" said Alice, curiously gazing at her; "and why should Mr. Frederick be free? He has taken his own way, and he must put up with it. He has made his bed, and he must lie on it. What is he that he should be delivered from what he has brought on himself?"

"I am fond of Frederick," said Innocent dreamily. "If he is good or not I do not know, but I am fond of him. Alice, do you know I have found out something? When papa said women were hateful, he meant women like Frederick's wife."

"My bonnie lamb," said Alice, "think as little as you can either of Mr. Frederick or Mr. Frederick's wife. Such kind of thoughts are little good. Say your prayers, and mind that you must wish harm to no person. It's against a' Scripture; though, eh! human nature's weak, and if it was me I doubt if I could keep my hands off her," she added to herself.

When Mrs. Eastwood left the room with Innocent,

Mr. Vane asked permission to stay. "May I wait till you come back?" he asked, "I have something to say." Perhaps it was injudicious on all sides, for, indeed, Nelly, who was thus left alone with him in a state of high and indignant resentment, was, perhaps, too much disposed to confide in the sympathetic companion who was always ready to feel with her, always willing to be interested. They were standing together over the little fire, which on this mild October evening smouldered unnecessarily in the grate. But when there is any trouble in a house the fire becomes at once the centre; everybody goes to it mechanically. Nelly stood there, clasping her hands together by way of restraining herself; her cheeks were flushed, her eyes abashed. She was not only wounded and angry, but ashamed to the bottom of her heart. She had been doing all she could to conceal and cover over the "scene" which, like all Englishwomen, she dreaded to have known. But she had not been successful, and now her mind was so full of it, so running over with indignation and excitement, that she knew she ought not to have trusted herself with any companion; and yet absolute self-denial was so hard. She could not be so wise as to go away and bury the tumult of feeling which was eager to be expressed.

"Oh, Mr. Vane, what must you think of us?" she burst forth at last.

"What must I think of you? I am afraid some things I dare not tell you," he said. "But what can any one think—that you have had to submit to a very ordinary form of domestic misfortune, and that, by dint of doing your very best to bear it, you have to suffer much that is disagreeable? That is all that the most curious could think. Every one who is worthy to be called your friend, Miss Eastwood, should be only too glad to stand by you in such a trial."

I don't know what John Vane meant, or if he fully realized what he was saying; but as for Nelly she turned crimson, and gave him a quick, furtive look of inquiry. Had he looked as if he meant anything she would have been offended; but he was sufficiently innocent or clever to dismiss all meaning from his face.

"Oh, as for that," said Nelly, "it would be foolish to speak as if we wanted any one to stand by us. Mamma and I are able to support each other—mamma, and I, and Innocent. We are quite a strong body; we want no one else," said Nelly. She looked up at him, smiling, to prove her assertion, but somehow just at that moment a chance

tear, which had gathered on her eyelashes without her knowledge, seized the opportunity to fall. "Why, what is this? I wonder," she said, with a little laugh, wiping it from her hand with her handkerchief, "it seems I must have been crying without knowing it. How silly! It is horrid that because one happens to be a woman one should always make a fool of one's self and cry."

"I wish we were all fools of your description," said Vane.

"What, to cry? Oh no. It comes natural to a girl, but it is dreadful in a man. And there is not much to cry about either," said Nelly. "It is not Mrs. Frederick that makes me unhappy, Mr. Vane; it is that poor mamma must feel what I once said to you, that we are all trying to get as much out of her as ever we can. Why should she have given up her own comforts to let Frederick marry? If papa had been alive, no one would have expected him to do it; but because mamma is a woman, Frederick and everybody think she should give in continually. Do you think it is just or right? Why should she give up all she has been used to, to give us things we have no need of? First her carriage, and now her old servants; and she talks even of letting the dear old house. Mr. Vane, perhaps I

ought not to talk like this to you—but do you think it is right? Should not a man try when he marries to make something for himself?"

"If I were ever so happy," said Vane, "that is what I should do. I should like my wife to feel that I was working for her. *My* wife! That sort of thing is not for me."

"Why shouldn't it be for you?" said Nelly in a softened tone; but she felt the ground was dangerous, and perhaps she felt that there was a certain inference in all that was being said—a something which implicated others as well as her brother; therefore she hasted to place Frederick in the foreground as the sole subject of discourse.

"Perhaps I am too angry with Frederick," she said, "it is because I feel as if mamma might think we were all alike—all thinking of what she has, not of her; all grasping and wanting something. Rather than she should think that of me I would die."

"She could not think that of you. It would be impossible," said Vane.

"I don't know," said Nelly, the tears gathering once more on her down-dropped eyelashes. "Oh, how true it is what mamma says—that nature wrongs women more than law does! Sometimes we are compelled to look different from what we are

that people may not see or find out—other things. Sometimes we have to put on false looks to make other people seem true. You men, you don't know half nor a quarter what poor girls have to do!"

This curious and enigmatical outburst filled Vane with feelings which I will not attempt to describe. He thought he understood it, and his whole heart melted over the girl, whose case already, perhaps, he had thought over too much. He put his hand for a moment on hers, not holding it, but giving just one touch of a sympathy which went beyond words. As he did so another tear slowly brimming over fell on his hand. Instantly, before he knew, the water stood in his own eyes; Nelly startled, dashed the tear off with her handkerchief, and crying hastily, "Oh, I beg your pardon! I beg your pardon!" covered her hot eyes and flushed face with her hand.

It was at this moment that Molyneux came in. I do not wonder for my part that he was a little startled by the position of the two, and the attitude of affairs generally; Nelly crying, and Vane beside her with an agitated look about the eyes, which tells much that men would prefer to conceal. "Hullo, what is wrong?" he said, striding up to her side.

Nelly recovered her composure instantaneously; and Vane, drawing back, felt that the charm of the moment was over, and all its magic flown.

"What is the matter?" cried Molyneux, more angry than affectionate; "crying! What are you crying for? Has Winks been taken bad, or have you lost your canary bird, or what? I think you might have kept your tears till I came."

"They are not pleasant things to keep," said Nelly, "and indeed I was not crying. Mrs. Frederick put us all out of temper——"

"Oh, Mrs. Frederick! Dick told me there had been a shindy," said the young man. "I'm sorry I was not here to see the fun. Vane, you are luckier than I am—you are always on the spot."

A retort was on John Vane's lips; but he considered all the circumstances and held his peace, offering no explanations. Nelly's betrothed looked from one to the other with, I do not deny, a certain justification for his suspicions. "Well," he said, "now that I am here, you don't seem communicative. What was it all about?"

"Oh, the subject does not matter," cried Nelly. "It was an attack upon mamma. Don't let us speak of it; it makes me wicked, it makes my heart sick. Poor mamma, who has always been so good

to us—is this how we are to repay her at the end?"

"I can't say, of course, if you don't choose to tell me," said Molyneux; "but Mrs. Eastwood is not any worse off than other people of her age, so far as I can see. We can't all be romantic little gooses, Nelly, like you."

"Don't!" said Nelly, with sharp pain and shame. Why was it that her lover's familiar tone went so near to disgust her at such a moment? She drew away, not venturing to look up, ashamed: because the other was present, she would have said. And this was true; but not entirely in the simple sense of the words.

"I must speak to your mother about Innocent," Vane said apologetically, feeling too that he was in the way, and they stood all there about the fire in the most awkward of positions until Mrs. Eastwood, with her clouded brow, came back. She gave Ernest a little nod of recognition—no more. It was well that he had not been there, and yet it was ill that he took no pains to stand by Nelly in any emergency. She seated herself in her usual chair, taking little notice of any one. Her pulses were still tingling, and her heart beating. She was a proud woman, though she made but small external

pretensions; and she had been insulted in her own house.

"I want you to let Innocent go to my sister," said Vane, approaching her softly, "for a week or two perhaps. Don't you think she should make acquaintance with her father's relations? She is grown up; she has developed so much under your kind care. Could you not trust her, even for a few weeks, out of your own hands?"

"Oh, Mr. Vane!" cried Mrs. Eastwood hastily, with tears coming to her eyes; "this is because of what you have just been hearing—because of what my daughter-in-law was so wicked, and so cruel as to say."

"What is the matter?" said Molyneux to Nelly. "What *did* she say? and what has he to do with it? and what does your mother mean by looking so excited? It all seems a pretty muddle for a man to fall into."

"What she said was about Innocent," said Nelly, restraining herself with an effort; "that we ought not to keep her here—that she should be sent out as a governess—I don't know how much more hard-hearted nonsense. I can't tell how she dared to speak so to mamma."

"That woman would dare anything," said Moly-

neux. "About Innocent? Well, I don't know that she was very wrong; that girl will turn into a dreadful burden one day or other, if she is not made to marry somebody. I can't think what your mother meant, when she had such a chance, by letting Longueville slip through her fingers. So that's why *he's* here, I suppose? I hate that man John Vane; always poking himself where he is not wanted."

"I suppose mamma must have wanted him or she would not have asked him," said Nelly. "We could not have an empty place at table."

"Oh, that's why you are cross, is it?" said Ernest, with a vain laugh; "but, Nelly, you must not really expect that I can always be doing duty at those family parties. A family party is the thing I most hate in the world."

"Fortunately for mamma Mr. Vane is not of your opinion," said Nelly. It was the first time she had attempted anything like self-assertion. She had never stood at bay before.

CHAPTER XIII.

INNOCENT'S OUTSET IN THE WORLD.

In consequence of this interview between Mrs. Eastwood and John Vane, it was arranged that Innocent should pay Miss Vane a visit at the High Lodge, near Sterborne, where that lady lived in an eccentric way of her own in an old house which her brother had abandoned to her, and which she had turned to a great many uses quite uncontemplated by her predecessors. "We are an eccentric race," her brother had said, laughing; "but as it is my way to be good for nothing, so it is Lætitia's way to be good for a great deal. The one of us neutralizes the other. I tell her she is trying to lay up a stock of superfluous merit on my account, one good result of having a brother a ne'er-do-well——"

"Why should you call yourself a ne'er-do-well?" said Mrs. Eastwood. Nelly had already asked the

same question furtively with a glance, and there was a warmth in the little outburst of partisanship by which these two women defended him against himself which warmed the man's heart.

"Because, alas! it is true," he said; "you got this character of me before you knew me? Ah, I was sure you had! and you see it is realized; but Lætitia is good for us both. Some part of her goodness is after a droll fashion, I confess. She is prodigiously High Church; she keeps a poor little parson in petticoats and a cloak, whom she calls father, and treats, I fear, as she treats her housemaids; but, mind, she is very good both to the housemaids and the parson. I think Father Featherstone is a mistake; but if there ever was a good woman bent on doing good and succeeding in the attempt, it is my sister Lætitia. She will be very good to Innocent. You need not fear to trust her in my sister's hands."

"I like men who believe in their sisters," said Mrs. Eastwood with a smile.

And Nelly looked at him. She did not say anything, but her lips moved as if she would have echoed her mother's words. Nelly's face had grown somehow longer, with a wistful expression which, by moments, was almost like Innocent's. Espe-

cially when she looked at John Vane was this the case; a perpetual comparison seemed to be going on in her mind, almost a complaint against him that he was different from the other who was so much more important to her. Why should Vane always be of use and service when that other neglected his duties? Why should he be, as Ernest said, always on the spot when the other was away? Nelly was half angry with the man who was so ready to stand by her; and then there came over her heart the softest compunction and self-reproach, mingled—in that inextricable complication which belongs to all human feeling—with bitterness and mortification. Was it possible that she grudged the kindness of the one because it threw into further relief the indifference of the other? This, as the reader will easily see, was a very unsafe, as well as a very uncomfortable, state of mind for an engaged young woman. Perhaps, on the whole, the kindest thing John Vane could have done would have been to take himself out of the way and leave Ernest to show himself in the best light possible, a thing which his constant presence put out of the question.

To return, however, to the conversation with which this chapter begins. It took place on the morning after Mrs. Frederick's outburst, and was

the end of the adjourned discussion which Vane had begun on the previous evening. He had found some trouble in soothing Mrs. Eastwood, and persuading her that his proposal had nothing to do with what Amanda had said, but had been in his mind for some time previously. When he succeeded in this, everything was easy enough. It was certainly well that Innocent should be made acquainted with her family, her father's relations. "If anything were to happen to me," Mrs. Eastwood allowed with some pathos, "it would be an excellent thing that she should have other friends to fall back upon. Frederick could not, I fear, give her a home, as I might have hoped; and as for Nelly, I don't know how Nelly may be situated," the mother said, looking at her daughter. She did not know what was in Nelly's mind; but that Ernest should be ready to give succour and shelter to a penniless dependent was a thing which, at this stage of affairs, with her present knowledge of Ernest, Mrs. Eastwood could not hope.

"It was with no such lugubrious idea that I made my proposal," said John Vane, laughing. "But Innocent is nearly eighteen, and there could not be an easier plunge into life for her than a few weeks at the High Lodge. My sister has made half a convent,

half a school, of the old house. I wish you would come too, and see what she is doing. But if not, I will take my little cousin down and leave her with Lætitia. It will teach Innocent the use of some new faculties. You have taught her only how to be carried about and cared for and tended——"

"I have not spoiled her, I hope," said Mrs. Eastwood, who was not, however, displeased with the compliment. When a woman comes to that stage of life in which all that she does and says is no longer admirable because she says and does it—when she begins to feel the force of hot and hostile criticism, and to be shaken even in the natural confidence with which she has been accustomed to regard her own motives, then praise becomes very sweet to her; it restores her to the moral standing-ground which she seemed to have lost. Mrs. Eastwood had just accepted with a natural pleasure John Vane's testimony to her goodness, when Frederick came in suddenly, with a harassed look upon his face. Frederick had been in the country shooting, as he said—for some time—without his wife; and had come back looking pale, as he used to look after his absence in the old days.

"Something is wrong?" said his mother, divining what his looks meant, as Vane discreetly withdrew.

"Oh, nothing particular—nothing out of the ordinary," he said. "I wonder though that, knowing all the circumstances as you do, you should not make an effort, mother, to prevent Amanda from exciting herself. Of course, she is ill to-day. I told you before I married what was the state of affairs; *she* may deserve it if you please, but I don't deserve it, and the worst always falls on me. I do think you and Nelly between you might at least manage to keep the peace."

"Frederick! you seem quite unaware of how it all happened," cried his mother, suddenly roused to a movement of self-defence.

"I know how it all turned out," said Frederick, "and I do think my mother, if she had any regard for me, would try to avoid such scenes. She has been ill all night; and now she's taken it into her head to go down to Sterborne, to the old place—the last thing in the world I could wish for. If you only knew," said Frederick, in a tone of the deepest injury, "how I hate her father; how I have struggled to keep them apart! And now here is my wife—your daughter-in-law—going down to our own county, among all the Eastwoods, to Batty's house! By Jove! it will break my heart."

Words of unkind meaning were on Nelly's very

lips. "You should not have married Batty's daughter if you hate him," was what she was disposed to say. "Frederick would not have spared me had I done anything of the kind," she added to herself. She was guilty in intention of this unkind utterance; but in act she was innocent; she bit her lips and kept it in. Mrs. Eastwood was a great deal more sympathetic.

"But if you were to speak to her, Frederick—if you were to say you did not like it?" she suggested anxiously.

"Speak! say! much she would care!" cried Frederick. "It just shows how little you know Amanda. That confounded heart disease of hers—if she has a heart disease—makes her believe that she is free to insult everybody. She must not be crossed herself; but there is nothing she likes so much as to cross others. No, I shall have to give in. I shall have to take her there, though I hate the whole concern. I do not think there ever was a more miserable wretch than I am on the face of the earth," cried Frederick, flinging himself wearily into a chair.

"My poor boy!" said his mother, going to him, and passing her soft kind hand over his forehead, raising the waves of his hair, which were not in their

usual good order. Frederick was not generally very tolerant of his mother's caresses, but of late he had been soothed by them. Amanda cared very little for his *amour propre,* and made no particular effort to magnify his importance, and a man likes to feel himself important, if only to his mother. On the other hand, his mother was half-pleased, even in the midst of her pity for him, that he should, as it were, throw aside his wife and recognize himself as a victim. It is not a fine quality, this, in women; but I am afraid a great many good women are conscious of possessing it. When a man has connected himself with his inferior, with some one we disapprove of, we like him to find out his mistake. We feel that it is better for him to know that he has done badly, very badly, for himself; and though in higher minds a certain contempt for the being who thus gives up the cause of his once-beloved mingles with the softer feeling, yet we are all more or less mollified towards the son or brother who has made a foolish marriage when he delivers over his wife, metaphorically, to our tender mercies, and abandons her standard. I don't know whether the same sentiment exists on the other side, but I avow its existence on my own side. Mrs. Eastwood was pleased that her boy gave his Amanda up. She was far more tenderly sorry for him than

had he been still in love. In words she tried "to make the best of her," and recognized fully that now the deed was done it was to be desired that Frederick should be "happy" with the woman who was his wife; but she thought more highly of him because he was not happy. She was more pleased, more tender, much more softened towards her son than if his household had been a pleasant one. Nelly did not share these sentiments. She was impatient with Frederick, and disposed to despise him for giving up Amanda's cause. She put herself in Amanda's place, small as was her sympathy for that young woman, and involuntarily conjured up before her a picture of the Molyneuxes, who would feel towards Ernest's wife much as the Eastwoods felt to Frederick's. Would Ernest abandon her, Nelly, to their strictures? would he allow them to suppose that he too had made a mistake? This thought made Nelly's cheeks burn, and her eyes glow, and disposed her on the spot to assault Frederick and lift up Amanda's falling standard.

"It is curious," said Mrs. Eastwood, after a pause, "that we should be so much entangled with Sterborne, where all the Eastwoods live, without having anything to do with the Eastwoods. Perhaps Innocent might travel with you, Frederick, if you are

obliged to go. She has been invited to the High Lodge, to make acquaintance with her father's family."

"Who lives at the High Lodge?"

"Mr. Vane's sister, the only one of the Vanes who has taken much notice of Innocent."

"What does John Vane want with Innocent?" said Frederick, his tone changing. He got up from his chair, and slightly pushed away his mother, who was still leaning over him. "Does he want to marry *her* too?"

"Does Mr. Vane want to marry some one else—too?" said Nelly instinctively, with an impulse for which next moment she was sorry.

"You should know best," said Frederick; and then he turned to his mother with that air of superior knowledge and virtue which he knew so well how to assume. "I told you when that man first came to the house that his character was very doubtful. He has always been a queer fellow. Had I thought that you would receive him almost into the family, and make so much of him, I should never have allowed him to come here at all."

"But, Frederick!—I have never seen anything in him that was not nice," said Mrs. Eastwood, alarmed.

"Oh, I dare say, mother. A man does not come into a lady's drawing-room to show off his shady qualities; but I warned you to start with. There are many queer stories about him current among men. Ask Molyneux—I don't think there is any love lost between him and John Vane."

"Is that the case, Nelly?" asked Mrs. Eastwood.

Nelly felt to her dismay that a hot and angry blush—a blush not altogether of embarrassment, of something that felt like passion—covered her face. "I should be sorry to quote Ernest on any such subject," she said, faltering yet eager. "He told me that there were stories current among men about Sir Alexis, that he was not a man to be brought into your house, into my company——"

("What impertinence! one of my oldest friends!") said Mrs. Eastwood in a parenthesis.

"And then," continued Nelly, "he turned round upon me, and laughed at my knowing such things, when I told you, mamma. He made me out to be a gossip, to be fond of disagreeable reports; he made me feel as if I had made it up; that is how men show their friendship for each other. Probably both Frederick and he would do the same about Mr. Vane."

"Molyneux would be flattered by your opinion of

him," said Frederick, laughing; and had it not been for the lucky arrival of Dick and Jenny, I do not know how far the quarrel might have gone. Mrs. Eastwood, however, would not have "the boys" made parties to any discussion of this kind, and Frederick departed after a time to his office, where he was so very hard worked, poor fellow, and where he appeared between twelve and one o'clock, having settled his domestic affairs first, as became a Briton of the most "domesticated" race in the world.

During the interval which has passed without record in these pages Dick, the much-suffering and much-labouring, had encountered a great event, and had got through it, I do not say triumphantly, but at least successfully. The examination—the great exam., which had exercised his mind and temper for years—had come and passed; and Dick had pulled through. There he was, still walking about with books in his pocket, still in the trammels of "a coach," and still subject to other terrible and ghastly episodes of exam., which had (I think) to be repeated for two or three years before the full-blown competition wallah was sent to India. I do not remember to have encountered in society many young men of this tremendously educated class, and

therefore I cannot tell if Dick may be considered as a fair specimen; but this I can say, that considering the amount of information which must have been crammed into his head, it was astonishing how lightly he wore it. He was profoundly careful not to shock and humiliate the uninstructed mass of his fellow-creatures by letting it appear when there was no occasion for such vanities; and, in short, Dick examined and passed was as much like Dick unexamined and dubious as could be supposed. Jenny had undergone a greater change. He had left Eton and had matriculated at Balliol, and felt himself a greater man than it is given to mortal in any other stage of existence to feel himself. He had done even more than this; he had gained a scholarship, and was thus actually paying part of his own expenses, a fact which his mother could not sufficiently admire and wonder at, and which still had all the freshness of a family joke in the house. It was astonishing how the brows of the two women cleared, how the atmosphere lightened when these two boys (oh, boys, I beg your pardon—men) came in. No complication had yet arisen in their young lives. Jenny had hung his mother's photograph over the mantelpiece in his college sitting-room, and boasted that she had as much sense as all the dons put together, though

she knew no Greek. I wonder whether in the progress of the human intellect this kind of boy will long survive; but the very sight of Jenny's face (though he was not handsome), and Dick's big figure, with a book in its coat pocket, was good for sore hearts as well as eyes.

"We were talking about Mr. Vane," said Mrs. Eastwood, with a little furtive artfulness such as women use. She would not enter into any discussion of him with her boys, nor direct their attention to the stories "current among men." She reverenced their youth more perhaps than, had she been anything but an ignorant woman, she would have thought it necessary to reverence it. Probably they both knew a great deal more than she did in that kind—or so at least all men inform women for their comfort; but still I think it was good for Dick and Jenny that their mother ignored all these "stories current," &c. "We were talking," she said, "about Mr. Vane. Frederick does not seem quite to like him——"

"I should think not. He isn't the sort of fellow for Frederick to like," said Dick. "He is not your superior sort of prig. He is jolly to everybody. *I* like him—gives himself no airs, and is never above saying he's wrong when he's wrong. Why, just the

other day—I told you, Jen—about the build of that yacht——"

"I like him," said Jenny, "but I'm not a fair judge. He came down to Eton last fourth of June, and didn't he just give me a tip! So I can't speak; I'm bribed; but if I knew anything *he* wanted——"

"So that is your opinion," said the mother, well pleased. "They say, though," she added mournfully, "that those men in the clubs——"

"I don't belong to any club," said Dick. "It's very hard. What does it matter, if I *am* going to India? I shall come back from India, I hope. I suppose you all wish to see me again? Well, then, why shouldn't I be proposed for Trevor's Club? It doesn't bind a fellow to anything, and it's a handy place to have people call upon you and to send your letters. Trevor offered to put me up a year ago. His father is on the committee, and I know two or three other fellows there."

"My dear boy, Frederick thought it a waste of money—as you are going away," said Mrs. Eastwood, with an incipient tear in her eye. This glimmer of moisture was always produced by any reference to the fact that Dick was going away.

"Then thanks to him," said Dick, in high dud-

geon, "I can't tell any one what is said in the clubs."

"What is the question?" said Jenny, always practical; "is John Vane on his trial for something?" And here the boy, without knowing it, glanced at Nelly; and Nelly turned abruptly away, and went out through the conservatory into the garden, with a very great tumult and many painful thoughts in her breast.

"Innocent is going to pay his sister a visit," said Mrs. Eastwood, "at a house near Sterborne. He thinks it is time she knew her father's relations, and I have consented, for I thought so too. But Frederick says——"

"Is she going now, or at Christmas?" said Jenny. "If now, I give my consent, for I'm going off to-morrow. I like Innocent to be at home when I am at home. You may laugh, if you please, but I like it; why shouldn't I?" said the boy hotly. "And I like Nelly to be at home. What is the good of girls, if they don't make the old place look nice? But she may go now, if you please; what has that to do with John Vane?"

Upon this Dick laughed long and low. "John ain't in love with Innocent," he said, chuckling. "I say, mother, what a set of jolly spoons!—if you

know what that means. I'll take her down to the country if you like, and see John Vane's sister. Perhaps she might take a fancy to me."

"Silly boy, she is as old as I am," said his mother, with a smile. And thus the discussions of the morning fell into cheerful home banter and the jests of the boys. This consoled the mother, the light of whose firmament was at present supplied by these two boys; but it did not comfort Nelly, who was wading up to her neck in personal dismay and trouble; and it would have called forth nothing but angry contempt from Frederick, who felt his own griefs big enough to eclipse both earth and heaven.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HIGH LODGE.

THUS every one discussed and gave their opinion as to Innocent's outset in life—except Innocent herself. She acquiesced—it was all she ever did. A slight paling of her very faint colour, a certain look of fright in her eyes, were the only indications that it affected her at all. Somehow this change in her life associated itself in her ideas with Amanda's proposal to render her of use—a proposal which she had received with more favour than any one else in the house; it had offended them all on her account, but it had not offended Innocent. She listened to all the descriptions which were given her of Miss Vane, her unknown relation, and of the pretty country which she was about to visit, and of the novelty and change which her aunt thought would do her so much good, with passive incomprehension. Novelty alarmed, it

did not excite her; she wanted no change—but yet she was quite contented to be sent where they pleased; to do whatever they thought proper. She looked upon her visit as a very devout and enthusiastic believer looks—or is supposed to look—upon death; as an unknown and terrible event of which she could form no idea, but which would be soon over, and which it was absolutely the will of those who were as gods to Innocent that she should undergo "for her good." Thus she allowed herself to be prepared for it with a mixture of fright and docility; everybody talked of it except herself, the heroine. Innocent's visit was in every mouth except Innocent's. She did not even form to herself any picture of what it would be like, as Nelly kept doing perpetually. She had no faculty for making pictures. Indeed, the peculiarity of Innocent's organization began to centre chiefly in this point—that she had no imagination. It did not seem a moral want in her as it does in some people, so much as a wistful vacancy, a blank caused by some accident. No sort of cynic scorn of the imagination of others, such as the unimaginative often show, was in her passive soul; but she followed the gaze of the eyes which could thus see into the unseen with a wistful look which was full of pathos.

"How do you know when things are going to happen?" she said to Nelly, who had just been indulging in a long account of Miss Vane's probable appearance and manners, to cheer them over their work, as they sat with Alice in Mrs. Eastwood's room, helping to make some new "things" for Innocent's outfit.

"I don't know in the least—I only imagine," said Nelly, laughing.

"Imagine!" repeated Innocent. She did not understand it. She was all a dream, poor child, and Nelly was all real; but the dream-girl possessed no imagination at all, while the other was running over with ready youthful fancy. No matter-of-fact creature, no dull clodhopper, could be more absolutely and rigidly bound within the lines of what she knew, than Innocent. She knew the old wandering life in Italy, and she knew The Elms. But all the rest of the world was a blank to her. She had formed no idea either of what she was about to meet with, or how she was to conduct herself under other circumstances. With such an absence of the faculty which guides us through it, the future and every change can be nothing but a terror to the ignorant soul.

"Look here, Innocent," said Jenny, who had

always taken a special charge of her, on the evening before she left home. He had taken her into the garden for the purpose of examining her, and satisfying himself that she was what he called a free agent. "Are you sure you like going? That's what I want to know."

"Like going?" said Innocent, opening her eyes. "Oh, no."

"Why are you going, then? Is it because you are obliged?" asked Jenny, knitting portentous brows.

"Obliged!" Innocent repeated once more, with a little wonder. "I am going because my aunt thinks so—neither because I am obliged, nor because I like. It is not me, it is her."

"But it ought not to be like that," cried Jenny. "Speak to my mother, she is very reasonable. She never forces a fellow into anything: tell her that you would rather not. That's how I always did."

"But you are a boy," said Innocent, with a mixture of respect and gentle contempt, which I fear she had learned from Nelly.

"What difference does that make? have a little courage, and tell me. The thing you want to learn," said Jenny, with much gravity, "is that everybody here wishes you to be happy, wishes you to do what pleases you. Don't misunderstand my

mother. You take up an idea of your own—you don't look at the real state of the case, and try to make out what she means. Don't you understand me, Innocent?"

"No," said Innocent, looking at him with veiled and wondering eyes.

Poor Jenny! he thrust his hands deeper into his pockets, and muttered something to himself, which was not adapted for publication; and then he looked at her in his turn with that anxious but impotent gaze with which so often one mortal attempts to fathom another—to fathom the unfathomable—whether there be nothing or much in those veiled and inscrutable depths of personal identity. She smiled at him softly, and the dreamy light of this smile went over all her face, touching it into visionary life and beauty. Jenny was baffled in his inquiry, in his investigation, in his counsel; he could not make anything of Innocent. With a mixture of kindness and impatience he hurried her back into the house.

"It is growing cold, and you have no shawl," said Jenny. Would poor Innocent never be sensible to any higher solicitude than this?

Next day she went away under the care of John Vane. She did not cry or show any emotion; but

her eyes were full of fright, and the excitement of terror. She had not even the same unreasoning instinctive confidence to support her which she had felt in Frederick on her former journey. John Vane was very kind to her, and very good, she knew; but he was not Frederick. She sat still as a mouse in her corner of the carriage, and said "Yes" and "No" when he asked her a question, and saw the world whirl round her once again, and the long stretches of country, and strange faces look in. To Innocent it seemed a kind of treadmill, turning round and round. She was not conscious of making any progress; but only of unknown faces that looked at her, of long green lines of fields and hedgerows flying past. When they had got half way through their journey, they discovered that Frederick was in the same train, with his wife, whom he was taking to her father's house. He came to the carriage, when the train stopped, and leaned his arms upon the window and talked to Innocent, who brightened at the sight of him, and instinctively put out her hand to cling to the most real thing she knew, the first human creature whom she had personally identified and discovered, as it were, out of the unknown. John Vane could not be supposed to understand this altogether inexplainable feeling, which

poor Innocent could no more have put into words than she could have written a poem. He thought very differently of it. He thought like a man that the other man, smiling and talking lightly to the poor girl, had meanly accepted the worthless flower of this child's love to laugh at, or tread under foot. He was unjust, for perhaps the most really good feeling in Frederick's mind (when she did not cross or irritate him) was his tenderness for his little cousin; but the other cousin, who felt himself her protector, realized this as little as he understood the nature of Innocent's sentiments. He made the poor child change her seat to the other end of the carriage, and when Frederick came back, entertained him with remarks upon the weather, to which Frederick responded in the same tone. There was, as people say, no love lost between them.

"Oh, is it Innocent?" said Amanda, when they reached Sterborne. "So your mother has taken my advice, Fred. I suppose she is going to be trained for a governess at Miss Vane's school? Quite right, quite right! You may come and see me, Innocent, if you like; it will be a little change for you. After all the petting you have had at The Elms, you may not quite like it at first; but it's for your good. Fred, is there a carriage for me? Is papa there?

Come and take me out, then; don't leave me here like a piece of luggage. Come and see me soon, Innocent. You will always be some one to talk to —Good-bye."

"Innocent," said John Vane, when he had placed her in the light open carriage which had been sent for them from the High Lodge, "I do not wish you to go and see that woman, neither does your aunt, I think. So unless you wish it very much——"

"I don't wish it at all," said Innocent, more distinctly than usual; and with a promptitude which surprised her companion.

"Then you don't like her?" he said.

"She took Frederick away from us," said Innocent; "he would have lived at home always but for her. She makes my aunt, and every one, unhappy. Him too—sometimes he looks as if he were miserable. People who make everybody miserable," the girl continued, very gravely, "ought not to be allowed to live."

"My dear child," he said, half-laughing, "that is a terrible doctrine. In that way none of us would be safe."

"You don't make any one miserable," said Innocent. "Few that I have ever seen do. But she does. And Frederick——"

"I don't wish to say anything to you against your cousin," said Vane very gravely; "but, Innocent, you must not think too highly of Frederick Eastwood. He is not so perfect as you suppose. Remember that it is entirely his own fault that he has such a wife; you must not make a hero of Frederick. The less you see of him also, the better for your own sake——"

Innocent looked at him wonderingly with vague consternation. Did she understand what he said? Certainly not the inference conveyed in his words—the more serious meaning. But she had no time to reply, for the short drive was over, and the High Lodge in sight. It was a curious old straggling house, with an old chapel standing detached, but connected by a covered way with the house. The grounds were large and well kept, and the quaint little lattice windows showed her several clusters of faces peeping out. The door stood open, flooded with evening sunshine. Great feathery branches of the clematis which had done flowering, and was now all cottony with seed pods, hung about the porch. The wall was one mass of creeping plants; late roses were flaunting out of reach high up about the clustered chimneys and gables; and the flower-borders about the house were bright with asters,

and scarlet geraniums, and all kinds of autumn flowers. The chapel bell began to tinkle as they drove in at the gate, and from all the corners of the irregular old house appeared groups of women and children. Even Innocent was roused into curiosity by the strange sight. In the slanting afternoon light, with that background of old wall, matted all over with interlacing wreaths of jessamine, clematis, honeysuckle, and roses, and pierced with twinkling casements, each looking out as with so many eyes through the little diamond panes—the sight was a very pretty one. One or two women in the dress of sisters lent an additional quaintness to the picture; the children were of various ages and of various dress, fluttering like flowers along the trim and well-kept walk. John Vane laughed as men laugh who are half-amused, half-affected by the scene before them.

"Now we shall see Letty in all her glory," he said.

This sight, which was so unusual and so little expected, had actually driven from Innocent's mind for the moment all recollection of herself, and all thoughts of the meeting with another stranger which was about to follow. She woke up with a start to find herself lifted out of the carriage, and taken suddenly with a rapid salute into some one's

arms. The new figure was that of a little woman with very bright eyes, and a very alert and lively aspect, who kissed Innocent in a business-like manner, and then, turning, raised her cheek to her brother, who was about three times as tall as she was.

"So here you are," said Miss Vane, "fifteen minutes late, as that train always is. Quick, come in, Reginald, there is tea in the parlour. I have only time to say a word to you before chapel. This way, my dear, follow me; the passage is rather narrow, and there are two steps, just at the most unlikely places—but you will get used to it in time."

Thus talking she led them into a large low room, with great beams across the roof, and a multiplicity of small windows, deeply recessed in the thick old wall. There was a great open fireplace, with a few logs of wood burning on the hearth, and a little white-covered table with tea, standing before it; this table, and the easy chair, and a number of books, were the only modern things in the room. It was panelled with dark oak, and had, consequently, nothing of the brightness of the modern English rooms which Innocent knew; neither was it like the spare and lofty magnificence of those Italian apartments which had once been familiar to her. There were some

small but rare pictures on the walls, and some portraits. Vane looked round it with the familiar satisfaction of one who returns to an old home.

"Thank heaven, whatever you have done to the rest of the house, Letty," he said, "you have spared my mother's old room."

"Yes," said Miss Vane, "I am far from perfection yet, if I ever attain to it. I don't expect I shall. It is not the drawing-room now, it is only the parlour; but beyond that sacrifice I can't go any further, which is contemptible. So this is Gilbert Vane's daughter? Innocent, my dear, you are very welcome. I like you for your name. Reginald and I had a sister Innocent. You must try to like me and be happy here, as long as your aunt will let you stay. Sit down and pour out some tea for yourself and him—I must go off to chapel. You are excused to-day, as your train is late. Take care of the child, Reginald, and see she has some tea. I must be off, or else I shall be late as well. Very glad to see you both. *Au revoir* in half an hour."

She went on talking till she reached the door, when she disappeared, still talking and waving her hand. Her brother followed her with his kind eyes.

"Dear old Letty!" he said, "I told you we should see her in all her glory. Sit down, Innocent,

and warm your poor little hands, and take your tea."

With this brief advice he left her, and went round the room, looking at all the pictures, the books, everything about. Innocent sat down as she was bid in the great easy chair. She poured out the tea as she had been bid, for herself and for him. A soft sensation of well-being stole over her; the sweetness of the mignionette outside, the tinkling of the bell, the sunshine which slanted in through the deep small windows, and the soft warmth of the fire, all soothed the girl; but what soothed her most was the charmingly matter-of-fact way in which she had been received, in which she had been bidden to do this and that. No response, no emotion had been required from her; there was no cause for emotion; she was told what to do, and left to do it in peace. Her fright went away in this quiet moment; her whole nature was soothed; here was the place for her; now she knew and saw, and the terrors of the change fled away. She did not care for the tea, and probably would not have taken it, but that she recollected suddenly that she had been told to do so, on which recollection Innocent sipped, and was glad. The afternoon was sweet, the rest and quiet were sweet after so much confused motion and vision; and it

was sweet to be no longer frightened, to feel the excitement and the terror over. She did not know how long it was till the children began to stream again past the windows, and Miss Vane came back; but even then no call was made upon her. She was allowed to sit in peace while the others talked, pleasant family talk, playful discussions, inquiries after one and another. Innocent paid very little attention to the subject of the conversation, but it was a pleasant sound in her ears, and the very air of the gentle house was pleasant. Then Miss Vane took her to one of the little rooms, with the shining casements, up-stairs, where pale roses were still looking in at the window, and showed her where to put her things, and told her at what hour she must be ready in the morning, and all that was done at the High Lodge. It was the beginning of a new life to the wondering girl. No more indulgence, consultation of her wishes—she who had no wishes! but gentle control, absolute rule, matter-of-fact kindness—nothing but obedience required of her; and that was the easiest thing to give.

Miss Vane, however, as it turned out, was as much pleased with Innocent as Innocent was with Miss Vane. After one day with his sister, which, perhaps, in the circumstances, was enough for both,

John Vane set off to pay various visits, promising to return again for Innocent, and warning his sister only to keep her apart from "the Frederick Eastwoods" and Mr. Batty's house in Sterborne. This Miss Vane cheerfully agreed to do, without any question; for, certainly, it was very undesirable that a relation of her own should have any intercourse or connexion with Mr. Batty's daughter. The religious vocation of the mistress of the High Lodge did not make her indifferent to the claims of family. Religious vocations seldom do; a well-born woman is well-born in a Carmelite cloister as well as in a king's court, and generally thinks quite as much of it in the one region as the other. It seemed accordingly a perfectly simple matter that Innocent should be permitted to accept no invitation from Mrs. Frederick Eastwood; and indeed no such invitation came. Otherwise things went on with the most perfect comfort between the girl and her new relation. She did not talk much, it is true; she was not interested, as Miss Vane expected her to be, in the upper school, where half-a-dozen "daughters of gentlemen" were being educated in one wing of the old house; or the lower school, where children who had no gentility to boast of were being trained in another; or in the orphanage, even though she

herself was an orphan, and might have been supposed likely to "take an interest" in the young creatures—girls like herself, who found refuge there. Innocent went through the whole establishment, making no remark. When asked if she liked it, she said Yes: when asked if she was tired, she said No: when asked if she would like to see something more, she said Yes again. She smiled upon the little children, and said *Ma sœur* to the sisters when they spoke to her, which pleased them. She was everything that was docile, gentle, and obedient, and she grew in a few weeks to look stronger and better than she had ever done in her life; but she did not become more communicative. One thing, however, Innocent did, which found high favour in everybody's eyes. She would go and sit for hours together in the little chapel, with her eyes fixed upon the pictured Christ (an old Italian picture, full of true early Italian sentiment for the divine and holy) which was hung over the altar. The chapel was low, like the house, an old early English building in good repair, but homely as became its date, with low windows, filled with grisaille glass, dim and silvery. Here Innocent would sit, taking no note of time; it felt to her like the little church of the Spina over again; and here, as there, she said, "Our

Father," vaguely reverential, and sat, in a soft quiescence, scarcely thinking—happy, she knew not why. The habit she thus showed commended her to the community beyond expression. She was so Catholic, so pious, so saintlike, they said; and indeed Innocent in those gentle days made the first great success of her life. It was the pause before the storm.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MINSTER AND THE VILLA.

"I MUST take you to see the minster, Innocent," said Miss Vane. "You cannot be in this part of the world without seeing the minster. You will be quite happy in it, you who are so fond of church. Put on your hat and your cloak, and be ready when the carriage comes round. I have got a number of visits to make and things to do; but as I know you can make yourself happy in the minster while I am busy, I will take you with me. Have you ever seen any of our great Gothic cathedrals? Then you will be perfectly happy, child; you will feel this day an era in your life."

Little thought Lætitia Vane what she was saying. The unconscious prophecy came lightly from her lips, and was received by Innocent with a smile. She was not excited by the prospect of seeing the

minster, but she was pleased to go, to do what she was told, to be with the kind but arbitrary mistress, who had brought harmony into her life. She put on her hat, smiling, looking at herself in the glass, which was not very usual with her. She had gained some colour on her pale cheeks, her eyes were brighter, her whole aspect more life-like. It was a fresh October morning, warm in the sunshine, though a sharp little chill of autumn wind met them occasionally at a corner, promising a cold evening.

"We must take care not to be late coming back," said Miss Vane, throwing an additional shawl upon Innocent's lap before she got into the little carriage, and took the reins. Miss Vane herself wore no conventual costume; she had not abandoned the pleasant things of this life. She wore rich silks, moaning over her own imperfection, which never could attain to the virtue of serge, and was fond of her pretty ponies and her pleasant little carriage. They had a cheerful drive into Sterborne, Miss Vane pointing out everything on the way, and naming every house they passed, Innocent paying little attention, yet listening to all that was said to her, and enjoying in her passive way the air, the sunshine, the rapid movement. Things no longer seemed to rush

past her, moved by some dreadful whirl of their own, but it was she who was in motion, lightly, cheerfully—the centre, not a passive object in the scene. This, which she could not have explained for her life, but which she felt vaguely yet strongly, made the greatest difference to Innocent. She was more alive than she had ever been before in her life.

Miss Vane took her over the minster, rapidly pointing out all the chief wonders; and then left her, seated within sight of the high altar, to enjoy what everybody at the High Lodge supposed to be meditation of the devoutest kind.

"You will be quite happy here," Miss Vane said, kissing her softly, and feeling, with warm compunctions for her own worldliness, how superior was her young relation. She stopped at the door, ere she went about her many businesses, to point out Innocent to the chief verger, and commend her to his care. "I will come back in about an hour and a half," she said. Thus Innocent was left alone.

I do not think she had ever been left entirely alone before, save on the one occasion of her visit to the Methodist chapel, since she had been under her aunt's care, and the sensation was sweet to her—

quite alone, silent, no one interfering with her, free to do as she would, to be still, without speaking, without feeling, without thinking. The solemn nave of the minster, the lovely, lessening arches of the apse, the silvery glow of the painted glass in the windows, made no special impression upon her for themselves. As she sat silent they mingled in a confused but grateful calm; with the little church of the Spina—the lingering memories of her past life. Subdued steps came and went about her as in the other little sanctuary by the Arno; the light was subdued as by the influence of the place; no sound above a whisper was audible; gliding figures appeared in the distance, into which she gazed not, indeed, coming there to pray, as in Santa Maria, but yet moving softly, with a certain reverence. No gleaming tapers on the altar, no chanting priest interposed to furnish a background for her dreams; but Innocent scarcely felt the want. She said her prayers, kneeling down, all unconscious of observation, on the stone pavement. She sat down again in a hush of soft and peaceful feeling—to dream? No, nor even to think. The mind of this poor little Innocent had no need for any exercise; she rested, before the fiery coming of her fate.

It was not till the verger, much bewildered by a

stillness of attitude to which he was quite unused, came to ask whether the young lady would like to see the chapter-house, or the crypt, or any of the special sights of the minster, that the girl was roused. She rose then, always acquiescent, smiling upon the old man. But as she turned round, Innocent's eye caught a figure much more interesting to her than the verger's. It was Frederick, who turned round at the same moment, and came forward to her, holding out both his hands. "Ah, Innocent, at last!" he cried. There was real pleasure in his face.

"Miss Vane has left me here to wait for her," said Innocent, "but, oh, I am so glad to see you!" It seemed to her that she had found him again—that all the intermediate time had glided away, that she was in the church of the Spina, and he, her new-discovered only guardian and protector again.

"I am glad that you are glad," said Frederick. "I thought you might have forgotten all about us among the Vanes. How is it that they neglect you like this? I suppose you are the poor relation there, Innocent, eh? You never were so at The Elms."

"I do not know what you mean," said Innocent; but she put her hand within his arm, with her old use and wont, looking up at him brightly with her

soft smile. The verger looking on, felt that, perhaps, it was his duty to interfere, but had not the heart to do it.

"You'll find me in the porch, miss, if you want me," he said. If the young lady had met with some one as she liked better than them papistical nunnery-folks at High Lodge, was it his business? He went away heavily, dragging his feet upon the pavement, as ecclesiastical attendants for ages and ages have dragged them, with stooped shoulders and shuffling gait; and the two, whom he thought lovers, were left alone.

They were not lovers, far from that; but Innocent clung to the arm of the first man whom she had ever identified and felt any warm personal regard for, and Frederick looked down upon her with a complacency which half arose from a vain belief that she loved him, partly from a real kindness for his little cousin, and partly from a sensation of thankfulness to have some one belonging to him to look at and speak to—some one not of the terrible Batty tribe, to which he was bound until Monday morning. This was Saturday, and he had been imperatively summoned to visit his wife, who was still ill. He could not get back until Monday morning, and the thought that this terrible moment of duty might

be softened by the presence of Innocent who adored him, was sweet. He told her that Amanda was ill in bed, not able to come out with him, or to be his companion. "I cannot spend my whole time with her," said Frederick, "and her father is more odious than I can tell you. You must come to see her; you must stay with me, Innocent, till I go back."

"If Miss Vane will let me," said Innocent brightly.

"You would like it? You were always a dear girl. When I take you home with me, Innocent," said Frederick solemnly, you will learn a lesson, which I have learnt too late, that it is a fatal thing to connect one's self with people of a different class from one's own, who cannot understand one, whose life is a contradiction to all one feels and wishes. I don't speak, of course, of my wife, that is my own affair; whatever I may have to put up with, I say nothing on that score to any one. But, Innocent, a man of honour has many things to bear which women never know."

These fine sentiments were wasted upon Innocent, who looked up at him wondering, and received what he said docilely, but made no attempt to understand. I don't know why Frederick, knowing her well

enough to be aware of this, should have thought it necessary to make so solemn a statement. He did it, perhaps, from the habit he had acquired of posing as a victim to honour. He led her about the minster, and showed her many things which Innocent looked at with her usual docility, pleased to be with him, if not much excited by anything else. She had been happy at the High Lodge, but after all Frederick was her first friend, her discovery, and to be thus alone with him, cared for by him, no one else interfering, carried her back to the first startled awakening of her torpid youth. He was always kind to her when she was thus thrown upon his care, and Innocent was happy, with her hand clinging to his arm. When Miss Vane came to recall her to the present, she looked with perhaps a warmer personal wish than had ever been seen in her eyes before at her temporary guardian, pleading for the granting of the request which Frederick made, with his very finest Charles I. look, and melancholy gentlemanlike grace. Miss Vane, a busy woman, had partially forgotten her brother's warning about Mrs. Frederick. She knew the young man before her had made a very foolish marriage, but still he was an Eastwood, of prepossessing appearance, and a compunction crossed her mind as to her want of civility in not

"calling on" the daughter-in-law of Innocent's good aunt. A woman takes rank from her husband, not from her father, Miss Vane reflected, and if this poor fellow had found out, as might be guessed from his resigned manner, that he had made a terrible mistake, it was only right that a connexion should stand by him as far as was practicable. After a few difficulties, therefore, as to Innocent's dress, &c., she consented, promising to send the gardener with her bag, and to drive in for her on Monday morning, "when I will take the opportunity of leaving a card for Mrs. Eastwood. I am sorry to hear she is so poorly," said Miss Vane, in her most gracious manner. Innocent could scarcely believe it when she saw her energetic relation drive away, and found herself left in Frederick's charge. "I am to stay, then?" she said, with a smile which lighted up her whole face; then added, with a faint shadow stealing over it, "but with you, Frederick? I do not like—your wife——"

"You shall be with me," said Frederick, "but Innocent, you must not say such things. It is imprudent—you might be misunderstood. I know very well what you mean, and that, of course, it is impossible you should feel towards poor Amanda as you do to me; but you must not forget what I have

told you so often, that a woman's best policy is always to make friends with her own sex. You are coming now, you understand, to visit my wife, who is far from well; but I shall take care to have you a great deal with me."

Innocent's enjoyment was a little damped by this long speech, but as she was still walking with Frederick, and had, as yet, no drawback to the pleasant sensation of being with him, the shadow flitted rapidly from her face. He took her all over the village, showing her everything that was to be seen, before he turned his step towards the villa, where Amanda, fretful and peevish, awaited him, longing for news, for change, for something to amuse her. Frederick cared very little for the fact that his once worshipped beauty was now waiting for him. His little cousin, with her dreamy delight in his society, her refined and gradually developing beauty, and the strange attraction of her visionary abstractedness from the common world, was very amusing and pleasant to him. The mere fact of not seeing her every day, as he had been in the habit of doing, had made him perceive Innocent's beauty, and a mingled feeling, half wholly good, half dubious in character, inclined him towards the girl who clung to him. She was very pretty, and " very fond of him," which

pleased his vanity highly, and made him feel vaguely self-complacent and on good terms with himself, in her company; and by the side of this doubtful and not very improving sensation, the man, who was not wholly bad, had actually a little wholesome, brotherly, protecting affection for the child who had clung to him from the first moment of seeing him. Thus they wandered through the village, round and round the minster, looking at everything and at nothing till the October afternoon began to cloud over. "Now you must come and see Amanda," said Frederick, with a sigh. Innocent sighed too. It seemed to her very hard that there was this inevitable "Frederick's wife" to be always the shadow to the picture, to take him away from his family, to separate him from herself, to worry and vex him whatever he was doing. Innocent hesitated at the corner of the street.

"Are you sure I should go?" she said. "She will scold me. She will not be kind, like cousin Lætitia or you. She does not like me, and I do not like her. Shall I go back now? I have had all I wanted, Frederick; I have seen you."

"That would never do," said Frederick. "If it were known that you had met me in the minster and walked about so long with me, and then returned

without seeing my wife, people would talk—unpleasant things would be said."

"What could be said?" asked Innocent.

"Upon my life, one doesn't know whether to laugh at you or be angry," cried Frederick, impatient. "Will you never understand? But come along, it is no use wasting words. Don't you see you must come now."

"I do not want to come. She will scold me," said Innocent, standing firm, with a cloud upon her face. It was the first time she had openly resisted him or any one. Poor child, was it some angel who stayed her feet? She felt ready to cry, which was an unusual thing with her, and with a frightened instinctive recoil, stood still, refusing to go on.

Poor Innocent! Safety and shelter, and the life of order and peace which suited her half-developed faculties lay calm and sunshiny on one side. On the other was conflict, confused darkness and misery, pain and shame, gathering in heavy clouds to swallow her up. For one moment it hung on the balance which her fate was to be; terrible moment which we, none of us, divine, during which we have to exercise that great and awful choice which is the privilege of humanity, in blindness and unconsciousness, ignorant of the issues, stupid to the importance of the

decision. This was decided, however, not by Innocent. Impatient Frederick seized her hand and drew it through his arm.

"This is folly," he cried. "What you, Innocent! you be such a little traitor and resist me and get me into trouble? No, no, come along. This is out of the question now."

Next moment he had knocked at his father-in-law's door.

The villa looked very much as it had done the day that Frederick first made his appearance there. The sun was was still shining by intervals, but glimmers of firelight came from the window, and the garden behind was spare of flowers. Mr. Batty met them as they came in, and stared hard at the girl whom Frederick led by the hand into the narrow light passage which traversed the house from the street to the garden door. "This is my cousin, sir, Miss Innocent Vane," said Frederick. "I have brought her to see Amanda. She is on a visit at the High Lodge, as you may have heard."

"Oh, yes, I've heard," said Batty, "and I think it's time she should turn up, the only one of your family as has ever come near my girl. You're welcome, my dear, better late than never; though I think, considering how kind the Eastwoods have

been to you, that you might have come a little sooner to show Mrs. Frederick some respect."

Innocent listened, wondering, to this address, gazing at the man whom she had a confused recollection of having seen before. All that she comprehended now was, more or less, that he was scolding her, though about what she could not tell. He was a kind of man totally unknown to Innocent—his thick figure, his coarse air, his loud voice and red hands, surprised, without so much revolting her as they might have done had her organization been more perfect. She was frightened, but made an effort of politeness to conceal it.

"Is she better?" she asked, not knowing what to say.

"You'll see what she'll say to you when she sees you," said Batty to Frederick, with a chuckle, "and I don't blame her, poor girl. If this is what you call visiting your wife when she's poorly, things have changed since my day. It's close on five and nearly time for dinner, and you've been out since the moment you swallowed your lunch."

"I have been with my little cousin here, and Miss Vane, of the High Lodge, who is coming to call on Amanda on Monday," said Frederick. "In the meantime I took the liberty of inviting my cousin

to stay with my wife for a couple of nights. I hope it is practicable——"

"Oh, practicable enough," said Batty, with a laugh. "I'm not one of those as leave themselves without a room to give to a friend. Plenty of accommodation here for as many as you like to bring —and the more the merrier, if they're the right sort. Glad to see you, Miss Innocent. Training up for your trade, eh?—at that old nunnery out there. Lord, to see that old Lady Abbess in my house will be a sight! 'Manda will tackle her, I'll be bound. Walk up, walk up-stairs, Eastwood will show you the way; and he's sure of a warm welcome, he is. Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Batty stood in the passage, holding his sides, while Frederick, with disgust on every line of his fine features, strode up-stairs. Innocent followed her cousin wondering. What the man meant, whether he was merry, or angry, or simply the most disagreeable strange man she had ever seen, she could not make out. She remembered vaguely what Frederick had told her so lately—what she had heard repeated on all sides at The Elms—that Frederick's wife was of "another class." And the stairs were narrow, the passage contracted, the maid who had opened the door not like the maids at

The Elms; and Batty's dress, and appearance, and manner of speech very different from any thing Innocent had ever known before. This was what it meant, then, to be of "another class." Thus she followed, with some new speculations rising in her passive brain, into the presence of Frederick's wife.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MOMENT OF FATE.

FREDERICK led Innocent to the door of a bedroom which opened from a little gallery up-stairs. He paused there before he opened it.

"If we find Amanda in an excitable state, you must not mind it," he said; "you must not be frightened. Forgive her because she is ill. It is her way——"

With these words of warning he opened the door. It was a pretty room enough—meant to be luxurious—in a somewhat tawdry style of decoration, ye tolerable, in so far that its rose-coloured hangings and heavy fringes were fresh at least, and in good order. Amanda was in bed, with a blue dressing-gown over her shoulders, and her elaborately-dressed hair adorned with a small lace cap. Nothing could be gayer than the composition of colour, her own

rose-cheeks and golden hair, the bright blue garment in which she was clothed, and the blue ribbon in her little cap, all relieved against the rose-coloured hangings. A perfect Watteau, some one had told her, this composition made, and, though she did not know what a Watteau was, she felt it must be something fine, and kept up the successful combination. Her cheeks were not pale, but flushed with anger, impatience, and excitement. She burst forth almost before Frederick had come into the room.

"This is how you visit your wife, is it, Mr. Frederick Eastwood?—Three mortal hours have I been left alone, without a creature to speak to but aunty. How dare you face me after that? how dare you? I have a hundred minds never to speak to you again——"

"That would be to punish yourself more than me, my dear," said Frederick, with the conventional speech of the injured husband.

She looked at his careless smile, and her fury increased.

"I should like to throw something at you," she cried. "You cold, wicked, careless, unprincipled wretch! Was it for this you married me, and pretended to be fond of me? Was it for this you

took me from my father, who was always so kind? Was it for this——?"

"Of course it was for all that," said Frederick, advancing to the bedside. "We have gone through the list before. Amanda, try to keep your temper; it will be the best thing for you. Here is Innocent, whom I found in the minster, and who has come to pay you a visit. Miss Vane is coming on Monday to fetch her; and if you play your cards well——"

Amanda interrupted him by a shrill laugh.

"Oh, so here is Innocent! and the old nun is coming?—a great deal I care! This is how you try to hoodwink me. Innocent, come here! How long has he been walking about with you, talking, and holding your hand, and turning your head, you little fool? You think he cares? He cares as much for you as he does for me; he cares for no one but himself. Oh, go away, or I shall throw something at you! Go away, or——"

She had put out her hand to clutch at a glass which stood by her on a little table.

"Go! Go!" cried some one from behind the curtain.

Frederick made a rapid step to the door; but before he had reached it his wife's mood had changed.

"Oh, *you* tell him to go, do you?" she cried. "Then I tell him to stay. Come here, Innocent; you shall stay and nurse me; I know you'll like it; and Fred, turn that woman out—turn her off, turn her out of doors. She has been my plague ever since I can recollect. Oh, you thought you would keep me all to yourself, did you, and get the better of me? But I haven't got a husband for nothing. Fred, turn her out of doors."

Frederick opened the door with servile haste. He dragged the poor aunty, the *souffre-douleur* of the household, out by the sleeve, escaping himself along with her. Amanda leant back upon her pillow, laying her hand upon her breast.

"How hot it is," she said, panting. "Open the window—take this fan and fan me; can't you make yourself useful? Oh, you are well named; you are a true Innocent! If you will tell me all that he was saying to you, I will forgive you. Tell me what he said."

"He told me that I was to come and see you; that I was not to be frightened," said the girl, who was trembling, yet not confused by mental dread, as she had sometimes felt on less occasion.

"And are you frightened?"

"N—no." She spoke with a little hesitation, but

still succeeded in making this answer. She did not shrink from Amanda's blazing red-hazel eyes. The excited creature somehow did not alarm her. She had done all that Amanda had told her with the happy habit of instant obedience, which she had learned at the High Lodge, and kept fanning her, according to her orders, as she spoke.

"You are very odd," said Amanda, whose passion was over. "But you know how to fan one; not like that woman who saws the air like a windmill. You may take off your hat and sit down by me. I have a hasty temper. I sometimes say things and do things I am sorry for; but I'm very goodhearted. There, sit down, and let us have a talk. Weren't you glad to get off? Don't you hate that old cat, with her sermons and her prayers? So she is coming to call?—what an honour, to be sure, for me! But I think the Eastwoods can hold up their heads as high as the Vanes any day—and she's nothing but an interloper. Why, John Vane's father bought that house," said Amanda; "it is no more an old family place than this is. I am glad you are going to stay. If you are a good girl I will try what I can do for you, and make a friend of you. I never could make a friend of that little stuck-up Nelly. What airs she does give herself, to be sure! and not so much to be

proud of. Why, that wretched little Molyneux that she thinks such great things is no better than a shopkeeper's grandson. I know the judge's father was a jeweller in Brook-street; and there is nothing so very grand in having a judge in the family, unless you were going to be tried for your life, and wanted him to get you off——"

"Can judges get people off?" said Innocent. Heaven knows why she asked such a question! It was an echo rather of her companion's last words than said by any free-will of her own. But Frederick heard it as he came in, and so did poor aunty, who stood outside trembling at the door.

"Of course they can, you little stupid. It is all they are good for," said Amanda benignantly. "Oh, you may come in. I am such a soft-hearted ninny, I always forgive people when my passion is over. And none of you ought to cross me; you know you oughtn't. Some of these days, if you don't mind, just to punish you I shall die——"

She laughed and laid her head back upon the pillow, with her blue ribbons and blue gown thrown sharply out by the rose-coloured bed. She was amused by her own threat. But passion and self-indulgence had made great havoc in the undisciplined creature, and to a serious looker-on that menace

would have seemed not so unlikely as Amanda thought to come to reality. Her breath came quick and with difficulty, heaving her breast at every respiration. A high hectic colour was on her cheek, and the cheekbones themselves which bore these dangerous roses were sharpened by the wasting processes of continual excitement. Innocent stood all this time by the bed, fanning her slowly and steadily. She was getting tired, but did not think of stopping till she was told. Her visionary looks, and the mechanical occupation which was so much more natural to her than anything of a visionary character, contrasted strangely, as she stood thus docile, always passive, by that bed. I suppose she would literally have gone on for ever, like an eastern slave, had no one interposed.

This steady service pleased Amanda hugely. She took full advantage of it, keeping the girl employed until her very arm was drooping with the fatigue of the monotonous motion; and she was so generous as to allow Frederick to sit down and tell her "the news." Frederick had brought down, as in duty bound, a few scandalous anecdotes from the fountain-head of gossip—anecdotes circumstantialized by date and name, but probably as false as was the taste that desired them. He made indeed a few demurs at

repeating these wonderful pieces of history before Innocent, which were speedily silenced by his wife.

"Innocent is paying no attention. She never listens to what any one says," cried Amanda, "and besides, no one thinks of that sort of old-fashioned nonsense now-a-days. Go on——"

In this edifying way the time was spent till dinner. Amanda declared that she never felt better, that she would certainly get up next day. "And I'll go to church at the minster if there is a good anthem," she said, "and you shall give me your arm, Fred, and everybody will think us a model couple." This last outburst of amiability was called forth by a delightful piece of scandal about what the newspapers call a very elevated personage, and which Frederick vouched for as authentic. Mrs. Frederick, whose "set" were of those who called the heir to the throne by the name of his principality *tout court*, was altogether conciliated by this delightful communication. Innocent, as Amanda said, paid very little attention. She listened yet did not listen, half pleased that Frederick seemed pleased, half wondering, by an instinct which was more penetrating than reason, that he should be satisfied, and should take so much trouble to keep Amanda in good temper. Innocent was not observant, she was not

conscious of any faculty of criticism in her own undeveloped mind; she made no voluntary contrast between Frederick in this fretful sick chamber trying to please, and Frederick at home contemptuously indifferent to what any one did or said. Only a little vague wonder at him rose in her mind; her sense of Mrs. Frederick's imperfections was not more distinct than the mere feeling of personal dislike—dislike which was not softened by this sight of her, or by the exacting and selfish demands she made upon everybody. Innocent was born to obey. She did what Miss Vane had told her with the most docile unquestioning readiness, and with the consent of her whole being; and she did also whatever Mrs. Frederick told her, but with how different a feeling! That she could have explained the difference to herself, or that she even fully defined and recognized it, I am far from asserting; but the fact that she was conscious of this difference was at least a proof of the expanding of her mental powers.

Mrs. Frederick consented that her husband and Innocent should leave her to go to dinner, with reluctance, but she did consent. Before the meal was over, however, they heard loud and repeated knockings on the floor above, signals of her impatience. Frederick was in a state of unusual

exhilaration, perhaps excited by finding the weary evening pass less disagreeably than he thought—for Innocent, passive as she was, was yet a shield between him and his coarse father-in-law; and even Amanda's knocking, as he was out of her reach, did not disturb him.

"Come round the garden with me while I smoke my cigar," he said, "and then you can go to her."

The evening was soft and warm and mellow, with a large full October moon less white than usual, throwing broad beams of the palest gold over the dark garden. Batty watched them go out with doubtful eyes, unable quite to keep himself from vulgar interpretations of Innocent's submission to her cousin, yet confident in the power of "my girl" to retain her husband's devotion, and caring very little about the other. Besides, he was fluttered, in spite of himself, that Innocent should be there under his roof. Two great families, the one more "stuck up" than the other, seemed thus to be holding out an olive branch to him, and already Batty felt himself mounting the steps of social grandeur. He sat over his port, meditating on the moment when he could change that drink for more natural brandy and water—when another vehement assault upon the floor overhead roused him.

"She'll make herself worse than ever," Batty said to himself; and going to the stairs he shouted in his great voice, "Steady there, steady, 'Manda. She's a-coming; she's a-coming." Then he went out into the garden to seek the other two. The grass was wet with dew, the leaves, which had begun to change colour, showed like flowers in the moonlight. He followed the soft sound of sauntering steps along two or three windings of the path. Then he came in sight of the pair he sought; Frederick was walking along indifferently enough smoking his cigar, with one hand thrust into his pocket? Innocent by his side held this arm so cavalierly and carelessly bent with her hand. She went along by him like his shadow; she looked up at him with a half smile upon her face, to which the moonlight lent an aspect of deeper and more impassioned self-devotion than Innocent knew. Frederick, in low tones, and with now and then a demonstrative gesture of the disengaged hand with which he sometimes took his cigar from his lips, was laying down the law about something. Probably he was inculcating that first duty of woman, to "consider me, not yourself," or some other equally plain and fundamental principle. The sight struck Batty with a certain jealousy by reflec-

tion. So intimate a conversation could scarcely be without somehow infringing upon the rights of "his girl." Had it been Frederick's sister, probably he would have had the same feeling; but in that case he would have been less at liberty to interfere.

"Hollo!" he said, "don't you know Mrs. Frederick is all alone, while you two are gallivanting and philandering here? Come along, miss; you're safer with my 'Manda than with that young spark. *I* know him better than you do. Come along, come along, or she'll bring down the house; and not much wonder either if she saw as much as I see—but I'll tell no tales," he said, with a coarse laugh.

Innocent stood bewildered with the sudden shock—for at the moment that Batty's voice became audible, Frederick, with an instinctive movement, cast her off from his arm. To her, who knew no wrong, who thought no evil, this movement was simply incomprehensible. He was angry, that could be the only reason; but why, or with whom? She stood turning her wondering looks towards Batty, towards the house, with its lighted windows, the moonbeams pouring over her, lighting up her raised face with its wistful gaze. Frederick, as an expression of his feeling, tossed away the end of his cigar.

"We were coming in," he said. "Innocent, perhaps you had better go first, and let me know if I'm wanted. I am tired. Tell Amanda I have got some letters to write, office work which I was obliged to bring with me. Batty, suppose you order some coffee, and let me get to work," he added, carelessly leading the way into the house. He left Innocent to follow as she might, and to deal with Batty as she might. He had put up with him long enough; he saw no reason for exerting himself further now.

"Confound his impudence!" said Batty. "Now, miss, come along. You'd best stay with 'Manda, if you'll take my advice, while you are here."

"If you please," said Innocent, with a sigh.

"Oh, if *I* please—you'd rather be with *him*, eh? Pleasanter ain't it?" said Batty, with a grin of airy raillery.

"Yes," said simple Innocent. "I know Frederick, and I don't know you." A courteous instinct which she could not have explained kept her from adding that she did not like Mrs. Frederick, which was her usually unconcealed sentiment. She added quite gravely, altogether unaware that his laugh had anything to do with her, "If I am to go to Frederick's wife, will you show me the way?"

Batty led the way without another word—he was curiously impressed by her gravity, by a certain solemn simplicity about the pale creature who stood there facing him in the moonlight, impervious to his gibes. He took her to his daughter's room, and looked in, giving Amanda a word of warning. "Keep your temper, 'Manda," he said; I do not know that he could have explained why.

This was what Amanda was little inclined to do. She assailed Innocent with a storm of questions; what had she been doing? where had she been?

"I have been in the garden with Frederick," said the girl, with that serious and quiet calm which already had so much impressed Mrs. Frederick's father.

"In the garden with Frederick! and you tell me so with that bold face! What was he doing? what was he saying? oh, I know him, and his false ways," said the excited wife; "making you think all sort of things, you little fool—and then sending you to me with your innocent face. Innocent, indeed! Oh, no; I didn't call—I don't want you. Innocent, to be sure! You are a pretty Innocent for the nunnery; just the sort of creature to go there, if all tales be true—to learn to deceive—as if you wanted teaching! You never thought of me lying up here, while you

went wandering about the garden with Frederick—nor he didn't, neither. Who cares for me? I was everything that was sweet before I married, but now much he cares. Oh, if I just had him here to tell him what I think of him! Call him to tell him what I think of him—both him and you!"

Innocent had never been thrown upon her own resources before. She was not prepared for the emergency, and had those who loved her best foreseen the possibility of such a trial for her she never would have been allowed to risk it; but in the meantime it did her good. A certain curious practical faculty had been developed in her by the life of rule and order at the High Lodge. She went forward to the bedside with her visionary look, but the most serious matter-of-fact meaning, ignoring the passion as completely as if it did not exist; which, indeed, to her it did not, being a thing beyond her range of perception.

"You make yourself ill when you are angry," she said seriously, looking down upon Amanda's worn and flushed countenance; "it makes you very ill; it would be far better not to be angry. When you scold me I am sorry; but it does not make me ill. It hurts you most. You should stop yourself when you feel it coming on; because, perhaps, when you

are scolding you might die—and it would be better to live and not to scold. I have thought about it, and that is what I think."

Amanda was aghast at this speech—it subdued her as if a baby had suddenly opened its mouth, and uttered words of wisdom. She gave a gasp, half of wonder, half of terror, and felt herself checked and subdued as she had never been in her life before. The effect was so strange that she did not know what to make of it. She tried to laugh, and failed; finally she said, "What an odd girl you are!" and settled down among her pillows, calmed in spite of herself. "Read to me," she said, after a little pause, thrusting a book into Innocent's hand. The calm was as sudden as the storm. The moment that she was told to do something definite Innocent resumed her usual obedient frame of mind, after this, the longest speech she had ever made, and the most completely independent mental action she had ever been conscious of. She sat down and read, opening the book where she was told, pursuing without a question the course of a foolish story. She never thought of asking who or what were the personages she suddenly began to read about; she took the book as she had taken the fan, and used it in a similar way. And then there followed a curious

little interval of calm. Amanda had prepared herself for the night while the others were at dinner; she had taken off her blue dressing-gown and her pretty ribbons; she was all white now, ready to go to sleep when the moment came. The room had been partially darkened for the same reason. Behind the curtain at the head of the bed was a lamp shaded from the eyes, but the other lights had been taken away, and the profound quiet grew slumberous as Innocent's soft voice rose through it, reading steadily and gently with a certain sweet monotony. I cannot tell how long Innocent continued reading. The calm grew more and more profound; no one came near the room; Amanda's retirement was not invaded. Innocent herself grew drowsy as she listened to her own voice; it rose and fell with a gentle, but incessant, repetition; sometimes she would almost fall asleep, stumbling over the words —and then, as Mrs. Frederick, who was drowsy too, stirred and murmured at the cessation of the voice which acted upon her like a lullaby, the girl would resume her reading, startled into wakefulness. Once or twice poor aunty, who had been banished from the room, put in her head noiselessly at the door, nd withdrew it as gently, seeing that all was still. atty himself once did the same; but the household

was too glad of the unusual stillness to do anything to disturb it. At length the soft, girlish voice, after repeated breaks and faltering recommencements, dropped altogether, and Innocent fell fast asleep, with her head leaning upon the back of her chair, and the book in her clasped hands. She and the lamp by which she had been reading, and the little table covered with medicine phials, were separated from the sleeper in the bed by the dropped curtain, which threw a rose-coloured reflection over Amanda in her sleep; this lasted for an hour or two, during which the patient and the young attendant who was so little used to watch, slept peacefully with but the veil of this curtain between them. Then Amanda began to stir. Her sleep was always broken and uncertain; the poor aunty to whom she was so cruel had accustomed her to constant and unfailing attendance—and when she woke and called and saw no one, sudden wrath flamed up in Amanda's bosom. Gradually the circumstances came back upon her mind, and, plucking back the curtain, she saw poor Innocent quietly sleeping, her hair falling in the old childish way about her shoulders, and her dark eyelashes resting on her cheek, which looked so pale under them. Amanda did not care for the weary grace and *abandon* of the girl's attitude, nor was she

at all touched by the thought that Innocent had been occupied in her own service to her last moment of consciousness. Mrs. Frederick, on the contrary, was furious to find herself "left alone" with no obsequious nurse ready to attend to her wants. She shrieked at Innocent to rouse her, and stretching out of bed shook the girl, who started violently, and sprang up trembling and nervous. Amanda's eyes were blazing, her figure trembling with sudden irritation. "How dare you fall asleep?" she cried, "am I to be left with no one to take care of me? oh, you all want to kill me. Give me my drops, you cruel, wicked, sleepy, lazy, wicked girl. You don't know how?—oh, you know well enough how to walk about with my husband—how to make love to him. My drops! can't you understand?—there, in that bottle; you can read, I suppose, though you are a fool. Oh, to leave me to this horrid girl! Oh, to hâve no one to take care of me! My drops! can't you hear? I'll make it heard all over the house. My drops! Oh, yoú little idiot, can't you do that much? I always said you was a fool; walk about with another woman's husband—torment a man with clinging to him—but as for being of use. My drops! Put them in the glass, idiot! Can't you see I want to go to sleep?"

Innocent trembling, chilled, ignorant, incapable, only half awake, took the bottle that was pointed out to her, and endeavoured, as she had seen people do, to drop the liquid into a glass; she failed twice over in her fright and tremour. Then she kneeled down by the table to try for the third time, propping herself up against the chair. I don't know what thoughts might be passing unconscious through her mind. I don't think she was conscious of anything, except the miserable feeling of sudden waking—the cold, the sense of being beaten down with angry words—and the frightened attempt to do what she could not do, in obedience to the fiercest order she had ever received in her life. Where she knelt, painfully endeavouring to count the drops of the opiate, she was within reach of Amanda's arm, who by this time had worked herself into a wild, shrieking passion. Once more she dashed aside the curtain, and plucked at Innocent, calling to her with words which had become unintelligible to the ears of the frightened girl. "Give it me, you fool—give it me, you fool!" she said, then snatched the glass out of Innocent's hand, and lifted it to her lips. Between the fright of the one and the passion of the other the bottle had been half emptied into the glass. Amanda held it for a moment in one hand, grasping

Innocent with the other, and trying to recover breath. She was past thinking of any consequences, as Innocent was past knowing what was happening under her eyes. With a sudden long effort to regain her breath she put the glass to her panting lips, and drank it. How much she swallowed no one ever knew; the glass dropped out of her hand, spilling some dark drops upon the white coverlid, and Amanda dropped back heavily upon the pillows. Then there followed such a stillness as seemed to make the whole house, the very walls, shiver. Innocent, with the little phial clutched in one hand, with Amanda's fingers slowly relaxing from the other, stood stupefied, listening to the horrible stillness. Oh, God! what did it mean?

END OF VOL. II.

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