

Chronicles of Carlingford

MISS MARJORIBANKS

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'SALEM CHAPEL,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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MISS MARJORIBANKS.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ONE fytte of Lucilla's history is here ended, and another is to be told. We have recorded her beginning in all the fulness of youthful confidence and undaunted trust in her own resources; and have done our best to show that in the course of organising society Miss Marjoribanks, like all other benefactors of their kind, had many sacrifices to make, and had to undergo the mortification of finding out that many of her most able efforts turned to other people's profit and went directly against herself. She began the second period of her career with, to some certain extent, that sense of failure which is inevitable to every high intelligence after a little intercourse with the world. She had succeeded

in a great many things, but yet she had not succeeded in all ; and she had found out that the most powerful exertions in behalf of friends not only fail to procure their gratitude, but sometimes convert them into enemies, and do actual harm ; which is a discovery which can only be made by those who devote themselves, as Miss Marjoribanks had done, to the good of the human species. She had done everything for the best, and yet it had not always turned out for the best ; and even the people who had been most ready to appeal to her for assistance in their need, had proved the readiest to accuse her when something disagreeable happened, and to say "It was your fault." In the second stage of her progress Miss Marjoribanks found herself, with a great responsibility upon her shoulders, with nearly the entire social organisation of Carlingford depending upon her ; and, at the same time, with her means of providing for the wants of her subjects sensibly diminished, and her confidence in the resources of the future impaired to an equal degree. One thing was sure, that she had taken the work upon her shoulders, and that she was not the woman to draw back, whatever the difficulties might be. She did not bate a jot of her courage, though the early buoyancy of hope had departed, never to return. It is true that she was not so joyful and triumphant a figure as when she conquered Nancy, and won over Dr Marjoribanks, and

electrified Mr Holden by choosing curtains which suited her complexion ; but with her diminished hopes and increased experience and unabated courage, no doubt Miss Marjoribanks presented a still nobler and more imposing aspect to everybody who had an eye for moral grandeur, though it would be difficult to tell how many of such worthy spectators existed in Grange Lane.

There was, as our readers are aware, another subject also on which Lucilla had found her position altered. It was quite true that, had she been thinking of *that*, she never need have come home at all ; and that, in accepting new furniture for the drawing-room, she had to a certain extent pledged herself not to marry immediately, but to stay at home and be a comfort to her dear papa. This is so delicate a question that it is difficult to treat it with the freedom necessary for a full development of a not unusual state of mind. Most people are capable of falling in love only once or twice, or at the most a very few times, in their life ; and disappointed and heart-broken suitors are not so commonly to be met with as perhaps could be wished. But at the same time, there can be little doubt, that the chief way in which society is supposed to signify its approval and admiration and enthusiasm for a lady, is by making dozens of proposals to her, as may be ascertained from all the best-informed sources. When a woman is a great beauty, or is very brilliant and graceful, or even is only agree-

able and amusing, the ordinary idea is, that the floating men of society, in number less or more according to the lady's merits, propose to her, though she may not perhaps accept any of them. In proportion as her qualities rise towards the sublime, these victims are supposed to increase; and perhaps, to tell the truth, no woman feels herself set at her true value until some poor man, or set of men, have put, as people say, their happiness into her hands. It is, as we have said, a delicate subject to discuss; for the truth is, that this well-known and thoroughly established reward of female excellence had not fallen to Miss Marjoribanks's lot. There was Tom, to be sure, but Tom did not count. And as for the other men who had been presented to Lucilla as eligible candidates for her regard, none of them had given her this proof of their admiration. The year had passed away, and society had laid no tribute of this description upon Lucilla's shrine. The Archdeacon had married Mrs Mortimer instead, and Mr Cavendish had been led away by Barbara Lake! After such an experience nothing but the inherent sweetness and wholesome tone of Miss Marjoribanks's character could have kept her from that cynicism and disbelief in humanity which is so often the result of knowledge of the world. As for Lucilla, she smiled as she thought of it, not cynically, but with a sweetly melancholy smile. What she said to herself was, Poor

men ! they had had the two ways set before them, and they had not chosen the best. It made her sad to have this proof of the imperfection of human nature thrust upon her, but it did not turn her sweet into bitter, as might have been the case with a more ordinary mind. Notwithstanding that this universal reward, which in other cases is, as everybody knows, given so indiscriminately, and with such liberality, had altogether failed in her case, Lucilla still resumed her way with a beautiful constancy, and went forward in the face of fate undaunted and with a smile.

It was thus that she began the second period of her career. Up to this moment there had never been a time in which it was not said in Carlingford that some one was paying attention to Miss Marjoribanks ; but at present no one was paying attention to her. There were other marriages going on around her, and other preliminaries of marriage, but nobody had proposed to Lucilla. Affairs were in this state when she took up her burden again boldly, and set out anew upon her way. It was a proof of magnanimity and philanthropy which nobody could have asked from her, if Lucilla had not been actuated by higher motives than those that sway the common crowd. Without any assistance but that of her own genius—without the stimulating applause of admirers, such as a woman in such circumstances has a right to calculate upon—with no sym-

pathising soul to fall back upon, and nothing but a dull level of ordinary people before her,—Miss Marjoribanks, undaunted, put on her harness and resumed her course. The difficulties she had met only made her more friendly, more tender, to those who were weaker than herself, and whom evil fortune had disabled in the way. When Barbara Lake got her situation, and went out for a governess, and Rose's fears were realised, and she had with bitter tears to relinquish her Career, Lucilla went and sat whole afternoons with the little artist, and gave her the handiest assistance, and taught her a great many things which she never could have learned at the School of Design. And the effect of this self-abnegation was, that Lucilla bore General Travers's decision, and gave up all hope of the officers, with a stout-heartedness which nobody could have looked for, and did not hesitate to face her position boldly, and to erect her standard, and to begin her new campaign, unaided and unappreciated as she was. People who know no better may go away upon marriage-tours, or they may fly off to foreign travel, or go out as governesses, when all things do not go just as they wish. But as for Miss Marjoribanks, she stood bravely at her post, and scorned to flinch or run away. Thus commenced, amid mists of discouragement, and in an entire absence of all that was calculated to stimulate and exhilarate, the second grand period of Lucilla's life.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

IT would be vain to follow Lucilla in detail through her consistent and admirable career ; nor is it necessary to say that she went on steadily in face of all her discouragements, with that mixture of success and failure which comes natural to all human affairs. The singular thing about it was, that the years passed on, and that she was permitted by the world in general to fulfil her own promise and prophecy about remaining ten years at home to be a comfort to her dear papa. She had been nineteen when she began her career, and she was nine-and-twenty when that little episode occurred with young Dr Rider, before he was married to his present wife. There would have been nothing in the least unsuitable in a marriage between Dr Rider and Miss Marjoribanks, though people who were the best informed never thought either of them had any serious meaning ; but, of course, the general public, having had Lucilla for a long time before their eyes,

naturally added on seven or eight years to her age, and concluded her to be a great deal older than the young doctor, though everybody allowed that it would have been a most advantageous match for him in every possible point of view. But, however, it did not come to anything, no more than a great many other nibbles of the same kind did. The period arrived at which Lucilla had thought she might perhaps have begun to go off in her looks, but still there was no immediate appearance of any change of name or condition on her part. Many people quite congratulated themselves on the fact, as it was impossible to imagine what might be the social condition of Grange Lane without Miss Marjoribanks; but it is doubtful whether Lucilla congratulated herself. She was very comfortable, no doubt, in every way, and met with little opposition to speak of, and had things a great deal more in her own hands than she might have had, had there been a husband in the case to satisfy; but notwithstanding, she had come to an age when most people have husbands, and when an independent position in the world becomes necessary to self-respect. To be sure, Lucilla *was* independent; but then—there is a difference, as everybody knows.

And Miss Marjoribanks could not but feel that the world had not shown that appreciation of her, to which, in her earlier days, she looked forward with so little

fear. The ten years, as they had really gone by, were very different from the ten years she had looked forward to, when, in the triumph of her youth, she named that period as the time when she might probably begin to go off, and would be disposed to marry. By this time the drawing-room carpets and curtains had faded a little, and Lucilla had found out that the delicate pale green which suited her complexion was not to call a profitable colour; and nobody could have thought or said that to marry at this period would be in the least degree to swindle the Doctor. Thus the moment had arrived to which she looked forward, but the man had not arrived with it. Ten years had passed, during which she had been at the head of society in Grange Lane, and a great comfort to her dear papa; and now, if there remained another development for Lucilla's character, it was about time that it should begin to show itself. But at the same time, the main element necessary for that new development did not seem at present likely to be found in Grange Lane.

Unless, indeed, it might happen to be found in the person of Mr Ashburton, who was so often in Carlingford that he might be said to form a part of society there. It was he who was related to the Richmonds, who were a family much respected in the county. He had been at the bar, and even begun to distinguish himself, before old Miss Penrhyn died and left him the

Firs. He had begun to distinguish himself, but he had not, it appeared, gone so far as to prevent him from coming down to his new property and settling upon it, and taking his place as a local notability. He was not a man who could be expected to care for evening parties in a provincial town ; but he never refused to dine with Dr Marjoribanks, and was generally popular up-stairs, where he always paid a little attention to Lucilla, though nothing very marked and noticeable. Mr Ashburton was not like Mr Cavendish, for instance (if anybody remembered Mr Cavendish), a man whose money might be in the Funds, but who more probably speculated. Everybody knew everything about him, which was an ease to the public mind. The Firs was as well known as Carlingford steeple, and how much it was worth a-year, and everything about it ; and so was the proprietor's pedigree, which could be traced to a semi-mythical personage known as old Penrhyn, whose daughter was Sir John Richmond's grandmother. The Firs, it is true, had descended in the female line, but still it is something to know where a man comes from, even on one side,

Mr Ashburton made himself very agreeable in the neighbourhood, and was never above enlightening anybody on a point of law. He used to say that it was kind to give him something to do, which was an opinion endorsed practically by a great many people. It is

true that some of his neighbours wondered much to see his patience, and could not make out why he chose to rusticate at the Firs at his age, and with his abilities. But either he never heard these wonderings, or at least he never took any notice of them. He lived as if he liked it, and settled down, and presented to all men an aspect of serene contentment with his sphere. And it would be difficult to say what suggestion or association it was which brought him all of a sudden into Miss Marjoribanks's head, one day, when, seeing a little commotion in Masters's shop, she went in to hear what it was about. The cause of the commotion was an event which had been long expected, and which, indeed, ten years before, had been looked on as a possible thing to happen any day. The wonder was, not that old Mr Chiltern should die, but that he should have lived so long. The ladies in Masters's cried, "Poor dear old man!" and said to each other that however long it might have been expected, a death always seemed sudden at the last. But, to tell the truth, the stir made by this death was rather pleasant than sad. People thought, not of the career which was ended, but of the one which must now begin, and of the excitement of an election, which was agreeable to look forward to. As for Lucilla, when she too had heard the news, and had gone upon her way, it would be vain to assert that a regretful recollection of the

time when Mr Cavendish was thought a likely man to succeed Mr Chiltern did not occur to her. But when Miss Marjoribanks had dismissed that transitory thought, Mr Ashburton suddenly came into her head by one of those intuitions which have such an effect upon the mind that receives them. Lucilla was not of very marked political opinions, and perhaps was not quite aware what Mr Ashburton's views were on the Irish Church question, or upon parliamentary reform ; but she said after, that it came into her mind in a moment, like a flash of lightning, that he was the man. The idea was so new and so striking, that she turned back and went, in the excitement of the moment, to suggest it to Mrs Chiley, and see what her old friend and the Colonel would say. Of course, if such a thing was practicable, there was no time to lose. She turned round quickly, according to her prompt nature ; and such was her absorbed interest in the idea of Mr Ashburton, that she did not know until she had almost done it, that she was walking straight into her hero's arms.

“ Oh, Mr Ashburton ! ” said Lucilla, with a little scream, “ is it you ? My mind was quite full of you. I could not see you for thinking. Do come back with me, for I have something very particular to say—— ”

“ To me ? ” said Mr Ashburton, looking at her with a smile and a sudden look of interest ; for it is always slightly exciting to the most philosophical mortal to

know that somebody else's mind is full of him. "What you have said already is so flattering——"

"I did not mean anything absurd," said Miss Marjoribanks. "Don't talk any nonsense, please. Mr Ashburton, do you know that old Mr Chiltern is dead?"

Lucilla put the question solemnly, and her companion grew a little red as he looked at her. "It is not my fault," he said, though he still smiled; and then he grew redder and redder, though he ought to have been above showing such signs of emotion; and looked at her curiously, as if he would seize what she was going to say out of her eyes or her lips before it was said.

"It is not anything to laugh about," said Lucilla. "He was a very nice old man; but he is dead, and somebody else must be Member for Carlingford: that was why I told you that my mind was full of you. I am not in the least superstitious," said Miss Marjoribanks, solemnly; "but when I stood there—there, just in front of Mr Holden's—you came into my mind like a flash of lightning. I was not thinking of you in the least, and you came into my mind like—like Minerva, you know. If it was not an intimation, I don't know what it was. And that was why I ran against you, and did not see you were there. Mr Ashburton, it is you who must be the

man," said Lucilla. It was not a thing to speak lightly about, and for her part she spoke very solemnly ; and as for Mr Ashburton, his face flushed deeper and deeper. He stood quite still in the excitement of the moment, as if she had given him a blow.

" Miss Marjoribanks, I don't know how to answer you," he cried ; and then he put out his hand in an agitated way and grasped her hand. " You are the only creature in Carlingford, man or woman, that has divined me," he said, in a trembling voice. It was a little public at the top of Grange Lane, where people were liable to pass at every moment ; but still Miss Marjoribanks accepted the pressure of the hand, which, to be sure, had nothing whatever to do with love-making. She was more shy of such demonstrations than she had been in her confident youth, knowing that in most cases they never came to anything, and at the same time that the spectators kept a vivid recollection of them ; but still, in the excitement of the moment, Miss Marjoribanks accepted and returned in a womanly way the pressure of Mr Ashburton's hand.

" Come in and let us talk it over," Lucilla said, feeling that no time was to be lost. It was a conference very different from that which, had Mr Chiltern been so well advised as to die ten years before, might have been held in Dr Marjoribanks's

drawing-room over his successor's prospects; but at the same time there was something satisfactory to the personal sentiments of both in the way in which this conversation had come about. When Lucilla took off her hat and sat down to give him all her attention, Mr Ashburton could not but feel the flattering character of the interest she was taking in him. She was a woman, and young (comparatively speaking), and was by no means without admirers, and unquestionably took the lead in society; and to be divined by such a person was perhaps, on the whole, sweeter to the heart of the aspirant than if Colonel Chiley had found out his secret, or Dr Marjoribanks, or even the Rector: and Lucilla for her part had all that natural pleasure in being the first to embrace a new interest which was natural under the circumstances. "Let us talk it all over," she said, giving Mr Ashburton a chair near her own. "If I believed in spirit-rapping, you know, I should be sure that was what it meant. I was not thinking of you in the least, and all at once, like a flash of lightning—Mr Ashburton, sit down and tell me—what is the first thing that must be done?"

"If I could ask you to be on my committee, that would be the first thing to be done," said Mr Ashburton, "but unfortunately I can't do that. Let me tell you in the first place how very much I am obliged——"

“Don’t say that, please,” said Miss Marjoribanks, with her usual good sense, “for I have done nothing. But papa can be on the committee, and old Colonel Chiley, who is such a one for politics ; and of course Sir John—that will be a very good beginning ; and after that——”

“My dear Miss Marjoribanks,” Mr Ashburton said, with a smile, and a little hesitation, “Sir John takes exactly the other side in politics ; and I am afraid the Doctor and the Colonel are not of the same way of thinking ; and then my opinions——”

“If they are not of the same way of thinking we must make them,” said Lucilla : “after having such an intimation, I am not going to be put off for a trifle ; and besides, what does it matter about opinions ? I am sure I have heard you all saying over and over that the thing was to have a good *man*. Don’t go and make speeches about opinions. If you begin with that, there is no end to it,” said Miss Marjoribanks. “I know what you gentlemen are. But if you just say distinctly that you are the best man——”

“It would be an odd thing to say for one’s self,” said Mr Ashburton, and he laughed ; but, to tell the truth, he was not a man of very quick understanding, and at the first outset of the thing he did not understand Lucilla ; and he was a little—just

a very little — disappointed. She had divined him, which was a wonderful proof of her genius ; but yet at the bottom she was only an ignorant woman after all.

“I see it all quite clear what to do,” said Miss Marjoribanks. “You must have the Colonel and Sir John, and everybody. I would not pay the least attention to Tories or Whigs, or anything of the sort. For my part I don’t see any difference. All that has to be said about it is simply that you are the right man. Papa might object to one thing and the Colonel might object to another, and then if Sir John, as you say, is of quite another way of thinking—— But you are the man for Carlingford all the same ; and none of them can say a word against that,” said Lucilla, with energy. She stopped short, with her colour rising and her eyes brightening. She felt herself inspired, which was a new sensation, and very pleasant ; and then the idea of such a coming struggle was sweet to Miss Marjoribanks, and the conviction burst upon her that she was striking out a perfectly new and original line.

As for her candidate, he smiled, and hesitated, and paid her pretty little compliments for a few minutes longer, and said it was very good of her to interest herself in his fortunes. All which Lucilla listened to with great impatience, feeling that it had

nothing to do with the matter in hand. But then after these few minutes had elapsed the meaning of his fair adviser, as he called her, began to dawn upon Mr Ashburton's mind. He began to prick up his mental ears, so to speak, and see that it was not womanish ignorance, but an actual suggestion. For, after all, so long as he was the Man for Carlingford, all the rest was of little importance. He took something out of his pocket, which was his address to the constituency of Carlingford (for being anxious on the subject, he had heard of Mr Chiltern's death an hour or two before anybody else), and choke-full of political sentiments. In it he described to the electors what he would do if they sent him to Parliament, as carefully as if their election could make him Prime Minister at least; and naturally a man does not like to sacrifice such a confession of faith. "I should like to read it to you," he said, spreading it out with affectionate care: but Lucilla had already arranged her plans, and knew better than that.

"If you were to read it to me," said Miss Marjoribanks, "I should be sure to be convinced that you were quite right, and to go in with you for everything; and then I should be no good, you know. If it were to drive papa and Sir John and the Colonel all to their own ways of thinking, we never should make

any progress. I would never mind about anybody's ways of thinking, if I were you. After all," said Lucilla, with fine satire, of which she was unconscious, "what does it matter what people think? I suppose when it comes to doing anything, the Whigs and the Tories are just the same. Mr Ashburton, it is the Man that is wanted," said Miss Marjoribanks, with all the warmth of sudden conviction. She felt a little like Joan of Arc as she spoke. When an army has the aid of a sacred maiden to bring inspiration to its counsels, the idea of going on in the old formal way is no longer to be tolerated. And such was the force of Lucilla's conviction, that Mr Ashburton, though he felt a little affronted, and could not but look with fond and compunctious regret upon his address, yet began more and more to feel that there was justice in what she said.

"I will think over what you say," he said, rather stiffly, and put up his address—for it was natural, when he had done her such an honour as to offer to read it to her, that he should be affronted by her refusal. It was a bold experiment on Lucilla's part, but then she was carried out of herself at the moment by this singular flash of inspiration. "I will think over what you say," Mr Ashburton continued; "and if my judgment approves— At all events I shall not issue *this* till I have thought it all over. I am sure I am

extremely obliged to you for your interest." And here he stopped short, and looked as if he were going to get up and go away, which would have spoiled all.

"You are going to stop to lunch," said Lucilla ; "somebody is sure to come in. And you know you must not lose any opportunity of seeing people. I am so glad to-night is Thursday. Tell me just one thing, Mr Ashburton, before any one comes. There is one thing that is really important, and must be fixed upon. If we were to make any mistake, you know ——"

"What?" said the candidate, eagerly—"about Reform? I have expressed myself very clearly——"

Lucilla smiled compassionately, and with the gentlest tolerance, at this wild suggestion. "I was not thinking of Reform," she said, with that meekness which people assume when it is of no use being impatient. "I was thinking what your colours were to be. I would not have anything to do with the old colours, for my part—they would be as bad as opinions, you know. You may laugh, but I am quite in earnest," said Miss Marjoribanks. As for Mr Ashburton, he did not begin to laugh until he had fixed upon her that gaze of utter amazement and doubt with which on many similar occasions ordinary people had regarded Lucilla—thinking she was joking, or acting, or doing something quite different from the severe sin-

cerity which was her leading principle. She was so used to it, that she waited with perfect patience till her companion's explosion of amusement was over. He was thinking to himself what a fool she was, or what a fool he was to think of taking a woman into his counsels, or what curious unintelligible creatures women were, made up of sense and folly ; and all the time he laughed, which was a relief to his feelings. Miss Marjoribanks laughed a little too, to keep him in countenance, for she was always the soul of good-nature ; and then she repeated, " Now you must tell me what our colours are to be——"

" I am sure I don't know anything about colours," said the candidate, " any more than you do about opinions. I think they are equally unimportant, to say the least. I shall adopt the colours of my fair counsellor," Mr Ashburton added, laughing, and making a mock bow to her, and getting his hat as he did so—for he had naturally calmed down a little from the first enthusiasm with which he had hailed the woman who divined him, and he did not mean to stay.

" Blue and yellow are the old colours," said Lucilla, thoughtfully, " and you are the new man, you know, and we must not meddle with these antiquated things. Do you think this would do ?" As she spoke she took up a handful of ribbons which were lying by, and put them up to her face with an air of serious deliberation

which once more disturbed Mr Ashburton's gravity. And yet, when a young woman who is not at all bad-looking puts up a rustling, gleaming knot of ribbons to her hair and asks a man's opinion of the same, the man must be a philosopher or a wretch indeed who does not give a glance to see the effect. The candidate for Carlingford looked and approached, and even, in the temptation of the moment, took some of the long streamers in his hand. And he began to think Miss Marjoribanks was very clever, and the most amusing companion he had met with for a long time. And her interest in him touched his heart ; and, after all, it is no drawback to a woman to be absurd by moments. His voice grew quite soft and caressing as he took the end of ribbon into his hand.

"If they are your colours they shall be mine," he said, with a sense of patronage and protection which was very delightful ; and the two were still talking and laughing over the silken link thus formed between them, when the people came in whom Lucilla was expecting to lunch, and who were naturally full of Mr Chiltern's death, which, poor old man ! was so sudden at the last. Mr Ashburton stayed, though he had not intended it, and made himself very pleasant. And Lucilla took no pains to conceal her opinion that the thing was neither to consider Whigs nor Tories, but a good *Man*. And Major Brown, who had come with

his daughters, echoed this sentiment so warmly that Mr Ashburton was entirely convinced of the justice of Miss Marjoribanks's ideas. "We can't have a tip-topper, you know," Major Brown said, who was not very refined in his expressions; "and what I should like to see is a man that knows the place and would look after Carlingford. That's what we're all looking for." Mr Ashburton did not declare himself to Major Brown, but he dashed off his new address ten minutes after he had taken leave of Miss Marjoribanks, and put the other one in the fire like a Christian, and telegraphed for his agent to town. Lucilla, for her part, made an effort equally great and uncompromising. She took the ribbon Mr Ashburton had played with, and cut it up into cockades of all descriptions. It was an early moment, but still there was no time to be lost in a matter of such importance. And she wore one on her breast and one in her hair when Mr Ashburton's address was published, and all the world was discussing the new candidate.

"Of course they are his colours—that is why I wear them," said Lucilla. "I shall always think there was something very strange in it. Just after I had heard of poor old Mr Chiltern's death, as I was passing Holden's—when I was not in the least thinking of him—he came into my mind like a flash of lightning, you know. If I had been very intimate with poor old Mr

Chiltern, or if I believed in spirit-rapping, I should think *that* was it. He came into my head without my even thinking of him, all in a moment, with his very hat on and his umbrella, like Minerva—wasn't it Minerva?" said Miss Marjoribanks. And she took up Mr Ashburton's cause openly, and unfurled his standard, and did not even ask her father's opinion. "Papa knows about politics, but he has not had an intimation, as I have," said Lucilla. And, naturally, she threw all the younger portion of Grange Lane, which was acquainted with Mr Ashburton, and looked forward eagerly to a little excitement, and liked the idea of wearing a violet-and-green cockade, into a flutter of excitement. Among these rash young people there were even a few individuals who took Lucilla's word for it, and knew that Mr Ashburton was very *nice*, and did not see that anything more was necessary. To be sure, these enthusiasts were chiefly women, and in no cases had votes; but Miss Marjoribanks, with instinctive correctness of judgment, decided that there were more things to be thought of than the electors. And she had the satisfaction of seeing with her own eyes and hearing with her own ears the success of that suggestion of her genius. Carlingford had rarely been more excited by any public event than it was by the address of the new candidate, who was in the field before anybody else, and who had the boldness to come

before them without uttering any political creed. "The enlightened electors of Carlingford do not demand, like other less educated constituencies, a system of political doctrines cut and dry, or a representative bound to give up his own judgment, and act according to arbitrary promises," said the daring candidate: "what they want is an honest man, resolved to do his duty by his country, his borough, and his constituency; and it is this idea alone which has induced me to solicit your suffrages." This was what Mr Ashburton said in his address, though at that moment he had still his other address in his pocket, in which he had entered at some length into his distinctive personal views. It was thus that an independent candidate, unconnected with party, took the field in Carlingford, with Miss Marjoribanks, like another Joan of Arc, wearing a knot of ribbons, violet and green, in her hair, to inspire and lead him on.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LIFE with most people is little more than a succession of high and low tides. There are times when the stream runs low, and when there is nothing to be seen but the dull sandbanks, or even mudbanks, for months, or even years together ; and then all at once the waters swell, and come rushing twice a-day like the sea, carrying life and movement with them. Miss Marjoribanks had been subject to the *eaux mortes* for a long time : but now the spring-tides had rushed back. A day or two after Mr Ashburton had been revealed to her as the predestined member, something occurred, not in itself exciting, but which was not without its ultimate weight upon the course of affairs. It was the day when aunt Jemima was expected in Grange Lane. She was aunt Jemima to Lucilla ; but the Doctor called her Mrs John, and was never known to address her by any more familiar title. She was, as she herself described it, a widow lady, and wore the dress of her

order, and was the mother of Tom Marjoribanks. She was not a frequent visitor at Carlingford, for she and her brother-in-law had various points on which they were not of accord. The Doctor, for his part, could not but feel perennially injured that the boy had fallen to the lot of Mrs John, while he had only a girl—even though that girl was Lucilla ; and aunt Jemima could not forgive him for the rude way in which he treated her health, which was so delicate, and his want of sympathy for many other people who were delicate too. Even when she arrived, and was being entertained with the usual cup of tea, fears of her brother-in-law's robustness and unsympathetic ways had begun to overpower her. "I hope your papa does not ask too much from you, Lucilla," she said, as she sat in her easy-chair, and took her tea by the fire in the cozy room which had been prepared for her. "I hope he does not make you do too much, for I am sure you are not strong, my dear. Your poor mamma, you know——" and Mrs John looked with a certain pathos at her niece, as though she saw signs of evil in Lucilla's fresh complexion and substantial frame.

"I am pretty well, thank you, aunt Jemima," said Miss Marjoribanks ; "and papa lets me do pretty much what I like : I am too old now, you know, to be told what to do."

"Don't call yourself old, my dear," said aunt Jemima,

with a passing gleam of worldly wisdom—"one gets old quite soon enough. Are you subject to headaches, Lucilla, or pains in the limbs? Your poor mamma——"

"Dear aunt Jemima, I am as well as ever I can be," said Miss Marjoribanks. "Tell me when you heard from Tom, and what he is doing. Let me see, it is ten years since he went away. I used to write to him, but he did not answer my letters—not as he ought, you know. I suppose he has found friends among the Calcutta ladies," said Lucilla, with a slight but not unapparent sigh.

"He never says anything to me about Calcutta ladies," said Tom's mother; "to tell the truth, I always thought before he went away that he was fond of you—I must have been mistaken, as he never said anything; and *that* was very fortunate at all events."

"I am sure I am very thankful he was not fond of me," said Lucilla, with a little natural irritation, "for I never could have returned it. But I should like to know why that was so fortunate. I can't see that it would have been such a very bad thing for him, for my part."

"Yes, my dear," said aunt Jemima, placidly, "it would have been a very bad thing; for you know, Lucilla, though you get on very nicely here, you never could have done for a poor man's wife."

Miss Marjoribanks's bosom swelled when she heard these words—it swelled with that profound sense of being unappreciated and misunderstood, which is one of the hardest trials in the way of genius ; but naturally she was not going to let her aunt see her mortification. “ I don't mean to be any man's wife just now,” she said, making a gulp of it—“ I am too busy electioneering ; we are going to have a new member in dear old Mr Chiltern's place. Perhaps he will come in this evening to talk things over, and you shall see him,” Lucilla added, graciously. She was a little excited about the candidate, as was not unnatural—more excited, perhaps, than she would have been ten years ago, when life was young ; and then it was not to be expected that she could be pleased with aunt Jemima for thinking it was so fortunate ; though even that touch of wounded pride did not lead Miss Marjoribanks to glorify herself by betraying Tom.

“ My brother-in-law used to be a dreadful Radical,” said aunt Jemima ; “ I hope it is not one of those revolutionary men ; I have seen your poor uncle sit up arguing with him till I thought they never would be done. If that is the kind of thing, I hope you will not associate yourself with it, Lucilla. Your papa should have more sense than to let you. It does not do a young woman any good. I should never have permitted it if you had been *my* daughter,” added Mrs

John, with a little heat—for, to tell the truth, she too felt a slight vexation on her part that the Doctor had the girl—even though not for twenty girls would she have given up Tom.

Miss Marjoribanks looked upon the weak woman who thus ventured to address her with indescribable feelings; but after all she was not so much angry as amused and compassionate. She could not help thinking to herself, if she had been Mrs John's daughter, how perfectly docile aunt Jemima would have been by this time, and how little she would have really ventured to interfere. "It would have been very nice," she said, with a meditative realisation of the possibility—"though it is very odd to think how one could have been one's own cousin—I should have taken very good care of you, I am sure."

"You would have done no such thing," said Mrs John; "you would have gone off and married; I know how girls do. You have not married now, because you have been too comfortable, Lucilla. You have had everything your own way, and all that you wanted, without any of the bother. It is very strange how differently people's lots are ordered. I was married at seventeen—and I am sure I have not known what it was to have a day's health——"

"Dear aunt Jemima!" said her affectionate niece, kissing her, "but papa shall see if he cannot give you

something, and we will take such care of you while you are here."

Mrs John was softened in spite of herself; but still she shook her head. "It is very nice of you to say so, my dear," she said, "and it's pleasant to feel that one has somebody belonging to one; but I have not much confidence in your papa. He never understood my complaints. I used to be very sorry for your poor mamma. He never showed that sympathy—but I did not mean to blame him to you, Lucilla. I am sure he is a very good father to you."

"He has been a perfect old angel," said Miss Marjoribanks; and then the conversation came to a pause, as it was time to dress for dinner. Mrs John Marjoribanks had a very nice room, and everything that was adapted to make her comfortable; but she too had something to think of when the door closed upon Lucilla, and she was left with her maid and her hot water and her black velvet gown. Perhaps it was a little inconsistent to wear a black velvet gown with her widow's cap; it was a question which she had long debated in her mind before she resigned herself to the temptation—but then it always looked so well, and was so very profitable! and Mrs John felt that it was incumbent upon her to keep up a respectable appearance for Tom's sake. Tom was very much in her mind at that moment, as indeed he always was;

for though it was a long time ago, she could not get the idea out of her head that he must have said something to Lucilla before he went off to India ; and he had a way of asking about his cousin in his letters ; and though she would have done anything to secure her boy's happiness, and was on the whole rather fond of her niece, yet the idea of the objections her brother-in-law would have to such a match, excited to the uttermost the smouldering pride which existed in aunt Jemima's heart. He was better off, and had always been better off, than her poor John—and he had robust health and an awful scorn of the coddling, to which, as he said, she had subjected his brother ; and he had money enough to keep *his* child luxuriously, and make her the leader of Carlingford society, while *her* poor boy had to go to India and put himself in the way of all kinds of unknown diseases and troubles. Mrs John was profoundly anxious to promote her son's happiness, and would gladly have given every penny she had to get him married to Lucilla, " if that was what he wanted," as she justly said ; but to have her brother-in-law object to him, and suggest that he was not good enough, was the one thing she could not bear. She was thinking about this, and whether Tom really had not said anything, and whether Lucilla cared for him, and what amid all these perplexities she should do, while she dressed for dinner ; and, at the

same time, she felt her palpitation worse than usual, and knew Dr Marjoribanks would smile his grim smile if she complained, so that her visit to Grange Lane, though Lucilla meant to take such care of her, was not altogether unmingled delight to Mrs John.

But, nevertheless, Dr Marjoribanks's dinner-table was always a cheerful sight, even when it was only a dinner-party of three; for then naturally they used the round table, and were as snug as possible. Lucilla wore her knot of green and violet ribbons on her white dress, to her aunt's great amazement, and the Doctor had all the air of a man who had been out in the world all day and returned in the evening with something to tell—which is a thing which gives great animation to a family party. Mrs John Marjoribanks had been out of all that sort of thing for a long time. She had been living quite alone in a widowed forlorn way, and had half forgotten how pleasant it was to have somebody coming in with a breath of fresh air about him and the day's budget of news—and it had an animating effect upon her, even though she was not fond of her brother-in-law. Dr Marjoribanks inquired about Tom in the most fatherly way, and what he was about, and how things were looking for him, and whether he intended to come home. "Much better not," the Doctor said, — "I should certainly advise him not, if he asked me. He has got over all the

worst of it, and now is his time to do something worth while."

"Tom is not one to think merely of worldly advantages," said his mother, with a fine instinct of opposition. "I don't think he would care to waste all the best part of his life making money. I'd rather see him come home and be happy, for my part, even if he were not so rich——"

"If all men were happy that came home," said the Doctor, and then he gave a rather grim chuckle. "Somebody has come home that you did not reckon on, Lucilla. I am sorry to spoil sport; but I don't see how you are to get out of it. There is another address on the walls to-day besides that one of yours——"

"Oh, I hope there will be six addresses!" cried Miss Marjoribanks; "if we had it all our own way it would be no fun;—a Tory, and a Whig, and a—did you say Radical, aunt Jemima? And then, what is a Conservative?" asked Lucilla, though certainly she had a very much better notion of political matters than aunt Jemima had, to say the least.

"I wonder how you can encourage any poor man to go into Parliament," said Mrs John; "so trying for the health as it must be, and an end to everything like domestic life. If it was my Tom I would almost rather he stayed in India. He looks strong, but there is never any confidence to be put in young men look-

ing strong. Oh, I know you do not agree with me, Doctor; but I have had sad reason for my way of thinking," said the poor lady. As for the Doctor, he did not accept the challenge thus thrown to him. Tom Marjoribanks was not the foremost figure in the world in his eyes, as the absent wanderer was in that of his mother; and he had not yet unburdened himself of what he had to say.

"I am not saying anything in favour of going into Parliament," said the Doctor. "I'd sooner be a barge-man on the canal, if it was me. I am only telling Lucilla what she has before her. I don't know when I have been more surprised. Of course you were not looking for *that*," said Dr Marjoribanks. He had kept back until the things were taken off the table, for he had a benevolent disinclination to spoil anybody's dinner. Now, when all the serious part of the meal was over, he tossed the 'Carlingford Gazette' across the table, folded so that she could not miss what he wanted her to see. Lucilla took it up lightly between her finger and thumb; for the Carlingford papers were inky and badly printed, and soiled a lady's hand. She took it up delicately without either alarm or surprise, knowing very well that the Blues and the Yellows were not likely without a struggle to give up to the new standard, which was violet and green. But what she saw on that inky broadsheet overwhelmed in an

instant Miss Marjoribanks's self-possession. She turned pale, though her complexion was, if possible, fresher than ever, and even shivered in her chair, though her nerves were so steady. Could it be a trick to thwart and startle her? or could it be true? She lifted her eyes to her father with a look of horror-stricken inquiry, but all that she met in return was a certain air of amusement and triumph, which struck her at the tenderest point. He was not sorry nor sympathetic, nor did he care at all for the sudden shock she had sustained. On the contrary, he was laughing within himself at the utterly unexpected complication. It was cruel, but it was salutary, and restored her self-command in a moment. She might have given way under kindness, but this look of satisfaction over her discomfiture brought Lucilla to herself.

“Yes, I thought you would be surprised,” said Dr Marjoribanks, dryly; and he took his first glass of claret with a slow relish and enjoyment, which roused every sentiment of self-respect and spark of temper existing in his daughter's mind. “If you had kept your own place it would not have mattered; but I don't see how you are to get out of it. You see young ladies should let these sort of things alone, Lucilla.” This was all the feeling he showed for her in her unexpected dilemma. Miss Marjoribanks's heart gave one

throb, which made the green and violet ribbons jump and thrill ; and then she came to herself, and recognised, as she had so often done before, that she had to fight her way by herself, and had nobody to look to. Such a thought is dreary enough sometimes, and there are minds that sink under it ; but at other times it is like the touch of the mother earth which gave the giant back his strength ; and Lucilla was of the latter class of intelligence. When she saw the triumph with which her embarrassment was received, and that she had no sympathy nor aid to look for, she recovered herself as if by magic. Let what would come in the way, nothing could alter her certainty that Mr Ashburton was the man for Carlingford ; and that determination not to be beaten, which is the soul of British valour, sprang up in an instant in Miss Marjoribanks's mind. There was not even the alternative of victory or Westminster Abbey for Lucilla. If she was ever to hold up her head again, or have any real respect for herself, she must win. All this passed through her head in the one bewildering moment, while her father's words were still making her ears tingle, and *that name*, printed in big inky letters, seemed to flutter in all the air round her. It was hard to believe the intelligence thus conveyed, and harder still to go on in the face of old friendships and the traditions of her youth ; but still duty was dearer

than tradition, and it was now a necessity to fight the battle to the last, and at all risks to win.

“Thank you all the same, papa, for bringing me the paper,” said Lucilla. “It would have been a great deal worse if I had not known of it before I saw him. I am sure I am very glad for one thing. He can’t be married or dead, as people used to say. I am quite ashamed to keep you so long down-stairs, aunt Jemima, when I know you must be longing for a cup of tea—but it is somebody come back whom nobody expected. Tell him I shall be *so* glad to see him, papa; though I have no reason to be glad, for he was one of my *young* friends, you know, and he is sure to think I have gone off.” As she spoke, Lucilla turned aunt Jemima, to whom she had given her arm, quite round, that she might look into the great glass over the mantelpiece: “I don’t think I *am* quite so much gone off as I expected to be,” said Miss Marjoribanks, with candid impartiality; “though of course he will think me stouter—but it does not make any difference about Mr Ashburton being the right man for Carlingford.” She said the words with a certain solemnity, and turned Mrs John, who was so much surprised as to be speechless, round again, and led her up-stairs. It was as if they were walking in a procession of those martyrs and renouncers of self, who build up the foundations of society; and it would not be too much

to say that under her present circumstances, and in the excitement of this singular and unexpected event, such was the painful but sublime consciousness which animated Lucilla's breast.

As for Dr Marjoribanks, his triumph was taken out of him by that spectacle. He closed the door after the ladies had gone, and came back to his easy-chair by the side of the fire, and could not but feel that he had had the worst of it. It was actually Mr Cavendish who had come home, and whose address to the electors of Carlingford, dated from Dover on his return to England, the Doctor had just put into his daughter's hand. But wonderful and unlooked-for as was the event, Lucilla, though taken unawares, had not given in, nor shown any signs of weakness. And the effect upon her father of her last utterance and confession was such that he took up the paper again and read both addresses, which were printed side by side. In other days Mr Cavendish had been the chosen candidate of Grange Lane; and the views which he expressed (and he expressed his views very freely) were precisely those of Dr Marjoribanks. Yet when the Doctor turned to Mr Ashburton's expression of his conviction that he was the right man for Carlingford, it cannot be denied that the force of that simple statement had a wonderful effect upon his mind—an effect all the greater, perhaps, in comparison with the

political exposition made by the other unexpected candidate. The Doctor's meditations possibly took a slumbrous tone from the place and the moment at which he pursued them ; for the fact was that the words he had just been hearing ran in his head all through the reading of the two addresses. Mr Cavendish would think Lucilla had gone off ; but yet she had not gone off so much as might have been expected, and Mr Ashburton was the man for Carlingford. Dr Marjoribanks laughed quietly by himself in his easy-chair, and then went back to Mr Cavendish's opinions ; and ended again, without knowing it, in a kind of odd incipient agreement with Lucilla. The new candidate was right in politics ; but, after all, Mr Ashburton was a more satisfactory sort of person. He was a man whom people knew everything about, and a descendant of old Penrhyn, and had the Firs, and lived in it, and spent about so much money every year honestly in the face of the world. When a man conducts himself in this way, his neighbours can afford to be less exacting as to his political opinions. This comparison went on in the Doctor's thoughts until the distinction between the two grew confused and faint in that ruddy and genial glow of firelight and lamplight and personal wellbeing which is apt to engross a man's mind after he has come in out of the air, as people say, and has eaten a good dinner, and feels himself comfortable ;

and at last all that remained in Dr Marjoribanks's mind was that Mr Cavendish would think Lucilla had gone off, though she had not gone off nearly so much as might have been expected ; at which he laughed with an odd sound, which roused him, and might have induced some people to think he had been sleeping—if, indeed, anybody had been near to hear.

But this news was naturally much more serious to Miss Marjoribanks when she got up-stairs, and had time to think of it. She would not have been human if she had heard without emotion of the return of the man whom she had once dreamed of as member for Carlingford, with the addition of other dreams which had not been altogether without their sweetness. He had returned now and then for a few days, but Lucilla knew that he had never held up his head in Grange Lane since the day when she advised him to marry Barbara Lake. And now when he had bethought himself of his old ambition, had he possibly bethought himself of other hopes as well? And the horrible thing was, that she had pledged herself to another, and put her seal upon it that Mr Ashburton was the man for Carlingford! It may be supposed that, with such a complication in her mind, Miss Marjoribanks was very little capable of supporting aunt Jemima's questions as to what it was about, and who was Mr Cavendish, and why was his return of

consequence to Lucilla? Mrs John was considerably alarmed and startled, and began to think in earnest that Tom was fond of his cousin, and would never forgive his mother for letting Lucilla perhaps marry some one else, and settle down before her very eyes.

“ If it is a very particular friend, I can understand it,” Mrs John said, with a little asperity; but that was after she had made a great many attempts, which were only partially successful, to find it all out.

“ Dear aunt Jemima,” said Lucilla, “ we are all particular friends in Carlingford—society is so limited, you know;—and Mr Cavendish has been a very long time away. He used to be of such use to me, and I am so fond of him,” Miss Marjoribanks said, with a sigh; and it may be supposed that Mrs John’s curiosity was not lessened by such a response.

“ If you are engaged to any one, Lucilla, I must say I think I ought to have been told,” said Tom’s mother, with natural indignation. “ Though I ought not to blame *you* for it, perhaps. It is a sad thing when a girl is deprived of a mother’s care; but still I am your nearest relation——”

“ My dear aunt, it is something about the election,” said Miss Marjoribanks. “ How could I be engaged to a man who has been away ten years?”

“ Tom has been away ten years,” said Mrs John, impetuously; and then she blushed, though she was

past the age of blushing, and made haste to cover her imprudence. "I don't see what you can have to do with the election," she said, with suspicion, but some justice; "and I don't feel, Lucilla, as if you were telling me all."

"I have the favours to make, aunt Jemima," said Lucilla—"green and violet. You used to be so clever at making bows, and I hope you will help me;—papa, you know, will have to be on Mr Ashburton's committee," Miss Marjoribanks added; and then, in spite of herself, a sigh of doubt and anxiety escaped her bosom. It was easy to say that "papa would be on Mr Ashburton's committee, you know," but nobody had known that Mr Cavendish was coming to drive everything topsy-turvy; and Lucilla, though she professed to know only who was the man for Carlingford, had at the same time sufficient political information to be aware that the sentiments propounded in Mr Cavendish's address were also Dr Marjoribanks's sentiments; and she did not know the tricks which some green-and-violet spirit in the dining-room was playing with the Doctor's fancy. Perhaps it might turn out to be Mr Cavendish's committee which her father would be on; and after she had pledged herself that the other was the man for Carlingford! Lucilla felt that she could not be disloyal and go back from her word, neither could she forget the intimation which had so plainly

indicated to her that Mr Ashburton was the man ; and yet, at the same time, she could not but sigh as she thought of Mr Cavendish. Perhaps he had grown coarse, as men do at that age, just as Lucilla herself was conscious that he would find her stouter. Perhaps he had ceased to flirt, or be of any particular use of an evening ; possibly even he might have forgotten Miss Marjoribanks—but naturally that was a thing that seemed unlikely to Lucilla. And oh ! if he had but come a little earlier, or for ever stayed away !

But while all these thoughts were going through her mind, her fingers were still busy with the violet-and-green cockades which aunt Jemima, after making sure that Mr Ashburton was not a Radical, had begun to help her with. And they sat and talked about Mrs John's breathing, which was so bad, and about her headaches, while Lucilla by snatches discussed the situation in her mind. Perhaps, on the whole, embarrassment and perplexity are a kind of natural accompaniment to life and movement ; and it is better to be driven out of your senses with thinking which of two things you ought to do than to do nothing whatever, and be utterly uninteresting to all the world. This at least was how Lucilla reasoned to herself in her dilemma ; and while she reasoned she used up yard upon yard of her green ribbon (for naturally the violet bore

but a small proportion to the green). Whatever she might have to do or to suffer—however her thoughts might be disturbed or her heart distracted—it is unnecessary to add that it was impossible to Lucilla either to betray or to yield.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IT was a very good thing for Lucilla that Mrs John was so much of an invalid, notwithstanding that the Doctor made little of her complaints. All that Dr Marjoribanks said was — with that remnant of Scotch which was often perceptible in his speech — that her illnesses were a fine thing to occupy her, and he did not know what she would do without them — a manner of speaking which naturally lessened his daughter's anxiety, though her sympathetic care and solicitude were undiminished. And no doubt, when she had been once assured that there was nothing dangerous in her aunt's case, it was a relief to Miss Marjoribanks at the present juncture that Mrs John got up late and always breakfasted in her own room. Lucilla went into that sanctuary after she had given her father his breakfast, and heard all about the palpitation and the bad night aunt Jemima had passed ; and

then when she had consoled her suffering relative by the reflection that one never sleeps well the first night or two, Miss Marjoribanks was at liberty to go forth and attend a little to her own affairs, which stood so much in need of being attended to. She had had no further talk with the Doctor on the subject, but she had read over Mr Cavendish's address, and could not help seeing that it went dead against her candidate; neither could Lucilla remain altogether unaffected by the expression of feeling in respect to "a place in which I have spent so many pleasant years, and which has so many claims on my affections," and the touching haste with which the exile had rushed back as soon as he heard of the old member's death. If it touched Miss Marjoribanks, who was already pledged to support another interest, what might it not do to the gentlemen in Grange Lane who were not pledged, and who had a friendship for Mr Cavendish? This was the alarming thought that had disturbed her sleep all night, and returned to her mind with her first awakening; and when she had really her time to herself, and the fresh morning hours before her, Lucilla began, as everybody ought to do, by going to the very root and foundation, and asking herself what, beyond all secondary considerations, it was

right to do. To change from one side to the other and go back from her word was a thing abhorrent to her; but still Miss Marjoribanks was aware that there are certain circumstances in which honesty and truth themselves demand what in most cases is considered an untruthful and dishonest proceeding.

Thus in order to come to a right decision, and with a sense of the duty she owed to her country which would have shamed half the electors in England, not to say Carlingford, Lucilla, who naturally had no vote, read the two addresses of the two candidates, and addressed herself candidly and impartially to the rights of the subject. Mr Cavendish was disposed, as we have said, to be pathetic and sentimental, and to speak of the claims the borough had upon his affections, and the eagerness with which he had rushed home at the earliest possible moment to present himself to them. If poor old Mr Chiltern had been King Bomba, or a gloomy Oriental tyrant, keeping all possible reformers and successors banished from his dominions, the new candidate could not have spoken with more pathos. It was a sort of thing which tells among the imaginative part of the community, or so, at least, most people think; and Miss Marjoribanks was moved by it for the first moment; but then

her enlightened mind asserted its rights. She said to herself that Mr Cavendish might have come home at any hour, by any steamboat; that Calais and Boulogne, and even Dieppe, were as open to him as if he had been an actual refugee, and that consequently there was nothing particular to be pathetic about. And then, if the town had such claims on his affections, why had he stayed so long away? These two rationalistic questions dispersed the first *attendrissement* which had begun to steal over Lucilla's mind. When she came to this conclusion, her difficulties cleared away. She had no reason to go back from her engagements and reject that intimation which had so impressed it on her, that Mr Ashburton was the man. It was a sacrifice which ancient truth and friendship did not demand, for verity was not in the document she had just been reading, and that appeal to sentiment was nothing more than what is generally called humbug. "He might have been living here all the time," Lucilla said to herself; "he might have had much stronger claims upon our affections; if he had wanted, he might have come back ages ago, and not let people struggle on alone." When this view of the subject occurred to her, Lucilla felt more indignation than sympathy. And then, as Dr Marjoribanks had done, she turned to the calm utterance of her own candi-

date—the man who was the only man for Carlingford—and that sweet sense of having given sound counsel, and of having at last met with some one capable of carrying it out, which makes up for so many failures, came like balm to Lucilla's bosom. There was nothing more necessary; the commotion in her mind calmed down, and the tranquillity of undisturbed conviction came in its place. And it was with this sense of certainty that she put on her bonnet and issued forth, though it snowed a little, and was a very wintry day, on Mr Ashburton's behalf, to try her fortune in Grange Lane.

She went to Mrs Chiley's, who was now very old, poor old lady! and feeble, and did not like to leave her sofa. Not but what she could leave the sofa, she said to her friends, but at that time of the year, and at her time of life, it was comfortable. The sofa was wheeled to the side of the fire, and Mrs Chiley reclined upon it, covered with knitted rugs of the brightest colours, which her young friends all worked for her. The last one arrived was what used to be called an Afghanistan blanket, done in stripes of all sorts of pretty tints, which was a present from Mrs Beverley. "Her work, she says, Lucilla," said the old lady; "but we know what sort of soft dawdling woman she is, and it must have been the Archdeacon's nieces, you know." But

still it had the place of honour at present, covering Mrs Chiley's feet, and affording something to talk about when any one came in. And by her side was a little table, upon which stood one China rose, in a glass of water—a pale rose, almost as pale as her soft old cheeks, and chilled like them by the approaching frost. And the fire burned with an officious cheerfulness at her elbow, as if it thought nothing of such accidental circumstances as winter and old age. To be sure this was a reflection which never came into Mrs Chiley's head, who was, on the contrary, very thankful for the fire, and said it was like a companion. "And I often think, my dear, how do the poor people get on, especially if they are old and sick, they have no fires to keep them cheerful in this dreadful weather," the kind old lady would say. She did say so now when Lucilla came in, glowing with cold and her rapid walk, and with a flake or two of snow slowly melting on her sealskin cloak. Perhaps it was not a sentiment the Colonel agreed with, for he gave a humph and a little hoist of his shoulders, as if in protest, being himself a good deal limited in his movements, and not liking to own it, by the wintry torpor within his big old frame, and the wintry weather outside.

"Come and tell us all the news, Lucilla, my dar-

ling," Mrs Chiley said, as she drew down her young friend's glowing face to her own, and gave her one of her lingering kisses; "I felt sure you would come and tell us everything. I said it would not be like Lucilla if she didn't. We know nothing but *the fact*, you know—not another word. Make haste and tell us everything, my dear."

"But I don't know anything," said Miss Marjoribanks. "Of course you mean about Mr Cavendish. I saw it in the papers, like everybody else, but I don't know anything more."

And then Mrs Chiley's countenance fell. She was not very strong, poor old lady, and she could have cried, as she said afterwards. "Ah, well, I suppose there is not time," she said, after a little pause; "I suppose he has not got here from Dover yet—one always forgets the distance. I calculated it all over last night, and I thought he would get home by the eleven train; but these trains are never to be calculated upon, you know, my dear. I *am* a little disappointed, Lucilla. Poor dear! to think how he must have rushed home the first moment—I could have cried when I read that address."

"I don't see why any one should cry," said Lucilla. "I think he makes a great deal too much of that; he might have come ever so many years ago if he had liked. Poor Mr Chiltern did not banish him,

poor old man!—he might have been here for years.”

Upon which the Colonel himself drew a little nearer, and poked the fire. “I am glad to see you are so sensible, Lucilla,” he said. “It’s the first rational word I have heard on the subject. *She* thinks he’s a kind of saint and martyr; a silly young fellow that runs off among a set of Frenchmen because he can’t get everything his own way—and then he expects that we are all to go into transports of joy, and give him our votes,” Colonel Chiley added, smashing a great piece of coal with the poker, with a blow full of energy, yet showing a slight unsteadiness in it, which sent a host of blazing splinters into the hearth. He was a man who wore very well, but he was not so steady as he once was, and nowadays was apt, by some tremulous movement, to neutralise the strength which he had left.

Mrs Chiley, for her part, was apt to be made very nervous by her husband’s proceedings. She was possessed by a terror that the splinters some day would jump out of the hearth on to the carpet and fly into the corners, “and perhaps burn us all up in our beds,” as she said. She gave a little start among her cushions, and stooped down to look over the floor. “He will never learn that he is old,”

she said in Lucilla's ear, who instantly came to her side to see what she wanted ; and thus the two old people kept watch upon each other, and noted, with a curious mixture of vexation and sympathy, each other's declining strength.

"For my part, I would give him all my votes, if I had a hundred," said Mrs Chiley, "and so will you, too, when you hear the rights of it. Lucilla, my dear, tell him—I hope *you* are not going to forsake old friends."

"No," said Miss Marjoribanks — but she spoke with a gravity and hesitation which did not fail to reach Mrs Chiley's ear—"I hope I shall never desert my old friends ; but I think all the same that it is Mr Ashburton who is the right man for Carlingford," she said, slowly. She said it with reluctance, for she knew it would shock her audience, but, at the same time, she did not shrink from her duty ; and the moment had now arrived when Lucilla felt concealment was impossible, and that the truth must be said.

As for Mrs Chiley, she was so distressed that the tears came to her eyes ; and even the Colonel laughed, and did not understand it. Colonel Chiley, though he was by no means as yet on Mr Cavendish's side, was not any more capable than his neighbours of understanding Miss Marjoribanks's single-minded devotion

to what was just and right; and why she should transfer her support to Ashburton, who was not a ladies' man, nor, in the Colonel's opinion, a marrying man, nor anything at all attractive, now that the other had come back romantic and repentant to throw his honours at her feet, was beyond his power of explanation. He contented himself with saying "humph;" but his wife was not so easily satisfied. She took Lucilla by the hand and poured forth a flood of remonstrances and prayers.

"I do not understand you, Lucilla," said Mrs Chiley. "He whom we know so little about—whom, I am sure, you have no reason to care for. And where could you find anybody nicer than Mr Cavendish?—and he to have such faith in us, and to come rushing back as soon as he was able. I am sure you have not taken everything into consideration, Lucilla. He might not perhaps do exactly as could have been wished before he went away; but he was young and he was led astray; and I do think you were a little hard upon him, my dear; but I have always said I never knew anybody nicer than Mr Cavendish. And what possible reason you can have to care about that other man——"

"It was like a special Intimation," said Lucilla, with solemnity. "I don't see how I could neglect it, for my part. The day the news came about poor old Mr Chiltern's death I was out, you know, and heard it ;

and just at one spot upon the pavement, opposite Mr Holden's, it came into my mind like a flash of lightning that Mr Ashburton was the man. I don't care in the least for him, and I had not been thinking of him, or anything. It came into my head all in a moment. If I had been very intimate with poor dear old Mr Chiltern, or if I believed in spirit-rapping, I should think it was a message from *him*."

Lucilla spoke with great gravity, but she did not impress her audience, who were people of sceptical minds. Mrs Chiley, for her part, was almost angry, and could scarcely forgive Lucilla for having made her give grave attention to such a piece of nonsense. "If it *had* been him," she said, with some wrath, "I don't see how having been dead for a few hours should make his advice worth having. It never was good for anything when he was alive. And you don't believe in spirit-rapping, I *hope*. I wonder how you can talk such nonsense," the old lady said severely. And Colonel Chiley, who had been a little curious too, laughed and coughed over the joke; for the two old people were of the old school, and of a very unbelieving frame of mind.

"I knew you would laugh," said Miss Marjoribanks, "but I cannot help it. If it had been impressed upon *your* mind like that, you would have been different. And, of course, I like Mr Cavendish much the best.

I am so glad I have no vote," said Lucilla; "it does not matter to anybody what I think; but if I had anything to do with it, you know I could not stand up for Mr Cavendish, even though I am fond of him, when I felt sure that Mr Ashburton is the man for Carlingford—nobody could ask me to do that."

There followed a pause upon this declaration; for Miss Marjoribanks, though she had no vote, was a person of undoubted influence, and such a conviction on her part was not to be laughed at. Even Colonel Chiley, who was undecided in his own mind, was moved by it a little. "What does the Doctor think?" he asked. "Ashburton doesn't say a word about his principles that I can see; and the other, you know——"

"Dear Colonel Chiley," cried Lucilla, "he is not going to be Prime Minister; and I have always heard you say, as long as I can remember, that it was not opinions, you know, but a good *man* that people wanted. I have heard people talking politics for hours, and I always remember you saying that, and thinking it was the only sensible thing that was said; but, of course, I don't understand politics," Lucilla added, with humility. As for the Colonel, he took up the poker, perhaps to hide a little pleasant confusion, and again drew near the fire.

"By George! I believe Lucilla is in the right," he

said, with a certain agreeable consciousness. Perhaps he did not quite recollect at what moment of his life he had originated that sentiment, but he thought he could recollect having said it; and it was with the view of carrying off the bashfulness of genius, and not because the coals had any need of it, that he took up the poker—a proceeding which was always regarded with alarm and suspicion by his wife.

“The fire is very nice,” said Mrs Chiley. “I hate to have the fire poked when it does not want it. Lucilla, if you make him go over to *that* Mr Ashburton’s side, you will have a great deal to answer for, and I will never forgive you. My dear, you must be dreaming—a man that is as dry as a stick, and not one-hundredth nor one-thousandth part so nice——”

“I shan’t say another word,” said Lucilla; “I shan’t stay any longer, for I can’t help it, and you would be angry with me. People can’t help what they believe, you know. There is poor little Oswald Brown, who has doubts, and can’t go into the Church, and will ruin all his prospects, and nobody can help it——”

“If I were his mother I should help it!” cried Mrs Chiley. “I promise you he should not talk of his doubts to me! A bit of a lad; and what is good enough for all the bishops, and everybody in their senses, is not good enough for him! If that is the kind of example you are going to follow, Lucilla——”

“Dear Mrs Chiley,” said Miss Marjoribanks, “everybody knows what my Church principles are ; and perhaps you will come round to think with me ; but I am not going to say any more about it now. I am so glad your rheumatism is better this morning ; but you must wrap up well, for it is so cold, oh, so cold, out of doors !”

When Lucilla had thus dismissed the subject, she came to her old friend’s side and bent over her in her sealskin cloak, to say good-bye. Mrs Chiley took her by both hands as she thus stood with her back to the old Colonel, and drew her down close, and looked searchingly into her eyes. “If you have any *particular* reason, Lucilla, you ought to tell me—that would make such a difference,” said the old lady. “I always tell you everything,” said Miss Marjoribanks with evasive fondness, as she kissed the soft old withered cheek ; and naturally, with the Colonel behind, who was standing up before the fire shadowing over them both, and quite unaware of this little whispered episode, it would have been impossible to say more had there been ever so much to say. But it had been a close encounter in its way, and Lucilla was rather glad to get off without any further damage. She did not feel quite successful as she went out ; but still she had left a very wholesome commotion behind her ; for Colonel Chiley could not but feel that the sentiment which

she had quoted from himself was a very just sentiment. "By George! Lucilla was in the right of it," he said again, after she was gone; and in fact went through a process very similar to that which had modified the sentiments of Dr Marjoribanks on the previous night. Mr Cavendish was a young fellow who had rushed off among a set of Frenchmen, because Lucilla Marjoribanks would not have him, or because he could not marry Barbara Lake in addition, or at least somehow because he failed of having his own way. It was all very well for him to come back and make a commotion, and be sentimental about it. But what if, after all, Ashburton, who had the Firs, and lived there, and spent his money like a Christian, was the man for Carlingford? The Colonel's mind still wavered and veered about; yet it had received an impulse which was by no means unworthy of consideration.

As for Mrs Chiley, she laid back her head upon her pillows and painfully questioned with herself whether Lucilla could have any *particular* reason for taking Mr Ashburton's part so warmly. She thought with justice that Miss Marjoribanks was looking brighter and better, and had more of her old animation than she had shown for a long time—which arose from the simple fact that she had something in hand, though the old lady thought it might have a more touching and delicate motive. If *that* was the case, it would

make a great difference. Mrs Chiley was no longer able to go out in the evening, and had to be dependent on other people's observation for a knowledge of what happened—and she was wounded by a sense that her young friend had not been appreciated as her worth deserved. If Mr Ashburton had the sense to see what was for his own advantage, it would be a frightful thing, as Mrs Chiley said to herself, if Lucilla's friends should fly in his face. And though it was a hard trial to give up Mr Cavendish, still if anything of the kind had happened—— Thus it will be evident that Lucilla's visit, though it was not a long one, nor the least in the world an argumentative visit, was not without its fruit.

She went up Grange Lane again cheerful and warm in her sealskin coat. It was a thing that suited her remarkably well, and corresponded with her character, and everybody knows how comfortable they are. The snow-flakes fell softly, one at a time, and melted away to nothing upon her sleeves and her shoulders without leaving any trace—and Lucilla, with the chill air blowing in her face, and those feathery messengers in the air, could not but feel that her walk and the general readiness which she felt to face all kinds of objections and difficulties, and to make a sacrifice of her own feelings, had in them a certain magnanimous and heroic element. For after all she had no *par-*

ticular reason, as Mrs Chiley said. Mr Ashburton was a dry man, and of very little use in a social point of view, and had never paid her any attention to speak of, nor at all put himself forth as a candidate for her favour. If he had done so, she would not have felt that thrill of utter disinterestedness which kept her as warm within as her sealskin did without.

There was not a soul to be seen in Grange Lane at that moment in the snow, which came on faster and faster, but one of Mr Wentworth's (who at that time was new in St Roque's) grey sisters, and another lady who was coming down, as quickly as Lucilla was going up, by the long line of garden walls. The gentlemen were either at business or at their club, or keeping themselves snug indoors ; and it was only these devoted women who braved the elements outside. The figure in the grey cloak was occupied simply with the poor people, and that is not our present business ; but the other two were otherwise inspired. Mr Cavendish, who had lately arrived, had not been able to make up his mind to face the weather ; but his sister was of a different way of thinking. She was not of half the capacity of Lucilla, but still she felt that something ought to be done, and that there was not a moment to be lost. When she saw it was Miss Marjoribanks that was advancing to meet her, a momentary chill came over Mrs Woodburn. She was

thinking so much of her own errand that she could not but jump at the idea that nothing less important could have induced Lucilla to be out of doors on such a day ; and her heart beat loud as the two drew near each other. Was it an unexpected and generous auxiliary, or was it a foe accomplished and formidable ? For one thing, she was not coming out of Mr Centum's, where Mrs Woodburn herself was going, which at least was a relief. As they came nearer the two ladies instinctively looked to their weapons. They had met already in many a little passage of arms, but nothing like this had ever occurred to them before. If they were to work in union, Mrs Woodburn felt that they would carry all before them ; and if not, then it must be a struggle unto the death.

“ Is it really you, Lucilla ? ” she said ; “ I could not believe my eyes. What can have brought you out of doors on such a day ? You that have everything your own way, and no call to exert yourself—— ”

“ I have been to see Mrs Chiley,” said Lucilla, sweetly ; “ when the weather is bad she sees nobody, and she is always so pleased to have me. Her rheumatism is not so bad, thank you—though I am sure if this weather should last—— ”

“ You would see Mrs Beverley's blanket,” said Mrs Woodburn, who was a little nervous, though perhaps that might only be the cold ; “ but we know what sort

of woman she is, and it must have been the Arch-deacon's nieces, my dear. Do turn back with me a moment, Lucilla ; or I shall go with you. I want to speak to you. Of course you have heard of Harry's coming home ?”

“ I saw it in the papers,” said Miss Marjoribanks, whose perfect serenity offered a curious contrast to her companion's agitation. “ I am sure I shall be very glad to see him again. I hope he will come to dinner on Thursday as he used to do. It will be quite nice to see him in his old place.”

“ Yes,” said Mrs Woodburn ; “ but that was not what I was thinking of. You know you used always to say he ought to be in Parliament ; and he has always kept thinking of it since he went away—and thinking, I am sure, that it would please you,” said the poor woman, faltering ; for Lucilla listened with a smile that was quite unresponsive, and did not change countenance in the least, even at this tender suggestion. “ He has come home with that object now, you know, now that poor old Mr Chiltern is dead ; and I hope you are going to help us, Lucilla,” said Mrs Woodburn. Her voice quite vibrated with agitation as she made this hurried, perhaps injudicious, appeal, thinking within herself at the same moment what would Harry say if he knew that she was thus committing him. As for Lucilla, she received it all with the same tranquillity,

as if she expected it, and was quite prepared for everything that her assailant had to say.

“I am sure I wish I had a vote,” said Lucilla ; “but I have no vote, and what can a girl do ? I am so sorry I don’t understand about politics. If we were going in for that sort of thing, I don’t know what there would be left for the gentlemen to do.”

“You have influence, which is a great deal better than a vote,” said Mrs Woodburn ; “and they all say there is nobody like a lady for electioneering—and a young lady above all ; and then you know Harry so well, and can always draw him out to the best advantage. I never thought he looked so nice, or showed his talents so much, as when he was with you,” said the eager advocate. She was only wrapped in a shawl herself, and when she looked at Lucilla’s sealskin coat, and saw how rosy and comfortable she looked, and how serene and immovable, poor Mrs Woodburn was struck with a pang of envy. If Miss Marjoribanks had married ten years ago, it might have been she now who would have had to stand trembling with anxiety and eagerness among the falling snow, knowing sundry reasons why Mr Cavendish should be disposed to go into Parliament more substantial than that of gratifying a young lady, and feeling how much depended on her ability to secure support for him. This, as it happened, had fallen to his sister’s share instead, and Lucilla

stood opposite to her looking at her, attentive and polite, and unresponsive. If Harry had only not been such a fool ten years ago ! for Mrs Woodburn began to think now with aunt Jemima, that Lucilla did not marry because she was too comfortable, and, without any of the bother, could have everything her own way.

“It is so cold,” said Miss Marjoribanks, “and I do think it is coming on to snow very fast. I don’t think it is good to stand talking. Do come in to lunch, and then we can have a long chat ; for I am sure nobody else will venture out to-day.”

“I wish I could come,” said Mrs Woodburn, “but I have to go down to Mary Centum’s, and hear all about her last new housemaid, you know. I don’t know what servants are made of for my part. They will go out in their caps and talk to the young men, you know, in a night that is enough to give any one their death,” the mimic added, with a feeble exercise of her gift which it was sad to see. “But Harry will be sure to come to call the first time he goes out, and you *will* not forget what I have said to you, Lucilla ?” and with this Mrs Woodburn took her young friend’s hand and looked in her face with a pathetic emphasis which it would be impossible to describe.

“Oh no, certainly not,” said Miss Marjoribanks, with cheerful certainty ; and then they kissed each other in the midst of the falling snow. Mrs Woodburn’s face

was cold, but Lucilla's cheek was warm and blooming as only a clear conscience and a sealskin cloak could have made it ; and then they went their several ways through the wintry solitude. Ah, if Harry had only not been such a fool ten years ago ! Mrs Woodburn was not an enthusiastic young wife, but knew very well that marriage had its drawbacks, and had come to an age at which she could appreciate the comfort of having her own way without any of the bother. She gave a furtive glance after Lucilla, and could not but acknowledge to herself that it would be very foolish of Miss Marjoribanks to marry, and forfeit all her advantages, and take somebody else's anxieties upon her shoulders, and never have any money except what she asked from her husband. Mrs Chiley, to be sure, who was more experienced than Mrs Woodburn, and might have been her grandmother, took a different view of the subject ; but this was what the middle-aged married woman felt, who had, as may be said, two men to carry on her shoulders, as she went anxiously down Grange Lane to conciliate Mrs Centum, wrapping her shawl about her, and feeling the light snow melt beneath her feet, and the cold and discomfort go to her heart. She had her husband to keep in good humour, and her brother to keep up and keep to the mark, and to do what she could to remedy in public the effects of his indolent Continental habits, and carry, if it was possible, the

election for him—all with the horrid sense upon her mind that if at any time the dinner should be a little less cared for than usual, or the children more noisy, Woodburn would go on like a savage. Under such circumstances, the poor woman, amid her cares, may be excused if she looked back a little wistfully at Lucilla going home all comfortable and independent and light-hearted, with no cares, nor anybody to go on at her, in her sealskin coat.

This was how Lucilla commenced that effective but decorous advocacy which did Mr Ashburton so much good in Carlingford. She did not pretend to understand about politics, or to care particularly about Reform or the Income-tax ; but she expressed with quiet solemnity her conviction that it was not opinions but a good man that was wanted ; that it was not a prime minister they were going to elect, and that Mr Ashburton was the man for Carlingford. “ By George ! Lucilla is in the right of it ! ” Colonel Chiley said ; “ that was always my opinion ; ” and the people in Grange Lane soon began to echo the Colonel’s sentiments, which were so sound and so just.

As for Miss Marjoribanks, nobody had any occasion to “ go on ” about any neglect on her part of her household duties. Dr Marjoribanks’s dinners were always excellent, and it was now, as ever, a privilege

to be admitted to his table; and nothing could be more exemplary than the care Lucilla took of aunt Jemima, who had always such bad nights. Even on this snowy afternoon she went in from her more important cares, with a complexion freshened by the cold, and coaxed Mrs John into eating something, and made her as comfortable as possible at the drawing-room fireside.

“Now, tell me all about Tom,” Lucilla said, when she had got her work and settled herself comfortably for a quiet afternoon—for the snow had come on heavier than ever, and unless it might be a sister of charity, or such another sister not of charity, as Lucilla had already encountered, nobody was like to stir abroad or to disturb the two ladies in their work and their talk. Lucilla had some very interesting worsted-work in hand; and the drawing-room never looked more cozy, with somebody to talk to inside, and the wintry world and driving snow without. And such an invitation as Miss Marjoribanks had just given lifted aunt Jemima into a paradise of content. She took Lucilla at her word, and told her, as may be supposed, *all* about Tom, including many things which she was quite acquainted with and knew by heart; and at the same time there was a something implied all through, but never obtrusively set forth, which was not displeasing to the auditor. Miss Marjoribanks listened

with affectionate satisfaction, and asked a great many questions, and supplied a great many reminiscences, and entered quite into the spirit of the conversation, and the two spent a very pleasant afternoon together, —so pleasant that Mrs John felt quite annoyed at the reflection that it must come to an end like everything else that is good, and that she must get herself once more into her velvet gown and dine with her brother-in-law. If Providence had only given her the girl instead of the Doctor, who would no doubt have got on quite well without any children ! but then, to be sure, if Lucilla had been hers to start with, she never could have married Tom.

For this was the extravagant hope which had already begun to blossom in his mother's breast. To be sure a woman might marry Tom, who was too comfortable at home to think of marrying just anybody who might make her an offer. But it was not easy to tell how Lucilla herself felt on this subject. Her complexion was so bright with her walk, her sensations so agreeable after that warm, cheerful, pleasant afternoon, her position so entirely everything that was to be desired, and her mind so nobly conscious of being useful to her kind and country, that, even without any additional argument, Miss Marjoribanks had her reward, and was happy. Perhaps a touch more exquisite

might still come in to round the full proportions of content. But, to tell the truth, Lucilla was so well off that it was not necessary to invent any romantic source of happiness to account for the light of well-being and satisfaction that shone in her eyes.

CHAPTER XL.

THE result of Miss Marjoribanks's wise precaution and reticence was that Sir John Richmond and the Doctor and Colonel Chiley were all on Mr Ashburton's committee. They might not agree with his principles ; but then when a man does not state any very distinct principles, it is difficult for any one, however well disposed, to disagree with him ; and the fact that he was the man for Carlingford was so indisputable, that nobody attempted to go into the minor matters. "Mr Ashburton is a gentleman known to us all," Sir John said, with great effect, in his nomination speech ; and it was a sentence which went to the hearts of his audience. The other candidate had been a long time from home, and it was longer still since anybody in Carlingford could be said to have benefited by his residence there. He had had all his things down from town, as Mr Holden, the upholsterer, pithily remarked—and that

made a great difference to start with. As for Mr Ashburton, though it is true nobody knew what he thought about Reform or the Income-tax, everybody knew that he lived at the Firs, and was supplied in a creditable way by George Street tradesmen. There was no mystery whatever about him. People knew how much he had a-year, and how much he paid for everything, and the way in which his accounts were kept, and all about him. Even when he had his wine direct from the growers (for naturally his own county could not supply the actual liquor), it was put in Carlingford bottles, and people knew the kinds he had, and how much, and a hundred agreeable details. And then, "he was a gentleman as was always ready to give his advice," as some of the people said. All this furnished an immense body of evidence in his favour, and made Sir John's remark eloquent. And then Carlingford, as a general rule, did not care the least in the world about Reform. There were a few people who had once done so, and it was remarked in Grove Street that Mr Tozer had once been in a dreadful state of mind about it. But he was quite tranquil on the subject now, and so was the community in general. And what was really wanted, as Lucilla's genius had seen at a glance, was not this or that opinion, but a good man.

But at the same time it would be vain to deny

that Miss Marjoribanks looked forward to a possible visit from Mr Cavendish with a certain amount of anxiety. She was not frightened, for she knew her own powers; but she was a little excited and stimulated by the idea that he might come in at any minute, bringing back a crowd of recollections with him; and it was a perpetual wonder to her how he would take the inevitable difference, whether he would accept it as natural, or put on the airs of an injured man. Lucilla did not go out the two afternoons after her meeting with Mrs Woodburn, partly that she might not miss him if he called—for it was better to have it over; but Mr Cavendish did not come on either of these days. After that, of course, she did not wait for him any longer. But on the third or fourth day, when she was in Miss Brown's photographing room (the eldest Miss Brown was not married, and was a mother to the younger girls, and always enthusiastic about sitters), Mr Ashburton called about business, and Thomas came to fetch Miss Marjoribanks. She was sitting with the greatest good-nature for half-a-dozen pictures, knowing in her secret heart all the time that she would look a perfect fright, and that all Carlingford would see her grinning with imbecile amiability out of the hazy background of Miss Brown's *cartes*. Lucilla knew this, and had hitherto avoided the

process with success ; but now she gave in ; and as the Major was there, of course they talked of the coming election, which, indeed, at present was almost the only topic of conversation in Grange Lane.

“Of course, you are on Mr Ashburton’s committee,” said Lucilla ; “you must be, or going to be, after what you said the other day at lunch——”

“What did I say ?” asked Major Brown, with an air of dismay ; for, to tell the truth, his heart inclined a little towards poor Mr Cavendish, who was an old neighbour, and to whom Major Brown could not but think the Marjoribanks and others had behaved rather cruelly. But then in these electioneering matters one never knows what one may have done to compromise one’s self without meaning it ; and the Major was a little anxious to find out what he had said.

“Dear Major Brown,” said Lucilla, seriously, “I am so sorry if you did not mean it. I am sure it was that as much as anything that influenced Mr Ashburton. He was turning it all over in his mind, you know, and was afraid the people he most esteemed in Carlingford would not agree with him, and did not know what to do ; and then you said, What did it matter about opinions, if it was a good man ?—that was what decided him,” said Miss Marjoribanks, with sad yet gentle reproachfulness. “I am so sorry if you did not mean what you said——”

“ Good heavens ! I don’t remember saying anything of the sort,” said Major Brown. “ I—I am sure I never thought of influencing anybody. It is true enough about a good man, you know ; but if I had imagined for an instant that any one was paying attention—— By George ! it was you that said it, Lucilla—I remember now.”

“ Please don’t make fun of me,” said Miss Marjoribanks ; “ as if anybody cared what *I* say about politics. But I know that was what decided poor Mr Ashburton. Indeed, he told me so ; and when he finds you did not mean anything——”

“ But, good heavens !—I—I did mean something,” cried the accused, with dismay. And he grew quite inarticulate in his confusion, and red in the face, and lost his head altogether, while Lucilla sat calmly looking on with that air of virtue at once severe and indulgent, which pities, and blames, and hopes that perhaps there is not so much harm done as might have been expected. This was the position of affairs when Thomas came to say that Miss Marjoribanks was wanted, as she had told him to do when her candidate came ; for, to be sure, it was only next door. It was terrible to hear the soft sigh she gave when she shook hands with Major Brown. “ I hope he will not feel it so much as I think ; but I should be afraid to tell him,” said Lucilla ; and she went away, leaving the

good man in a state of bewilderment and embarrassment and doubt, which would have been much more unpleasant if he had not felt so flattered at the same time. "I never meant to influence anybody, I am sure," he said, with a comical mixture of complacence and dismay, when Lucilla was gone. "I have always said, papa, that you don't think enough of the weight people give to your opinion," Miss Brown replied, as she gave the final bath to her negatives; and they both left off work with a certain glow of comforted *amour propre*, and the most benevolent sentiments towards Mr Ashburton, who, to tell the truth, until he got his lesson from Miss Marjoribanks, had never once thought about the opinion of Major Brown.

He was sitting with aunt Jemima when Lucilla came in, and talking to her in a steady sort of a way. Nothing could have made Mr Ashburton socially attractive, but still there are many people to whom this steady sort of talk is more agreeable than brilliancy. When a man is brilliant there is always a doubt in some minds whether he is trustworthy, or sincere, or to be relied upon; but an ordinary common-sense sort of talker is free from such suspicion. Mr Ashburton was very sorry to hear that Mrs John Marjoribanks had bad nights, and suggested that it might be nervous, and hoped that the air of Carlingford would do her good, and was very glad to hear that her

son was getting on so well in India ; and aunt Jemima could not help approving of him, and feeling that he was a person of substance and reflection, and not one of those fly-away young men who turn girls' heads, and never mean anything. Lucilla herself gained something in Mrs John's eyes from Mr Ashburton's high opinion ; but at the same time it was quite clear that he was not thinking of anything sentimental, but was quite occupied about his election, as a man of sense should be. Lucilla came in with a fine bloom on her cheeks, but still with a shade of that sadness which had had so great an effect upon Major Brown. She had taken off her hat before she came in, and dropped into her chair with an air of languor and fatigue which was quite unusual to her. " It makes such a difference in life when one has something on one's mind," said Lucilla, and she sighed, as was but natural ; for though that did not affect the energy of her proceedings, she knew and remembered at moments of discouragement how seldom one's most disinterested exertions are appreciated at the end.

" You want your lunch, my dear," said Mrs John.

" Perhaps I do," said Miss Marjoribanks, with a mournful affectionate smile. " I have been sitting to Maria Brown. She has taken six, and I am sure they are every one more hideous than the other ; and they will go all over England, you know, for the Browns

have hosts of people belonging to them ; and everybody will say, 'So *that* is Miss Marjoribanks.' I don't think I am vain to speak of," said Lucilla, "but that sort of thing goes to one's heart."

"These amateurs are terrible people," said Mr Ashburton, in his steady way ; "and photographs are a regular nuisance. For my part——"

"Don't say that," said Miss Marjoribanks. "I know what you are going to say ; and you *must* sit to her, please. I have said already she must do one of you ; and I will tell you presently about the Major. But wait and talk to aunt Jemima a little, for I am so tired," said Lucilla. She was lying back negligently in her seat, with that air of languor which so many young ladies excel in, but which was for her a novel indulgence. Her hand hung over the arm of her chair as if there was no longer any force in it. Her head fell back, her eyes were half closed ; it was a moment of abandonment to her sensations, such as a high-principled young woman like Miss Marjoribanks seldom gives way to. But Lucilla went into it conscientiously, as into everything she did, that she might regain her strength for the necessary duties that were before her.

And it was at this moment that Thomas appeared at the door with a suspicion of a grin appearing at the corners of his sober mouth, and announced Mr

Cavendish, who came in before an ordinary woman would have had time to open her eyes. This was the moment he had chosen for his first visit ; and yet it was not he who had chosen it, but fate, who seemed to have in this respect a spite against Lucilla. It was not only the embarrassing presence of his rival, but the fact that neither of the two people in the room knew or had ever seen Mr Cavendish, that put a climax to the horror of the situation. She alone knew him, and had to take upon herself to present and introduce him, and bridge over for him the long interval of absence, and all this with the sense of being in the enemy's interest, and to a certain extent false to Mr Cavendish ! Lucilla rose at once, but she was not a woman to make pretences. She did not throw off all in a moment her fatigue, and dash into spasmodic action. She held out her hand silently to Mr Cavendish, with a look which spoke only affectionate satisfaction in a friend's return. She did not even speak at all for the first moment, but contented herself with a look, which indeed, if he had been younger and less preoccupied, would no doubt have touched his very heart.

“So you have really come back,” she said. “I am so glad ! after all that people said about your being married and dead and ever so many stupid things. Oh ! don't look at me, please. It doesn't matter with

a gentleman, but I know as well as if you had told me that you think me dreadfully gone off——”

“*I entertain such a profane idea!*” said Mr Cavendish ; but he was considerably embarrassed, and he was a great deal stouter, and altogether different from what he used to be, and he had not the light hand of his youth for a compliment. And then he sat down on the chair Thomas had given him ; and he looked uncomfortable, to say the least of it ; and he was getting large in dimensions and a little red in the face, and had by no means the air of thinking that it didn't matter for a gentleman. As for Miss Marjoribanks, it would be impossible to say what mists of illusion dropped away from her mind at the sight of him. Even while she smiled upon the new-comer, she could not but ask herself, with momentary dismay—Had *she* really gone off as much in the same time ?

“I have been looking for you,” Miss Marjoribanks resumed ; “I waited in for you Tuesday and Wednesday, and it is so odd you should have come just at this minute. Aunt Jenima, this is Mr Cavendish, whom you have heard so much about—and don't go, please, Mr Ashburton—you two must know each other. You will be hearing of each other constantly ; and I suppose you will have to shake hands or something on the hustings—so it will be much the best to begin it here.”

But the two candidates did not shake hands : they

bowed to each other in an alarming way, which did not promise much for their future brotherliness, and then they both stood bolt upright and stared at Miss Marjoribanks, who had relapsed, in the pleasantest way in the world, into her easy-chair.

“Now, please sit down and talk a little,” said Lucilla ; “ I am so proud of having you both together. There never has been anybody in the world that I have missed so much as *you*—you knew that when you went away, but you didn’t mind. Mr Ashburton is very nice, but he is of no use to speak of in an evening,” said Miss Marjoribanks, turning a reflective glance upon her own candidate with a certain sadness ; and then they both laughed as if it was a joke ; but it was no joke, as one of them at least must have known.

“Lucilla,” said Mrs John, with consternation, “ I never heard anybody talk as you do ; I am sure Mr Ashburton is the very best of society, and as for Mr Cavendish——”

“Dear aunt Jemima,” said Lucilla, “would you mind ringing the bell ? I have been sitting to Maria Brown, and I am almost fainting. I wish you gentlemen would sit to her ; it would please her, and it would not do *you* much harm ; and then for your constituents, you know——”

“I hope you don’t wish me to look like one of Maria Brown’s photographs to *my* constituents,” said

Mr Cavendish ; “ but then I am happy to say they all know me pretty well.” This was said with a slight touch of gentlemanly spite, if there is such a thing ; for, after all, he *was* an old power in Carlingford, though he had been so long away.

“ Yes,” said Lucilla, reflectively, “ but you are a little changed since then ; a little perhaps—just a little—stouter, and——”

“ Gone off ?” said Mr Cavendish, with a laugh ; but he felt horribly disconcerted all the same, and savage with Miss Marjoribanks, and could not think why “ that fellow ” did not go away. What had *he* to do in Lucilla’s drawing-room ? what did he mean by sitting down again and talking in that measured way to the old lady, as if all the ordinary rules of good breeding did not point out to him that he should have gone away and left the field clear ?

“ Oh, you know it does not matter for a gentleman,” said Lucilla ; and then she turned to Mr Ashburton—“ I am sure the Major wants to see you, and he thinks that it was he who put it into your head to stand. He was here that day at lunch, you know, and it was something he said——”

“ Quite true,” said Mr Ashburton in his business way. “ I shall go to see him at once. Thank you for telling me of it, Miss Marjoribanks ; I shall go as soon as I leave here.”

And then Mr Cavendish laughed. "This is what I call interesting," he said. "I hope Mr Ashburton sees the fun ; but it is trying to an old friend to hear of *that* day at lunch, you know. I remember when these sort of allusions used to be pleasant enough ; but when one has been banished for a thousand years——"

"Yes," said Lucilla, "one leaves all that behind, you know—one leaves ever so many things behind. I wish we could always be twenty, for my part. I always said, you know, that I should be gone off in ten years."

"Was it the only fib you ever told that you repeat it so?" said Mr Cavendish ; and it was with this pretty speech that he took her down-stairs to the well-remembered luncheon. "But you *have* gone off in some things when you have to do with a prig like that," he said in her ear, as they went down together, "and cast off old friends. It was a thing a fellow did not expect of *you*."

"I never cast off old friends," said Miss Marjoribanks. "We shall look for you on Thursday, 'you know, all the same. Must you go, Mr Ashburton? when lunch is on the table? But then, to be sure, you will be in time at the Browns'," said Lucilla, sweetly, and she gave the one rival her hand while she held the arm of the other, at the door of the dining-room, in which Mr Ashburton had gallantly deposited aunt Jemima before saying good-bye. They were

both looking a little black, though the gloom was moderate in Mr Ashburton's case ; but as for Lucilla, she stood between them a picture of angelic sweetness and goodness, giving a certain measure of her sympathy to both—Woman the Reconciler, by the side of those other characters of Inspirer and Consoler, of which the world has heard. The two inferior creatures scowled with politeness at each other, but Miss Marjoribanks smiled upon them both. Such was the way in which she overcame the difficulties of the meeting. Mr Ashburton went away a little annoyed, but still understanding his instructions, and ready to act upon them in that businesslike way he had, and Mr Cavendish remained, faintly reassured in the midst of his soreness and mortification, by at least having the field to himself and seeing the last (for the present) of his antagonist—which was a kind of victory in its way.

“I thought I knew you better than to think you ever would have anything to do with *that* sort of thing,” said Mr Cavendish. “There are people, you know, whom I could have imagined—but a prig like that.” He became indeed quite violent, as aunt Jemima said afterwards, and met with that lady's decided disapproval, as may be supposed.

“Mr Ashburton is very well-bred and agreeable,” Mrs John said, with emphasis. “I wish all the young men I see nowadays were as nice.”

“Young men!” said Mr Cavendish. “Is that what people call young nowadays? And he must be insane, you know, or he would never dream of representing a town without saying a single word about his principles. I daresay he thinks it is original,” said the unhappy man. He thought he was pointing out his rival’s weakness to Lucilla, and he went on with energy—“I know you better than to think you can like that milk-and-water sort of thing.”

“Oh, I don’t pretend to know anything about politics,” said Lucilla. “I hear you gentlemen talk, but I never pretend to understand. If we were not to leave you *that* all to yourselves, I don’t know what you could find to do,” Miss Marjoribanks added compassionately; and as she spoke she looked so like the Lucilla of old, who had schemed and plotted for Mr Cavendish, that he could not believe in her desertion in his heart.

“That is a delusion like the going off,” he said. “I can’t believe you have gone over to the enemy. When I remember how I have been roving about all those ten years, and how different it might have been, and whose fault it all was——”

This Mr Cavendish said in a low voice, but it did not the less horrify aunt Jemima, who felt prepared for any atrocity after it. She would have

withdrawn, in justice to her own sense of propriety ; but then she thought it was not impossible that he might propose to Lucilla on the spot, or take her hand or something, and for propriety's sake she stayed.

“Yes,” said Lucilla—and her heart did for one little moment give a faint thump against her breast. She could not help thinking what a difference it might have made to him, poor fellow, had he been under her lawful and righteous sway these ten years. But as she looked at him it became more and more apparent to Miss Marjoribanks that Mr Cavendish *had* gone off, whatever she herself might have done. The outlines of his fine figure had changed considerably, and his face was a little red, and he had the look of a man whose circumstances, spiritual and temporal, would not quite bear a rigid examination. As she looked at him her pity became tinged by a certain shade of resentment, to think that after all it was his own fault. She could not, notwithstanding her natural frankness of expression, say to him—“You foolish soul, why didn't you marry me somehow, and make a man of yourself?” Lucilla carried honesty very far, but she could not go as far as that. “Yes,” she said, turning her eyes upon him with a sort of abstract sympathy, and then

she added softly—"Have you ever seen Her again?" with a lowering of her voice.

This interesting question, which utterly bewildered aunt Jemima, drove Mr Cavendish wild with rage. Mrs John said afterwards that she felt a shiver go through her as he took up the carving-knife, though it was only to cut some cold beef. He grew white all at once, and pressed his lips tightly together, and fixed his eyes on the wall straight before him. "I did not think, after what I once said to you, Miss Marjoribanks, that you would continue to insult my judgment in that way," he said, with a chill which fell upon the whole table, and took the life out of everything, and dimmed the very fire in the chimney. And after that the conversation was of a sufficiently ordinary description until they went back again into the drawing-room, by which time Mr Cavendish seemed to have concluded that it was best to pocket the affront.

"I am going to begin my canvass to-morrow," he said. "I have not seen anybody yet. I have nobody but my sister to take *me* in hand, you know. There was once a time when it might have been different"—and he gave Lucilla a look which she thought on the whole it was best to meet.

"Yes," said Miss Marjoribanks, with cruel distinct-

ness, "there was a time when you were the most popular man in Grange Lane—everybody was fond of you. I remember it as if it had been yesterday," said Lucilla, with a sigh.

"You don't give a man much encouragement, by Jove!" said the unlucky candidate. "You remember it like yesterday! It may be vanity, but I flatter myself I shall still be found the most popular man in Grange Lane."

Miss Marjoribanks sighed again, but she did not say anything. On the contrary she turned to aunt Jemima, who kept in the background an alarmed and alert spectator, to consult her about a shade of wool; and just then Mr Cavendish, looking out of the window, saw Major Brown conducting his rival through his garden, and shaking hands with him cordially at the door. This was more than the patience of the other candidate could bear. A sudden resolution, hot and angry, as are the resolutions of men who feel themselves to have a failing cause, came into his mind. He had been badgered and baited to such an extent (as he thought) that he had not time to consider if it was wise or not. He, too, had sat to Maria Brown, and commanded once the warmest admiration of the household. He thought he would put it to the test, and see if after all his popularity was only a thing to

be remembered like yesterday ;—and it was with this intention that he bade a hurried good-bye to Lucilla, and, rushing out, threw himself at once upon the troubled waves of society, which had once been as smooth as glass to the most popular man in Grange Lane.

CHAPTER XLI.

MR CAVENDISH thought he had been an object of admiration to Maria Brown, as we have said. He thought of it with a little middle-aged complacency, and a confidence that this vague sentiment would stand the test he was about to apply to it, which did honour to the freshness of his heart. With this idea it was Miss Brown he asked for as he knocked at the Major's door; and he found them both in the drawing-room, Maria with gloves on to hide the honourable stains of her photography, which made her comparatively useless when she was out of her "studio"—and her father walking about in a state of excitement, which was, indeed, what Mr Cavendish expected. The two exchanged a guilty look when they saw who their visitor was. They looked as people might well look who had been caught in the fact and did not know how to get over it. They came forward, both of them, with a cowardly cordiality and eagerness to welcome

him—"How very good of you to come to see us so soon!" Miss Brown said, and fluttered and looked at her father, and could not tell what more to say. And then a dead pause fell upon them—such a pause as not unfrequently falls upon people who have got through their mutual greetings almost with an excess of cordiality. They stopped short all at once, and looked at each other, and smiled, and made a fatal conscious effort to talk of something. "It is so good of you to come so soon," Miss Brown repeated; "perhaps you have been to see Lucilla," and then she stopped again, slightly tremulous, and turned an appealing gaze to her papa.

"I have come to see *you*," said Mr Cavendish, plucking up all his courage. "I have been a long time gone, you know, but I have not forgotten Carlingford; and you must forgive me for saying that I was very glad to hear I might still come to see—Miss Brown. As for Lydia?" said the candidate, looking about him with a smile.

"Ah, Lydia," said her sister, with a sigh—"her eldest is eight, Mr Cavendish. We don't see her so often as we should like—marriage makes such a difference. Of course it is quite natural she should be all for her own family now."

"Quite natural," said Mr Cavendish, and then he turned to the Major. "I don't think there are quite

so many public changes as I expected to see. The old Rector always holds out, and the old Colonel; and you have not done much that I can see about the new paving. You know what I have come home about, Major; and I am sure I can count upon you to support me," the candidate said, with a great deal more confidence than he felt in his voice.

Major Brown cleared his throat; his heart was moved by the familiar voice, and he could not conceal his embarrassment. "I hope nothing will ever occur," he said, "to make any difference in the friendly feelings—I am sure I shall be very glad to welcome you back permanently to Carlingford. You may always rest assured of that," and he held out his hand. But he grew red as he thought of his treachery, and Maria, who was quaking over it, did not even try to say a word to help him—and as for Mr Cavendish, he took up his position on the arm of the sofa, as he used to do. But he had a slim youthful figure when he used to do it, and now the attitude was one which revealed a certain dawning rotundity, very different, as Maria afterwards said, from one's idea of Mr Cavendish. He was not aware of it himself, but as these two people looked, their simultaneous thought was how much he had changed.

"Thank you, you are very kind," said Mr Cavendish. "I have been a little lazy, I am afraid, since I came

here ; but I expect my agent down to-night, and then, I hope, you'll come over to my place and have a talk with Woodburn and Centum and the rest about it. I am a poor tactician, for my part. You shall contrive what is best to be done, and I'll carry it out. I suppose I may expect almost to walk over," he said. It was the confidence of despair that moved him. The more he saw that his cause was lost, the more he would make it out that he was sure to win—which is not an unusual state of mind.

"I—I don't know, I am sure," said poor Major Brown. "To tell the truth, I—though I can safely say my sympathies are always with you, Cavendish—I—have been so unfortunate as to commit myself, you know. It was quite involuntary, I am sure, for I never thought my casual expression of opinion likely to have any weight——"

"Papa never will perceive the weight that is attached to his opinion," said Miss Brown.

"I was not thinking of it in the least, Maria," said the modest Major ; "but the fact is, it seems to have been *that* that decided Ashburton to stand ; and after drawing a man in to such a thing, the least one can do is to back him out in it. Nobody had an idea then, you know, that you were coming back, my dear fellow. I assure you, if I had known——"

"But even if you had known, you know you never

meant it, papa," said Maria. And Mr Cavendish sat on the arm of the sofa, and put his hands deep into his pockets, and dropped his upper lip, and knit his eyebrows a little, and listened to the anxious people excusing themselves. He did not make any answer one way or another. He was terribly mortified and disappointed, and it went against his pride to make any further remonstrances. When they had done, he got down off his seat and took his right hand out of his pocket and offered it to Miss Brown, who, putting her own into it, poor soul! with the remembrance of her ancient allegiance, was like to cry.

"Well," he said, "if that is the case, I suppose I need not bother you any longer. You'll give me your good wishes all the same. I used to hear of Ashburton sometimes, but I never had the least idea he was so popular. And to tell the truth, I don't think he's any great things to brag of—though I suppose it's not to be expected *I* should appreciate his qualities," Mr Cavendish added, with a laugh. As for Miss Brown, it was all she could do to keep from crying as he went away. She said she could see, by the way he left the drawing-room, that he was a stricken deer; and yet, notwithstanding this sympathetic feeling, she could not but acknowledge, when Miss Marjoribanks mentioned it, that, to have been such a handsome man, he was inconceivably gone off.

Mr Cavendish went up Grange Lane with his hands in his pockets, and tried to think that he did not care ; but he did care all the same, and was very bitter in his mind over the failure of friends and the vanity of expectations. The last time he had walked past those garden walls he had thought himself sure of the support of Carlingford, and the personal esteem of all the people in all the houses he was passing. It was after the Archdeacon had broken down in his case against the man whom he called an adventurer, and when Mr Cavendish felt all the sweetness of being a member of an oligarchy, and entitled to the sympathy and support of his order. Now he went along the same path with his hat over his ears and his hands in his pockets, and rage and pain in his heart. Whose fault was it that his friends had deserted him and Carlingford knew him no more ? He might as well have asked whose fault it was that he was getting stout and red in the face, and had not the same grace of figure nor ease of mind as he used to have ? He had come very near to settling down and becoming a man of domestic respectability in this quiet place, and he had just escaped in time, and had laughed over it since, and imagined himself, with much glee, an old fogie looking after a lot of children. But the fact is that men do become old fogies even when they have no children to look

after, and lose their figure and their elasticity just as soon and perhaps a little sooner in the midst of what is called life than in any milder scene of enjoyment. And it would have been very handy just now to have been sure of his election without paying much for it. He had been living fast, and spending a great deal of money, and this, after all, was the only real ambition he had ever had ; and he had thought within himself that if he won he would change his mode of life, and turn over a new leaf, and become all at once a different man. When a man has made such a resolution, and feels not only that a mere success but a moral reformation depends upon his victory, he may be permitted to consider that he has a right to win ; and it may be divined what his state of mind was when he had made the discovery that even his old friends did not see his election to be of any such importance as he did, and could think of a miserable little bit of self-importance or gratified vanity more than of his interests—even the women who had once been so kind to him ! He had just got so far in his thoughts when he met Mr Centum, who stared for a moment, and then burst into one of his great laughs as he greeted him. “ Good Lord ! Cavendish, is this you ? I never expected to see you like that ! ” the banker said, in his coarse way. “ You’re stouter than I am,

old fellow ; and such an Adonis as you used to be ! ” Mr Cavendish had to bear all this without giving way to his feelings, or even showing them any more than he could help it. Nobody would spare him that imbecile suggestion as to how things used to be. To be growing stouter than Centum without Centum’s excuse of being a well-to-do householder and father of a family, and respectable man from whom stoutness was expected, was very bitter to him ; but he had to gulp it down, and recollect that Centum was as yet the only influential supporter, except his brother-in-law, whom he had in Carlingford.

“ What have you been doing with yourself since you came that nobody has seen you ? ” said Mr Centum. “ If you are to do any good here, you know, we shall have to look alive. ”

“ I have been ill, ” said the unfortunate candidate, with a little natural loss of temper. “ You would not have a man to trudge about at this time of year in all weathers when he is ill. ”

“ I would not be ill again, if I were you, till it’s all over, ” said Mr Centum. “ We shall have to fight every inch of our ground ; and I tell you that fellow Ashburton knows what he’s about—he goes at everything in a steady sort of way. He’s not brilliant, you know, but he’s sure—— ”

“ Brilliant ! ” said Mr Cavendish, “ I should think

not. It is Lucilla Marjoribanks who is putting him up to it. You know she had an old grudge at me."

"Oh, nonsense about Lucilla," said Mr Centum. "I can tell you Ashburton is not at all a contemptible adversary. He is going to work in the cunningest way—not a woman's sort of thing; and he's not a ladies'-man like you," the banker added, with a laugh. "But I am afraid you can't go in for that sort of thing as you used to do, Cavendish. You should marry, and settle, and become a steady member of society, now you've grown so stout." This was the kind of way in which he was addressed even by his own supporter, who uttered another great laugh as he went off upon his busy way. It was a sort of thing Mr Cavendish was not used to, and he felt it accordingly. To be sure he knew that he was ten years older, and that there were several things which he could not do with the same facility as in his youth. But he had saved up Carlingford in his imagination as a spot in which he would always be young, and where nobody should find out the difference; and instead of that, it was precisely in Carlingford that he was fated to hear how changed he was, with a frankness which only old friends would have been justified in using. As for Lucilla Marjoribanks, she was rather better looking than otherwise, and absolutely had not gone off. It did not occur to Mr Cavendish that this might be because Lucilla at

present was not still so old as he had been ten years ago, in the period which he now considered his youth. He was rather disposed, on the contrary, to take a moral view, and to consider that it was her feminine incapacity for going too far, which had kept years and amusements from having their due effect upon Miss Marjoribanks. And, poor fellow, he *had* gone too far. He had not been as careful in his life as he might have been had he stayed at Carlingford ; and now he was paying the penalty. Such was the edifying state of mind which he had come to when he reached the top of Grove Street. And there a waft of soft recollections came across his mind. In the absence of all sympathy he could not help turning back to the thought of the enchantress of old who used to sing to him, and listen to him, and storm at him. Probably he would have ended by strolling along the familiar street, and canvassing for Mr Lake's vote, which would have done him no good in Carlingford, but just then Dr Marjoribanks stopped in his brougham. The Doctor was looking very strange that morning, though nobody had particularly remarked it—perhaps because he smoothed his countenance when he was out of the brougham, which was his refuge when he had anything to think about. But he stopped suddenly to speak to Mr Cavendish, and perhaps he had not time to perform that ceremony. He looked dark and cloudy, and con-

strained, and as if he forced himself to speak ; which, to be sure, under the circumstances, was not so very strange.

“I am very glad to see you,” the Doctor said, “though you were a day too late, you know. Why didn’t you give us warning before we all went and committed ourselves ? If we had known that you were coming——”

“Ah, that’s what old Brown said,” said Mr Cavendish, with a slight shrug of his shoulders ; which was imprudent, for the Major was not so old as the Doctor, and besides was a much less important man in Grange Lane.

“So you have been to see old Brown,” said Dr Marjoribanks, in his dry way. “He always was a great admirer of yours. I can’t wish you luck, you know, for if you win we lose——”

“Oh, I don’t want you to wish me luck. I don’t suppose there can be much comparison between my chance and that of a new man whom nobody ever heard of in my time,” said the candidate for Carlingford. “I thought you Scotchmen, Doctor, always liked to be on the winning side.”

“We’ve a way of making our side the winning side,” said Dr Marjoribanks, grimly, for he was touchy where his nationality was concerned. “Health all right, I hope ?” he added, looking at Mr Caven-

dish with that critical medical glance which shows that a verbal response is quite unnecessary. This time there was in the look a certain insinuation of doubt on the subject, which was not pleasant. "You are getting stout, I see," Dr Marjoribanks added—not laughing, but as if that too was poor Mr Cavendish's fault.

"Yes, I'm very well," he answered, curtly; but the truth was that he did not feel sure that he was quite well after he had seen the critical look in Dr Marjoribanks's eye.

"You young men always go too fast," said the Doctor, with a strange little smile; but the term at least was consolatory; and after that Dr Marjoribanks quite changed his tone. "Have you heard Woodburn talking of that great crash in town?" he said—"that India house, you know—I suppose it's quite true?"

"Quite true," said Mr Cavendish, promptly, and somehow he felt a pleasure in saying it. "I got all the particulars to-day in one of my letters—and lots of private people involved, which is always the way with these old houses," he added, with a mixture of curiosity and malice—"widows, and all sorts of superannuated folks."

"It's a great pity," said the Doctor: "I knew old Lichfield once, the chief partner—I am very sorry

to hear it's true;" and then the two shook hands, and the brougham drove on. As for Mr Cavendish, he made up his mind at once that the Doctor was involved, and was not sorry, and felt that it was a sort of judicial recompense for his desertion of his friends. And he went home to tell his sister of it, who shared in his sentiments. And then it was not worth while going out any more that day—for the electioneering agent, who knew all about it, was not coming till the last train. "I suppose I shall have to work when he is here," Mr Cavendish said. And in the mean time he threw himself into an easy-chair. Perhaps that was why he was getting so stout.

And in the mean time the Doctor went on visiting his patients. When he came back to his brougham between his visits, and went bowling along in that comfortable way, along the familiar roads, there was a certain glumness upon his face. He was not a demonstrative man, but when he was alone you could tell by certain lines about the well-worn cordage of his countenance whether all was right with the Doctor; and it was easy to see just at this moment that all was not right with him. But he did not say anything about it when he got home; on the contrary, he was just as usual, and told his daughter all about his encounter with Mr Cavandish. "A man at his time of life has no right to get fat—it's a sort of thing I don't like

to see. And he'll never be a ladies' man no more, Lucilla," said the Doctor, with a gleam of humour in his eye.

"He is exactly like George the Fourth, papa," said Miss Marjoribanks ; and the Doctor laughed as he sat down to dinner. If he had anything on his mind he bore it like a hero, and gave no sign ; but then, as Mrs John very truly remarked, when a man does not disclose his annoyances they always tell more upon him in the end.

CHAPTER XLII.

THERE were a great many reasons why this should be a critical period in Miss Marjoribanks's life. For one thing, it was the limit she had always proposed to herself for her term of young-ladyhood ; and naturally, as she outgrew the age for them, she felt disposed to put away childish things. To have the control of society in her hands was a great thing ; but still the mere means, without any end, was not worth Lucilla's while—and her Thursdays were almost a bore to her in her present stage of development. They occurred every week, to be sure, as usual ; but the machinery was all perfect, and went on by itself, and it was not in the nature of things that such a light adjunct of existence should satisfy Lucilla, as she opened out into the ripeness of her thirtieth year. It was this that made Mr Ashburton so interesting to her, and his election a matter into which she entered so warmly, for she had come to an age at which she might have

gone into Parliament herself had there been no disqualification of sex, and when it was almost a necessity for her to make some use of her social influence. Miss Marjoribanks had her own ideas in respect to charity, and never went upon ladies' committees, nor took any further share than what was proper and necessary in parish work ; and when a woman has an active mind, and still does not care for parish work, it is a little hard for her to find a "sphere." And Lucilla, though she said nothing about a sphere, was still more or less in that condition of mind which has been so often and so fully described to the British public—when the ripe female intelligence, not having the natural resource of a nursery and a husband to manage, turns inwards, and begins to "make a protest" against the existing order of society, and to call the world to account for giving it no due occupation—and to consume itself. She was not the woman to make protests, nor to claim for herself the doubtful honours of a false position ; but she felt all the same that at her age she had outlived the occupations that were sufficient for her youth. To be sure, there were still the dinners to attend to, a branch of human affairs worthy of the weightiest consideration, and she had a house of her own, as much as if she had been half-a-dozen times married ; but still there are instincts which go even beyond dinners, and Lucilla had become conscious

that her capabilities were greater than her work. She was a Power in Carlingford, and she knew it; but still there is little good in the existence of a Power unless it can be made use of for some worthy end.

She was coming up Grange Lane rather late one evening, pondering upon these things—thinking within herself compassionately of poor Mr Cavendish, a little in the same way as he had been thinking of her, but from the opposite point of view. For Lucilla could not but see the antithesis of their position, and how he was the foolish apprentice who had chosen his own way and was coming to a bad end, while she was the steady one about to ride by in her Lord Mayor's coach. And Miss Marjoribanks was thinking at the same time of the other candidate, whose canvass was going on so successfully; and that, after the election and all the excitement was over, she would feel a blank. There could be no doubt she would feel a blank—and Lucilla did not see how the blank was to be filled up as she looked into the future; for, as has been said, parish work was not much in her way, and for a woman who feels that she is a Power, there are so few other outlets. She was a little disheartened as she thought it all over. Gleams of possibility, it is true, crossed her mind, such as that of marrying the member for Carlingford, for instance, and thus beginning a new and more important career; but she was too

experienced a woman not to be aware by this time, that possibilities which did not depend upon herself alone had better not be calculated upon. And there did occur to her, among other things, the idea of making a great Experiment which could be carried out only by a woman of genius—of marrying a poor man, and affording to Carlingford and England an example which might influence unborn generations. Such were the thoughts that were passing through her mind when, to her great surprise, she came up to her father, walking up Grange Lane over the dirty remains of the snow—for there was a great deal of snow that year. It was so strange a sight to see Dr Marjoribanks walking that at the first glance Lucilla was startled, and thought something was the matter; but, of course, it all arose from a perfectly natural and explainable cause.

“I have been down to see Mrs Chiley,” said the Doctor; “she has her rheumatism very bad again; and the horse has been so long out that I thought I would walk home. I think the old lady is a little upset about Cavendish, Lucilla. He was always a pet of hers.”

“Dear Mrs Chiley! she is not very bad, I hope?” said Miss Marjoribanks.

“Oh no, she is not very bad,” said the Doctor, in a dreary tone. “The poor old machine is just about

breaking up, that is all. We can cobble it this once, but next time perhaps——”

“Don’t talk in such a disheartening way, papa,” said Lucilla. “I am sure she is not so very old.”

“We’re all pretty old, for that matter,” said the Doctor; “we can’t run on for ever, you know. If you had been a boy like that stupid fellow Tom, you might have carried on my practice, Lucilla—and even extended it, I shouldn’t wonder,” Dr Marjoribanks added, with a little grunt, as who should say *that* is the way of the world.

“But I am not a boy,” said Lucilla, mildly; “and even if I had been, you know, I might have chosen another profession. Tom never had any turn for medicine that I ever heard of——”

“I hope you know pretty well about all the turns he ever had with that old—woman,” said the Doctor, pulling himself up sharply, “always at your ear. I suppose she never talks of anything else. But I hope you have too much sense for that sort of thing, Lucilla. Tom will never be anything but a poor man if he were to live a hundred years.”

“Perhaps not, papa,” said Lucilla, with a little sigh. The Doctor knew nothing about the great social experiment which it had entered into Miss Marjoribanks’s mind to make for the regeneration of her contemporaries and the good of society, or possibly he might

not have distinguished Tom by that particular title. Was it he, perhaps, who was destined to be the hero of a domestic drama embodying the best principles of that Moral Philosophy which Lucilla had studied with such success at Mount Pleasant? She did not ask herself the question, for things had not as yet come to that point, but it gleamed upon her mind as by a side-light.

“I don’t know how you would get on if you were poor,” said the Doctor. “I don’t think that would suit you. You would make somebody a capital wife, I can say that for you, Lucilla, that had plenty of money and a liberal disposition like yourself. But poverty is another sort of thing, I can tell you. Luckily you’re old enough to have got over all the love-in-a-cottage ideas—if you ever had them,” Dr Marjoribanks added. He was a worldly man himself, and he thought his daughter a worldly woman; and yet, though he thoroughly approved of it, he still despised Lucilla a little for her prudence, which is a paradoxical state of mind not very unusual in the world.

“I don’t think I ever had them,” said Lucilla—“not that kind of poverty. I know what a cottage means; it means a wretched man, always about the house with his feet in slippers, you know—what poor dear Mr Cavendish would come to if he was poor——”

The Doctor laughed, though he had not seemed up to this moment much disposed for laughing. "So that is all your opinion of Cavendish," he said; "and I don't think you are far wrong either; and yet that was a young fellow that might have done better," Dr Marjoribanks said reflectively, perhaps not without a slight prick of conscience that he had forsaken an old friend.

"Yes," said Lucilla, with a certain solemnity—"but you know, papa, if a man will not when he may——" And she sighed, though the Doctor, who had not been thinking of Mr Cavendish's prospects in that light, laughed once more; but it was a sharp sort of sudden laugh without much heart in it. He had most likely other things of more importance in his mind.

"Well, there have been a great many off and on since that time," he said, smiling rather grimly. "It is time you were thinking about it seriously, Lucilla. I am not so sure about some things as I once was, and I'd rather like to see you well settled before—— It's a kind of prejudice a man has," the Doctor said abruptly, which, whatever he might mean by it, was a dismal sort of speech to make.

"Before what, papa?" asked Lucilla, with a little alarm.

"Tut—before long, to be sure," he said, impatiently. "Ashburton would not be at all amiss if he liked it

and you liked it ; but it's no use making any suggestions about those things. So long as you don't marry a fool——" Dr Marjoribanks said, with energy. "I know—that is, of course, I've *seen* what that is ; you can't expect to get perfection, as you might have looked for perhaps at twenty ; but I advise you to marry, Lucilla. I don't think you are cut out for a single woman, for my part."

"I don't see the good of single women," said Lucilla, "unless they are awfully rich ; and I don't suppose I shall ever be awfully rich. But, papa, so long as I can be a comfort to you——"

"Yes," said the Doctor, with that tone which Lucilla could remember fifteen years ago, when she made the same magnanimous suggestion, "but I can't live for ever, you know. It would be a pity to sacrifice yourself to me, and then perhaps next morning find that it was a useless sacrifice. It very often happens like that when self-devotion is carried too far. You've behaved very well, and shown a great deal of good sense, Lucilla—more than I gave you credit for when you commenced—I may say that ; and if there was to be any change, for instance——"

"What change?" said Lucilla, not without some anxiety ; for it was an odd way of talking, to say the least of it ; but the Doctor had come to a pause, and did not seem disposed to resume.

“ It is not so pleasant as I thought walking over this snow,” he said ; “ I can’t give *that* up, that I can see. And there’s more snow in the air if I’m any judge of the weather. There—go in—go in; don’t wait for me;—but mind you make haste and dress, for I want my dinner. I may have to go down to Mrs Chiley again to-night.”

It was an odd way of talking, and it was odd to break off like this ; but then, to be sure, there was no occasion for any more conversation, since they had just arrived at their own door. It made Lucilla uneasy for the moment, but while she was dressing she managed to explain it to herself, and to think, after all, it was only natural that her papa should have seen a little into the movement and commotion of her thoughts ; and then poor dear old Mrs Chiley being so ill, who was one of his own set, so to speak. He was quite cheerful later in the evening, and enjoyed his dinner, and was even more civil than usual to Mrs John. And though he did not come up to tea, he made his appearance afterwards with a flake of new-fallen snow still upon his rusty grey whiskers. He had gone to see his patient again, notwithstanding the silent storm outside. And his countenance was a little overcast this time, no doubt by the late walk, and the serious state Mrs Chiley was in, and his encounter with the snow.

“ Oh yes, she is better,” he said. “ I knew she would do this time. People at our time of life don't go off in that accidental kind of way. When a woman has been so long used to living, it takes her a time to get into the way of dying. She might be a long time thinking about it yet, if all goes well——”

“ Papa, don't speak like that !” said Lucilla. “ Dying ! I can't bear to think of such a thing. She is not so very old.”

“ Such things will happen whether you can bear to think of them or not,” said the Doctor. “ I said you would go down and see her to-morrow. We've all held out a long time—the lot of us. I don't like to think of the first gap myself, but somebody must make a beginning, you know.”

“ The Chileys were always older than you,” said Mrs John. “ I remember in poor Mrs Marjoribanks's time:—they were quite elderly then, and you were just beginning. When my Tom was a baby——”

“ We were always of the same set,” said the Doctor, interrupting her without hesitation. “ Lucilla, they say Cavendish has got hold of the Rector. He has made believe to be penitent, you know. That is cleverer than anything you could have done. And if he can't be won back again it will be serious, the Colonel says. You are to try if you can suggest anything. It seems,” said the Doctor, with mingled

amusement and satire, and a kind of gratification "that Ashburton has great confidence in you."

"It must have been the agent," said Lucilla. "I don't think any of the rest of them are equal to that, I don't see, if that is the case, how we are to win him back. If Mr Ashburton had ever done anything very wicked, perhaps——"

"You are safe to say *he* is not penitent anyhow," said Dr Marjoribanks, and he took his candle and went away with a smile. But either Mr Ashburton's good opinion of Lucilla, or some other notion, had touched the Doctor. He was not a man who said much at any time, but when he bade her good-night, his hand drooped upon Lucilla's shoulder, and he patted it softly, as he might have patted the head of a child. It was not much, but still it was a good deal from him. To feel the lingering touch of her father's hand caressing her, even in so mild a way, was something quite surprising and strange to Miss Marjoribanks. She looked up at him almost with alarm, but he was just then turning away with his candle in his hand. And he seemed to have laid aside his gloom, and even smiled to himself as he went up-stairs. "If *she* had been the boy instead of that young ass," he said to himself. He could not have explained why he was more than ordinarily hard just then upon the innocent, far-distant Tom, who was unlucky, it is true, but not exactly an ass, after all:

But somehow it struck the Doctor more than ever how great a loss it was to society and to herself that Lucilla was not "the boy." She could have continued, and perhaps extended, the practice, whereas just now it was quite possible that she might drop down into worsted-work and tea-parties like any other single woman—while Tom, who had carried off the family honours, and was "the boy" in this limited and unfruitful generation, was never likely to do anything to speak of, and would be a poor man if he were to live for a hundred years. Perhaps there was something else behind that made the Doctor's brow contract a little as he crossed the threshold of his chamber, into which, no more than into the recesses of his heart, no one ever penetrated; but it was the lighter idea of that comparison, which had no actual pain in it, but only a kind of humorous discontent, which was the last articulate thought in his mind as he went to his room and closed his door with a little sharpness, as he always did, upon the outside world.

Aunt Jemima, for her part, lingered a little with Lucilla down-stairs. "My dear, I don't think my brother-in-law looks well to-night. I don't think Carlingford is so healthy as it is said to be. If I were you, Lucilla, I would try and get your papa to take something," said Mrs John, with anxiety, "before he goes to bed."

“Dear aunt Jemima, he never takes anything. You forget he is a doctor,” said Miss Marjoribanks. “It always puts him out when he has to go out in the evening; and he is sad about Mrs Chiley, though he would not say so.” But nevertheless Lucilla knocked at his door when she went up-stairs. And the Doctor, though he did not open, growled within with a voice which reassured his dutiful daughter. “What should I want, do you think, but to be left quiet?” the Doctor said. And even Mrs John, who had waited at his door, with her candle in her hand, to hear the result, shrank within at the sound and was seen no more. And Miss Marjoribanks, too, went to her rest, with more than one subject of thought which kept her awake. In the first place, the Rector was popular in his way, and if he chose to call all his forces to rally round a penitent, there was no saying what might come of it; and then Lucilla could not help going back in the most illogical manner to her father’s caress, and wondering what was the meaning of it. Meantime the snow fell heavily outside, and wrapped everything in a soft and secret whiteness. And amid the whiteness and darkness, the lamp burned steadily outside at the garden-gate, which pointed out the Doctor’s door amid all the closed houses and dark garden-walls in Grange Lane—a kind of visible succour and help always at hand for those who were suffering. And though Dr Marjori-

banks was not like a young man making a practice, but had perfect command of Carlingford, and was one of the richest men in it, it was well known in the town that the very poorest, if in extremity, in the depths of the wildest night that ever blew, would not seek help there in vain. The bell that had roused him when he was young, still hung near him in the silence of his closed-up house when he was old, and still could make him spring up, all self-possessed and ready, when the enemy Death had to be fought with. But that night the snow cushioned the wire outside, and even made white cornices and columns about the steady lamp, and the Doctor slept within, and no one disturbed him; for except Mrs Chiley and a few chronic patients, there was nothing particularly amiss in Carlingford, and then it was Dr Rider whom all the new people went to, the people who lived in the innumerable new houses at the other end of Carlingford, and had no hallowing tradition of the superior authority of Grange Lane.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE talk of this evening might not have been considered of any importance to speak of, but for the extraordinary and most unlooked-for event which startled all Carlingford next morning. Nobody could believe that it was true. Dr Marjoribanks's patients waited for him, and declared to their nurses that it was all a made-up story, and that he would come and prove that he was not dead. How could he be dead? He had been as well as he ever was that last evening. He had gone down Grange Lane in the snow, to see the poor old lady who was now sobbing in her bed, and saying it was all a mistake, and that it was she who ought to have died. But all those protestations were of no avail against the cold and stony fact which had frightened Thomas out of his senses, when he went to call the Doctor. He had died in the night without calling or disturbing anybody. He must have felt faint, it seemed, for he had got up and taken a little

brandy, the remains of which still stood on the table by his bedside ; but that was all that anybody could tell about it. They brought Dr Rider, of course ; but all that he could do was to examine the strong, still frame—old, and yet not old enough to be weakly, or to explain such sudden extinction—which had ceased its human functions. And then the news swept over Carlingford like a breath of wind, though there was no wind even on that silent snowy day to carry the matter. Dr Marjoribanks was dead. It put the election out of people's heads, and even their own affairs for the time being ; for had he not known all about the greater part of them—seen them come into the world and kept them in it—and put himself always in the breach when the pale Death approached that way ? He had never made very much boast of his friendliness or been large in sympathetic expressions, but yet he had never flinched at any time, or deserted his patients for any consideration. Carlingford was sorry, profoundly sorry, with that true sorrow which is not so much for the person mourned as for the mourner's self, who feels a sense of something lost. The people said to themselves, Whom could they ever find who would know their constitutions so well, and who was to take care of So-and-so if he had another attack ? To be sure Dr Rider was at hand, who felt a little agitated about it, and was conscious of the wonderful open-

ing, and was very ready to answer, "I am here;" but a young doctor is different from an old one, and a living man all in commonplace health and comfort is not to be compared with a dead one, on the morning at least of his sudden ending. Thank heaven, when a life is ended there is always that hour or two remaining to set straight the defective balances, and do a hasty late justice to the dead, before the wave sweeps on over him and washes out the traces of his steps, and lets in the common crowd to make their thoroughfare over the grave.

"It cannot be the Doctor," Mrs Chiley said, sobbing in her bed, "or else it has been in mistake for me. He was always a healthy man, and never had anything the matter with him—and a great deal younger than we are, you know. If anything has happened to him it must have been in mistake for me," said the poor old lady, and she was so hysterical that they had to send for Dr Rider, and she was thus the first to begin to build the new world on the foundations of the old, little as she meant it. But for the moment everything was paralysed in Grange Lane, and canvassing came to a standstill, and nothing was discussed but Dr Marjoribanks—how he was dead, though nobody could or would believe it; and how Lucilla would be left, and who her trustees were, and how the place could ever get used to the want of him, or would ever look

like itself again without his familiar presence. It was by way of relieving their minds from the horror of the idea, that the good people rushed into consultations what Lucilla would do. It took their minds a little off the ghastly imagination of that dark room with the snow on the window, and the late moonlight trying to get into the darkness, and the white rigid face inside, as he was said to have been found. It could not but make a terrible change to her—indeed, through her it could not but make a great change to everybody. The Doctor's house would, of course, be shut up, which had been the most hospitable house in Carlingford, and things would drop into the unsatisfactory state they used to be in before Miss Marjoribanks's time, and there would no longer be anybody to organise society. Such were the ideas the ladies of Grange Lane relapsed into by way of delivering themselves from the pain of their first realisation of what had happened. It would make a great change. Even the election and its anticipated joys could not but change character in some respects at least, and there would be nobody to make the best of them ; and then the question was, What would Lucilla do ? Would she have strength to "make an effort," as some people suggested ; or would she feel not only her grief, but her downfall, and that she was now only a single woman, and sink into a private life, as some others were inclined to believe ?

Inside the house, naturally, the state of affairs was sad enough. Lucilla, notwithstanding the many other things she had had to occupy her mind, was fond of her father, and the shock overwhelmed her for the moment. Though she was not the kind of woman to torture herself with thinking of things that she might have done, still at the first moment the idea that she ought not to have left him alone—that she should have sat up and watched or taken some extraordinary unusual precaution—was not to be driven away from her mind. The reign of reason was eclipsed in her as it often is in such an emergency. She said it was her fault in the first horror. “When I saw how he was looking, and how he was talking, I should never have left him,” said Lucilla, which indeed was a very natural thing to say, but would have been an utterly impossible one to carry out, as she saw when she came to think of it. But she could not think of it just then. She did not think at all that first long snowy, troubled day, but went about the house, on the bedroom floor, wringing her hands like a creature distracted. “If I had only sat up,” she said; and then she would recall the touch of his hand on her shoulder, which she seemed still to be feeling, and cry out, like all the rest of the world, that it could not be true. But, to be sure, that was a state of feeling that could not last long. There are events for which something higher than accident must be held account-

able, were one ever so ready to take the burden of affairs on one's own shoulders ; and Lucilla knew, when she came to herself, that if she had watched ever so long or so closely, that could have had no effect upon the matter. After a while the bewildering sense of her own changed position began to come upon her, and roused her up into that feverish and unnatural activity of thought which, in some minds, is the inevitable reaction after the unaccustomed curb and shock of grief. When she had got used to that dreadful certainty about her father, and had suddenly come with a leap to the knowledge that she was not to blame, and could not help it, and that though *he* was gone, *she* remained, it is no censure upon Lucilla to say that her head became immediately full of a horror and confusion of thoughts, an involuntary stir and bustle of plans and projects, which she did all she could to put down, but which would return and overwhelm her whether she chose it or not. She could not help asking herself what her new position was, thinking it over, so strangely free and new and unlimited as it seemed. And it must be recollected that Miss Marjoribanks was a woman of very active mind and great energies, too old to take up a girl's fancy that all was over because she had encountered a natural grief on her passage, and too young not to see a long future still before her. She kept her room, as was to be expected, and saw nobody, and only moved

the household and superintended the arrangements in a muffled way through Thomas, who was an old servant, and knew "the ways" of the house ; but notwithstanding her seclusion and her honest sorrow, and her perfect observance of all the ordinary restraints of the moment, it would be wrong to omit all mention of this feverish bustle of thinking which came into Lucilla's mind in her solitude. Of all that she had to bear, it was the thing that vexed and irritated and distressed her the most—as if, she said to herself indignantly, she ought to have been able to think of anything ! And the chances are that Lucilla, for sheer duty's sake, would have said, if anybody had asked, that of course she had not thought of anything as yet ; without being aware that the mere shock, and horror, and profound commotion had a great deal more to do than anything else in producing that fluttering crowd of busy, vexatious speculations which had come, without any will of hers, into her heart.

It looked a dreadful change in one way as she looked at it without wishing to look at it in the solitude of her own room, where the blinds were all down, and the snow sometimes came with a little thump against the window, and where it was so dark that it was a comfort when night came, and the lamp could be lighted. So far as Carlingford was concerned, it would be almost as bad for Miss Marjoribanks as if

she were her father's widow instead of his daughter. To keep up a position of social importance in a single woman's house, unless, as she had herself lightly said so short a time since, she were awfully rich, would be next to impossible. All that gave importance to the centre of society—the hospitable table, the open house—had come to an end with the Doctor. Things could no more be as they had once been, in that respect at least. She might stay in the house, and keep up to the furthest extent possible to her its old traditions ; but even to the utmost limit to which Lucilla could think it right to go it could never be the same. This consciousness kept gleaming upon her as she sat in the dull daylight behind the closed blinds, with articles of mourning piled about everywhere, and the grey dimness getting into her very eyes, and her mind distressed by the consciousness that she ought to have been unable to think ; and the sadness of the prospect altogether was enough to stir up a reaction, in spite of herself, in Miss Marjoribanks's mind.

And on the other side she would no doubt be very well off, and could go wherever she liked, and had no limit, except what was right and proper and becoming, to what she might please to do. She might go abroad if she liked, which perhaps is the first idea of the modern English mind when anything happens to it, and settle wherever she pleased, and arrange her mode

of existence as seemed good in her own eyes. She would be an heiress in a moderate way, and aunt Jemima was by this time absolutely at her disposal, and could be taken anywhere; and at Lucilla's age it was quite impossible to predict what might not happen to a woman in such a position. When these fairer possibilities gleamed into Lucilla's mind, it would be difficult to describe the anger and self-disgust with which she reproached herself—for perhaps it was the first time that she had consciously failed in maintaining a state of mind becoming the occasion; and though nobody but herself knew of it, the pain of the accusation was acute and bitter. But how could Miss Marjoribanks help it?—the mind travels so much quicker than anything else, and goes so far, and makes its expeditions in such subtle, stealthy ways. She might begin by thinking of her dear papa, and yet before she could dry her eyes might be off in the midst of one of these bewildering speculations. For everything was certain now so far as he was concerned; and everything was so uncertain, and full of such unknown issues for herself. Thus the dark days before the funeral passed by—and everybody was very kind. Dr Marjoribanks was one of the props of the place, and all Carlingford bestirred itself to do him the final honours; and all her friends conspired how to save Lucilla from all possible trouble, and help her over

the trial ; and to see how much he was respected was the greatest of all possible comforts to her, as she said.

Thus it was that among the changes that everybody looked for, there occurred all at once this change which was entirely unexpected, and put everything else out of mind for the moment. For to tell the truth, Dr Marjoribanks was one of the men who, according to external appearance, need never have died. There was nothing about him that wanted to be set right, no sort of loss, or failure, or misunderstanding, so far as anybody could see. An existence in which he could have his friends to dinner every week, and a good house, and good wine, and a very good table, and nothing particular to put him out of his way, seemed in fact the very ideal of the best life for the Doctor. There was nothing in him that seemed to demand anything better, and it was confusing to try to follow him into that which, no doubt, must be in all its fundamentals a very different kind of world. He was a just man and a good man in his way, and had been kind to many people in his lifetime—but still he did not seem to have that need of another rectifying, completer existence which most men have. There seemed no reason why he should die—a man who was so well contented with this lower region in which many of us fare badly, and where so few of us are contented. This was a fact which exercised a very

confusing influence, even when they themselves were not aware of it, on many people's minds. It was hard to think of him under any other circumstances, or identify him with angels and spirits—which feeling on the whole made the regret for him a more poignant sort of regret.

And they buried him with the greatest signs of respect. People from twenty miles off sent their carriages, and all the George Street people shut their shops, and there was very little business done all day. Mr Cavendish and Mr Ashburton walked side by side at the funeral, which was an affecting sight to see; and if anything more could have been done to show their respect which was not done, the corporation of Carlingford would have been sorry for it. And the snow still lay deep in all the corners, though it had been trampled down all about the Doctor's house, where the lamp was not lighted now of nights; for what was the use of lighting the lamp, which was a kind of lighthouse in its way, and meant to point out succour and safety for the neighbours, when the physician himself was lying beyond all hope of succour or aid? And all the Grange Lane people retired in a sympathetic, awe-stricken way, and decided, or at least the ladies did, to see Lucilla next day, if she was able to see them, and to find out whether she was going to make an effort, or what she meant to do.

And Mrs Chiley was so much better that she was able to be up a little in the evening, though she scarcely could forgive herself, and still could not help thinking that it was she who had really been sent for, and that the Doctor had been taken in mistake. And as for Lucilla, she sat in her room and cried, and thought of her father's hand upon her shoulder—that last unusual caress which was more touching to think of than a world of words. He had been fond of her and proud of her, and at the last moment he had showed it. And by times she seemed to feel again that lingering touch, and cried as if her heart would break : and yet, for all that, she could not keep her thoughts steady, nor prevent them from wandering to all kinds of profane out-of-door matters, and to considerations of the future, and estimates of her own position. It wounded her sadly to feel herself in such an inappropriate state of mind, but she could not help it ; and then the want of natural light and air oppressed her sorely, and she longed for the evening, which felt a little more natural, and thought that at last she might have a long talk with aunt Jemima, who was a kind of refuge in her present loneliness, and gave her a means of escape at the same time from all this bustle and commotion of unbecoming thoughts.

This was enough surely for any one to have to encounter at one time ; but that very night another

rumour began to murmur through Carlingford—a rumour more bewildering, more incredible still, than that of the Doctor's death, which the town had been obliged to confirm and acknowledge, and put its seal to. When the thing was first mentioned, everybody (who could find it in their heart to laugh) laughed loud in the face of the first narrator with mingled scepticism and indignation. They asked him what he meant by it, and ridiculed and scoffed at him to his face. "Lucilla will be the richest woman in Grange Lane," people said; "everybody in Carlingford knows that." But after this statement had been made, the town began to listen. It was obliged to listen, for other witnesses came in to confirm the story. It never might have been found out while the Doctor lived, for he had a great practice, and made a great deal of money; but now that he was dead, nothing could be hid. He was dead, and he had made an elaborate will, which was all as just and righteous as a will could be; but after the will was read, it was found out that everything named in it had disappeared like a bubble. Instead of being the richest, Dr Marjoribanks was one of the poorest men in Carlingford, when he shut his door behind him on that snowy night. It was a revelation which took the town perfectly by storm, and startled everybody out of their senses. Lucilla's

plans, which she thought so wicked, went out all of a sudden, in a certain dull amaze and dismay, to which no words could give any expression. Such was the second inconceivable reverse of fortune which happened to Miss Marjoribanks, more unexpected, more incomprehensible still than the other, in the very midst of her most important activities and hopes.

CHAPTER XLIV.

WHEN the first whisper of the way in which she was — as people say—“left,” reached Lucilla, her first feeling was incredulity. It was conveyed to her by aunt Jemima, who came to her in her room after the funeral with a face blanched with dismay. Miss Marjoribanks took it for grief; and, though she did not look for so much feeling from Mrs John, was pleased and comforted that her aunt should really lament her poor papa. It was a compliment which, in the softened and sorrowful state of Lucilla’s mind, went to her heart. Aunt Jemima came up and kissed her in a hasty excited way, which showed genuine and spontaneous emotion, and was not like the solemn pomp with which sympathising friends generally embrace a mourner; and then she made Lucilla sit down by the fire and held her hands. “My poor child,” said aunt Jemima—“my poor, dear, sacrificed child! you know, Lucilla, how fond I am of you, and you can always come to me——”

“ Thank you, dear aunt Jemima,” said Miss Marjoribanks, though she was a little puzzled. “ You are the only relative I have, and I knew you would not forsake me. What should I do without you at such a time ? I am sure it is what dear papa would have wished——”

“ Lucilla,” cried Mrs John, impulsively, “ I know it is natural you should cry for your father ; but when you know all,—you that never knew what it was to be without money—that never were straitened even, or obliged to give up things, like most other young women. Oh, my dear, they said I was to prepare you, but how can I prepare you ? I feel as if I never could forgive my brother-in-law ; that he should bring you up like this, and then——”

“ What is it ? ” said Miss Marjoribanks, drying her tears. “ If it is anything new, tell me, but don’t speak so of—of—— What is it ? say it right out.”

“ Lucilla,” said aunt Jemima, solemnly, “ you think you have a great deal of courage, and now is your time to show it. He has left you without a farthing—he that was always thought to be so rich. It is quite true what I am saying. He has gone and died and left nothing, Lucilla. Now I have told you ; and oh, my poor, dear, injured child,” cried Mrs John, with fervour, “ as long as I have a home there will be room in it for you.”

But Lucilla put her aunt away softly when she was about to fall upon her neck. Miss Marjoribanks was struck dumb ; her heart seemed to stop beating for the moment. " It is quite impossible—it cannot be true," she said, and gave a gasp to recover her breath. Then Mrs John came down upon her with facts, proving it to be true—showing how Dr Marjoribanks's money was invested, and how it had been lost. She made a terrible muddle of it, no doubt, but Lucilla was not very clear about business details any more than her aunt, and she did not move nor say a word while the long, involved, endless narrative went on. She kept saying it was impossible in her heart for half of the time, and then she crept nearer the fire and shivered, and said nothing even to herself, and did not even seem to listen, but knew that it must be true. It would be vain to attempt to say that it was not a terrible blow to Lucilla ; her strength was weakened already by grief and solitude and want of food, for she could not find it in her heart to go on eating her ordinary meals as if nothing had happened ; and all of a sudden she felt the cold seize her, and drew closer and closer to the fire. The thoughts which she had been thinking in spite of herself, and for which she had so greatly condemned herself, went out with a sudden distinctness, as if it had been a lamp going out and leaving the room in darkness, and a sudden sense of utter

gloom and cold and bewildering uncertainty came over Lucilla. When she lifted her eyes from the fire, into which she had been gazing, it almost surprised her to find herself still in this warm room where there was every appliance for comfort, and where her entire wardrobe of new mourning—everything, as aunt Jemima said, that a woman could desire—was piled up on the bed. It was impossible that she could be a penniless creature, left on her own resources, without father or supporter or revenue ; and yet—good heavens ! could it be true ?

“ If it is true, aunt Jemima,” said Lucilla, “ I must try to bear it ; but my poor head feels all queer. I’d rather not think any more about it to-night.”

“ How can you help thinking about it, Lucilla ?” cried Mrs John. “ I can think of nothing else ; and I am not so much concerned as you.”

Upon which Lucilla rose and kissed aunt Jemima, though her head was all confused and she had noises in her ears. “ I don’t think we are much like each other, you know,” she said. “ Did you hear how Mrs Chiley was ? I am sure she will be very sorry ;” and with that Miss Marjoribanks softened, and felt a little comforted, and cried again—not for the money, but for her father. “ If you are going down-stairs, I think I will come down to tea, aunt Jemima,” she said. But after Mrs John had gone away full of wonder at her philosophy, Lucilla drew close to the fire again

and took her head between her hands and tried to think what it meant. Could it be true? Instead of the heiress, in a good position, who could go abroad or anywhere, and do anything she liked, was it possible that she was only a penniless single woman with nobody to look to, and nothing to live on? Such an extraordinary incomprehensible revolution might well make any one feel giddy. The solid house and the comfortable room, and her own sober brain, which was not in the way of being put off its balance, seemed to turn round and round as she looked into the fire. Lucilla was not one to throw the blame upon her father, as Mrs John had done. On the contrary she was sorry, profoundly sorry for him, and made such a picture to herself of what his feelings must have been, when he went into his room that night and knew that all his hard-earned fortune was gone, that it made her weep the deepest tears for him that she had yet shed. "Poor papa!" she said to herself; and as she was not much given to employing her imagination in this way, and realising the feeling of others, the effect was all the greater now. If he had but told her, and put off a share of the burden from his own shoulders on to hers who could have borne it! but the Doctor had never done justice to Lucilla's qualities. This, amid her general sense of confusion and dizziness and insecurity, was the only clear thought

that struck Miss Marjoribanks ; and that it was very cold and must be freezing outside ; and how did the poor people manage who had not all her present advantages ? She tried to put away this revelation from her, as she had said to aunt Jemima, and keep it for a little at arm's length, and get a night's rest in the mean time, and so be able to bring a clear head to the contemplation of it to-morrow, which was the most judicious thing to do. But when the mind has been stimulated by such a shock, Solomon himself, one would suppose, could scarcely, however clearly he might perceive what was best, take the judicious passive way. When Lucilla got up from where she was crouching before the fire, she felt so giddy that she could scarcely stand. Her head was all queer, as she had said, and she had a singing in her ears. She herself seemed to have changed along with her position. An hour or two before, she could have answered for her own steadiness and self-possession in almost any circumstances, but now the blood seemed to be running a race in her veins, and the strangest noises hummed in her ears. She felt ashamed of her weakness, but she could not help it ; and then she was weak with grief and excitement and comparative fasting, which told for something, probably, in her inability to bear so unlooked-for a blow.

But Miss Marjoribanks thought it was best to go

down to the drawing-room for tea, as she had said. To see everything just as it had been, utterly indifferent and unconscious of what had happened, made her cry, and relieved her giddiness by reviving her grief; and then the next minute a bewildering wonder seized her as to what would become of this drawing-room, the scene of her triumphs—who would live in it, and whom the things would go to—which made her sick, and brought back the singing in her ears. But on the whole she took tea very quietly with aunt Jemima, who kept breaking into continual snatches of lamentation, but was always checked by Lucilla's composed looks. If she had not heard this extraordinary news, which made the world turn round with her, Miss Marjoribanks would have felt that soft hush of exhaustion and grief subdued which, when the grief is not too urgent, comes after all is over; and even now she felt a certain comfort in the warm firelight and the change out of her own room—where she had been living shut up, with the blinds down, and the black dresses everywhere about, for so many dreary days.

John Brown, who had charge of Dr Marjoribanks's affairs, came next day and explained everything to Lucilla. The lawyer had had one short interview with his client after the news came, and Dr Marjoribanks had borne it like a man. His face had changed a little, and he had sat down, which he was not in the habit of

doing, and drawn a kind of shivering long breath ; and then he had said, "Poor Lucilla!" to himself. This was all Mr Brown could say about the effect the shock had on the Doctor. And there was something in this very scanty information which gave Lucilla a new pang of sorrow and consolation. "And he patted me on the shoulder that last night," she said, with tender tears ; and felt she had never loved her father so well in all her life—which is one of the sweeter uses of death which many must have experienced, but which belonged to a more exquisite and penetrating kind of emotion than was common to Lucilla.

"I thought he looked a little broken when he went out," said Mr Brown, "but full of pluck and spirit, as he always was. 'I am making a good deal of money, and I *may* live long enough to lay by a little still,' were the last words he said to me. I remember he put a kind of emphasis on the *may*. Perhaps he knew he was not so strong as he looked. He was a good man, Miss Marjoribanks, and there is nobody that has not some kind thing to tell of him," said the lawyer, with a certain moisture in his eyes ; for there was nobody in Carlingford who did not miss the old Doctor, and John Brown was very tender-hearted in his way.

"But nobody can know what a good father he was," said Lucilla, with a sob ; and she meant it with all her

heart, thinking chiefly of his hand on her shoulder that last night, and of the "Poor Lucilla!" in John Brown's office; though, after all, perhaps, it was not chiefly as a tender father that Dr Marjoribanks shone, though he gave his daughter all she wanted or asked for. Her grief was so true, and so little tintured by any of that indignation over the unexpected loss, which aunt Jemima had not been able to conceal, that John Brown was quite touched, and felt his heart warm to Lucilla. He explained it all very fully to her when she was composed enough to understand him; and as he went through all the details the giddiness came back, and once more Miss Marjoribanks felt the world running round, and heard his statement through the noises in her ears. All this settled down, however, into a certain distinctness as John Brown, who was very clear-headed and good at making a concise statement, went on; and gradually the gyrations became slower and slower, and the great universe became solid once more, and held to its moorings under Lucilla's feet, and she ceased to hear that supernatural hum and buzz. The vague shadows of chaos and ruin dispersed, and through them she saw once more the real aspect of things. She was not quite penniless. There was the house, which was a very good house, and some little corners and scraps of money in the funds, which were Lucilla's very own, and could not be lost; and last of all there was

the business—the best practice in Carlingford, and entire command of Grange Lane.

“But what does that matter?” said Lucilla; “if poor papa had retired indeed, as I used to beg him to do, and parted with it—— But everybody has begun to send for Dr Rider already,” she said, in an aggrieved voice; and then for the first time John Brown remembered, to his confusion, that there was once said to be “something between” Miss Marjoribanks and Dr Rider; which complicated the affair in the most uncomfortable way.

“Yes,” he said, “and of course that would make it much more difficult to bring in another man; but Rider is a very honourable young fellow, Miss Marjoribanks——”

“He is not so very young,” said Lucilla. “He is quite as old as I am, though no one ever would think so. I am sure he is honourable, but what has that to do with it? And I do think Mrs Chiley might have done without—anybody else: for a day or two, considering when it was——”

And here she stopped to cry, unreasonably, but yet very naturally; for it did feel hard that in the house to which Dr Marjoribanks’s last visit had been paid, another doctor should have been called in next day.

“What I meant to say,” said John Brown, “was, that Dr Rider, though he is not rich, and could not

pay a large sum of money down, would be very glad to make some arrangement. He is very anxious about it, and he seemed himself to think that if you knew his circumstances you would not be disinclined to—— But as I did not at all know——”

Lucilla caught, as it were, and met, and forced to face her, her informant's embarrassed, hesitating look. “You say this,” said Miss Marjoribanks, “because people used to say there was something between us, and you think I may have some feeling about it. But there never was anything between us. Anybody with a quarter of an eye could have seen that he was going out of his senses about that little Australian girl. And I am rather fond of men that are in love—it shows they have some good in them. But it is dreadful to talk of such things now,” said Lucilla, with a sigh of self-reproach. “If Dr Rider has any arrangement to propose, I should like to give him the preference, please. You see they have begun to send for him already in Grange Lane.”

“I will do whatever you think proper,” said John Brown, who was rather scared, and very much impressed by Miss Marjoribanks's candour. Dr Rider had been the first love of Mr Brown's own wife, and the lawyer had a curious kind of satisfaction in thinking that this silly young fellow had thus lost two admirable women, and that probably the little

Australian was equally inferior to Miss Marjoribanks and Mrs Brown. He ought to have been grateful that Dr Rider had left the latter lady to his own superior discrimination—and so he was ; and yet it gave him a certain odd satisfaction to think that the Doctor was not so happy as he might have been. He went away fully warranted to receive Dr Rider's proposition, and even, to a certain extent, to decide upon it—and Lucilla threw herself back in her chair in the silent drawing-room, from which aunt Jemima had discreetly withdrawn, and began to think over the reality of her position as she now saw it for the first time.

The sense of bewildering revolution and change was over ; for, strangely enough, the greater a change is the more easily the mind, after the first shock, accepts and gets accustomed to it. It was over, and the world felt steady once more under Lucilla's feet, and she sat down, not precisely amid the ruins of her happiness, but still in the presence of many an imagination overthrown, to look at her real position. It was not, after all, utter poverty, misery, and destitution, as at the first glance she had believed. According to what John Brown had said, and a rapid calculation which Lucilla had herself made in passing, something approaching two hundred a-year would be left to her—just a small single woman's revenue, as she thought to

herself. Two hundred a-year! All at once there came into Miss Marjoribanks's mind a sudden vision of the two Miss Ravenswoods, who had lived in that pretty set of rooms over Elsworthy's shop, facing into Grange Lane, and who had kept a lady's maid, and asked the best people in the place to tea, upon a very similar income, and how their achievements had been held up to everybody as a model of what genteel economy could do. She thought of them, and her heart sank within her; for it was not in Lucilla's nature to live without a sphere, nor to disjoin herself from her fellow-creatures, nor to give up entirely the sovereign position she had held for so many years. Whatever she might ultimately do, it was clear that, in the meantime, she could not make up her mind to any such giving up of the battle as that. And then there was the house. She might let it to the Riders, and add probably another hundred a-year to her income; for though it was an excellent house, and worth more than a hundred a-year, still there was no competition for houses in Grange Lane, and the new Doctor was the only probable tenant. And, to tell the truth, though Lucilla was very reasonable, it went to her heart at the present moment to think of letting the house to the new Doctor, and having the patients come as usual, and the lamp lighted as of old, and nothing changed except the central figure of all. She ought to

have been above such sentimental ideas when a whole hundred pounds a-year was in question ; but she was not, which of itself was a strange phenomenon. If she could have made up her mind to that, there were a great many things that she might have done. She might still have gone abroad, and to some extent taken a limited share in what was going on in some section of English society on the Continent. Or she might have gone to one of the mild centres of a similar kind of life in England. But such a prospect did not offer many attractions to Miss Marjoribanks. If she had been rich, it would have been different. Thus there gradually dawned upon her the germ of the plan she ultimately adopted, and which was the only one that commended itself to her feelings. Going away was expensive and troublesome at the best ; and even at Elsworthy's, if she could have made up her mind to such an expedient, she would have been charged a pound a-week for the rooms alone, not to speak of all kinds of extras, and never having the satisfaction of feeling yourself in your own place. Under all the circumstances, it was impressed upon Lucilla's mind that her natural course was to stay still where she was, and make no change. Why should she make any change ? The house was her own, and did not cost anything, and if Nancy would but stand by her and one good maid—— It was a venture ; but

still Lucilla felt as if she might be equal to it. Though she was no mathematician, Miss Marjoribanks was very clever at mental arithmetic in a practical sort of way. She put down lines upon lines of figures in her head while she sat musing in her chair, and worked them out with wonderful skill and speed and accuracy. And the more she thought of it, the more it seemed to her that this was the thing to do. Why should she retreat and leave her native soil and the neighbourhood of all her friends because she was poor and in trouble? Lucilla was not ashamed of being poor—nor even frightened by it, now that she understood what it was—any more than she would have been frightened, after the first shock, had her poverty even been much more absolute. She was standing alone at this moment as upon a little island of as yet undisturbed seclusion and calm, and she knew very well that outside a perfect sea of good advice would surge round her as soon as she was visible. In these circumstances Lucilla took by instinct the only wise course: she made up her mind there and then with a perfect unanimity which is seldom to be gained when counsellors are admitted. And what she decided upon, as was to be expected from her character, was not to fly from her misfortune and the scene of it, but to confront fate and take up her lawful burden and stay still in her own house. It was the wisest and the easiest, and at the same time

the most heroic course to adopt, and she knew beforehand that it was one which would be approved of by nobody. All this Lucilla steadily faced and considered and made up her mind to while she sat alone ; although silence and solitude and desolation seemed to have suddenly come in and taken possession all around her of the once gay and brilliant room.

She had just made her final decision when she was rejoined by her aunt, who, everybody said, was at this trying moment like a mother to Lucilla. Yet aunt Jemima, too, had changed a little since her brother-in-law's death. She was very fond of Miss Marjoribanks, and meant every word she had said about giving her a home, and still meant it. But she did not feel so certain now as she had done about Tom's love for his cousin, nor at all anxious to have him come home just at this moment ; and for another thing, she had got a way of prowling about the house and looking at the furniture in a speculative, auctioneering sort of way. " It must be all sold, of course," aunt Jemima had said to herself, " and I may as well look what things would suit me ; there is a little chiffonier that I have always wanted for my drawing-room, and Lucilla would like to see a few of the old things about her, poor dear." With this idea Mrs John gave herself a great deal of unnecessary fatigue, and gave much offence to the servants by making pilgrimages all over the house, turn-

ing up at the most unlikely places and poking about in the least frequented rooms. It was a perfectly virtuous and even amiable thing to do, for it was better, as she reasoned, that they should go to her than to a stranger, and it would be nice for Lucilla to feel that she had some of the old things about her; but then such delicate motives are seldom appreciated by the homely critics down-stairs.

It was with something of this same air that she came into the drawing-room, where Lucilla was. She could not help laying her hand in a suggestive sort of way on a small table which she had to pass, as if she were saying to herself (as indeed she was saying), "The veneer has been broken off at that side, and the foot is mended; it will bring very little; and yet it looks well when you don't look too close." Such were the ideas with which aunt Jemima's mind was filled. But yet she came forward with a great deal of sympathy and curiosity, and forgot about the furniture in presence of her afflicted niece.

"Did he tell you anything, Lucilla?" said Mrs John; "of course he must have told you something—but anything satisfactory, I mean."

"I don't know if you can call it satisfactory," said Lucilla, with a sudden rush of softer thoughts; "but it was a comfort to hear it. He told me something about dear papa, aunt Jemima. After

he had heard of *that*, you know—all that he said was, Poor Lucilla! And don't you remember how he put his hand on my shoulder that last night? 'I am so—so—glad he did it,' sobbed Miss Marjoribanks. It may be supposed it was an abrupt transition from her calculations; but after all it was only a different branch of the same subject; and Lucilla in all her life had never before shed such poignant and tender tears.

"He might well say, Poor Lucilla!" said Mrs John—"brought up as you have been, my dear; and did not you hear anything more important?—I mean, more important in a worldly point of view," aunt Jemima added, correcting herself; "of course, it must be the greatest comfort to hear something about your poor papa."

And then Lucilla unfolded John Brown's further particulars to her surprised hearer. Mrs John lived upon a smallish income herself, and she was not so contemptuous of the two hundred a-year. "And the house," she said—"the house would bring you in another hundred, Lucilla. The Riders, I am sure, would take it directly, and perhaps a great part of the furniture too. Three hundred would not be so bad for a single woman. Did you say anything about the furniture, my dear?" aunt Jemima added, half regretfully, for she did feel that she would be sorry to lose that chiffonier.

“I think I shall stay in the house,” said Lucilla ; “you may think it silly, aunt Jemima, but I was born in it, and——”

“Stay in the house !” Mrs John said, with a gasp. She did not think it silly, but simple madness, and so she told her niece. If Lucilla could not make up her mind to Elsworthy’s, there was Brighton and Bath and Cheltenham, and a hundred other places where a single woman might be very comfortable on three hundred a-year. And to lose a third part of her income for a piece of sentiment was so utterly unlike any conception aunt Jemima had ever formed of her niece. It *was* unlike Miss Marjoribanks ; but there are times of life when even the most reasonable people are inconsistent. Lucilla, though she felt it was open to grave criticism, felt only more confirmed in her resolution by her aunt’s remarks. She heard a voice aunt Jemima could not hear, and that voice said, Stay !

CHAPTER XLV.

IT must be allowed that Lucilla's decision caused very general surprise in Carlingford, where people had been disposed to think that she would be rather glad, now that things were so changed, to get away. To be sure it was not known for some time ; but everybody's idea was that, being thus left alone in the world, and in circumstances so reduced, Miss Marjoribanks naturally would go to live with somebody. Perhaps with her aunt, who had something, though she was not rich ; perhaps, after a little, to visit about among her friends, of whom she had so many. Nobody doubted that Lucilla would abdicate at once, and a certain uneasy, yet delicious, sense of freedom had already stolen into the hearts of some of the ladies in Grange Lane. They lamented, it is true, the state of chaos into which everything would fall, and the dreadful loss Miss Marjoribanks would be to society ; but still, freedom is a noble thing, and Lucilla's subjects contemplated

their emancipation with a certain guilty delight. It was, at the same time, a most fertile subject of discussion in Carlingford, and gave rise to all those lively speculations and consultations, and oft-renewed comparing of notes, which take the place of bets in the feminine community. The Carlingford ladies as good as betted upon Lucilla, whether she would go with her aunt, or pay Mrs Beverley a visit at the Deanery, or retire to Mount Pleasant for a little, where those good old Miss Blunts were so fond of her. Each of these opinions had its backers, if it is not profane to say so; and the discussion which of them Miss Marjoribanks would choose waxed very warm. It almost put the election out of people's heads; and indeed the election had been sadly damaged in interest and social importance by the sad and most unexpected event which had just happened in Grange Lane.

But when the fact was really known, it would be difficult to describe the sense of guilt and horror which filled many innocent bosoms. The bound of freedom had been premature—liberty and equality had not come yet, notwithstanding that too early unwise *elan* of republican satisfaction. It was true that she was in deep mourning, and that for a year, at least, society must be left to its own devices; and it was true, also, that she was poor—which might

naturally be supposed a damper upon her energies—but, at the same time, Carlingford knew its Lucilla. As long as she remained in Grange Lane, even though retired and in crape, the constitutional monarch was still present among her subjects; and nobody could usurp her place or show that utter indifference to her regulations which some revolutionaries had dreamed of. Such an idea would have gone direct in the face of the British Constitution, and the sense of the community would have been dead against it. But everybody who had speculated upon her proceedings disapproved of Lucilla in her most unlooked-for resolution. Some could not think how she could bear it, staying on there when everything was so changed; and some said it was a weakness they could never have believed to exist in her; and some—for there are spiteful people everywhere—breathed the names of Cavendish and Ashburton, the rival candidates, and hinted that Miss Marjoribanks had something in her mind to justify her lingering. If Lucilla had not been supported by a conscious sense of rectitude, she must have broken down before this universal disapprobation. Not a soul in the world except one supported her in her resolution, and that was perhaps, of all others, the one least likely to be able to judge.

And it was not for want of opportunity to go elsewhere. Aunt Jemima, as has been seen, did not lose

an instant in offering the shelter of her house to her niece ; and Mrs Beverley wrote the longest, kindest, most incoherent letter begging her dear Lucilla to come to her immediately for a long visit, and adding, that though she had to go out a good deal into society, she needn't mind, for that everything she could think of would be done to make her comfortable ; to which Dr Beverley himself, who was now a dean, added an equally kind postscript, begging Miss Marjoribanks to make her home at the Deanery "until she saw how things were to be." "He would have found me a place, perhaps," Lucilla said, when she folded up the letter—and this was a terrible mode of expression to the genteel ears of Mrs John.

"I wish you would not use such words, my dear," said aunt Jemima ; "even if you had been as poor as you thought, my house would always have been a home for you. Thank heaven I have enough for both ; you never needed to have thought, under any circumstances, of taking a—a situation. It is a thing I could never have consented to,"—which was a very handsome thing of aunt Jemima to say.

"Thank you, aunt," said Lucilla, but she sighed ; for, though it was very kind, what was Miss Marjoribanks to have done with herself in such a dowager establishment ? And then Colonel Chiley came in, who had also his proposal to make.

"*She sent me,*" the Colonel said ; "it's been a sad business for us all, Lucilla ; I don't know when I have felt anything more ; and as for her, you know, she has never held up her head since——"

"Dear Mrs Chiley !" Miss Marjoribanks said, unable to resist the old affection ; "and yet I heard she had sent for Dr Rider directly," Lucilla added. She knew it was quite natural, and perhaps quite necessary, but then it did seem hard that his own friends should be the first to replace her dear papa.

"It was I did that," said the Colonel. "What was a man to do ? I was horribly cut up, but I could not stand and see her making herself worse ; and I said, you had too much sense to mind——"

"So I ought," said Lucilla, with penitence, "but when I remembered where he was last, the very last place——"

It was hard upon the Colonel to stand by and see a woman cry. It was a thing he could never stand, as he had always said to his wife. He took the poker, which was his favourite resource, and made one of his tremendous dashes at the fire, to give Lucilla time to recover herself, and then he turned to aunt Jemima, who sat pensively by—

"*She sent me,*" said the Colonel, who did not think his wife needed any other name—"not that I would not have come of my own accord ; we want

Lucilla to go to us, you see. I don't know what plans she may have been making, but we're both very fond of her—she knows that. I think, if you have not settled upon anything, the best that Lucilla can do is to come to us. She'll be the same as at home, and always somebody to look after her——”

The old Colonel was standing before the fire, wavering a little on his long unsteady old legs, and looking wonderfully well preserved, and old and feeble; and Lucilla, though she was in mourning, was so full of life and force in her way. It was a curious sort of protection to offer her, and yet it was real protection, and love and succour, though, heaven knows! it might not perhaps last out the year.

“I am sure, Colonel Chiley, it is a very kind offer,” said aunt Jemima, “and I would have been thankful if she could have made up her mind to go with me. But I must say she has taken a very queer notion into her head—a thing I should never have expected from Lucilla—she says she will stay here.”

“Here?—ah—eh—what does she mean by here?” said the Colonel.

“*Here*, Colonel Chiley, in this great big melancholy house. I have been thinking about it, and talking about it till my head goes round and round. Unless she were to take Inmates,” said aunt Jemima, in a resigned and doleful voice. As for the Colonel he

was petrified, and for a long time had not a word to say.

“*Here!*—By Jove, I think she must have lost her senses,” said the old soldier. “Why, Lucilla, I—I thought—wasn’t there something about the money being lost? You couldn’t keep up this house under a—fifteen hundred a-year at least; the Doctor spent a mint of money;—you must be going out of your senses. And to have all the sick people coming, and the bell ringing of nights. Bless my soul! it would kill anybody,” said Colonel Chiley. “Put on your bonnet, and come out with me; shutting her up here, and letting her cry, and so forth—I don’t say it ain’t natural—I’m terribly cut up myself whenever I think of it; but it’s been too much for her head,” said the Colonel, with anxiety and consternation mingling in his face.

“Unless she were to take Inmates, you know,” said aunt Jenima, in a sepulchral voice. There was something in the word that seemed to carry out to a point of reality much beyond anything he had dreamt of, the suggestion Colonel Chiley had just made.

“Inmates! Lord bless my soul! what do you mean, ma’am?” said the old soldier. “Lucilla, put on your bonnet directly, and come and have a little fresh air. She’ll soon be an inmate herself if we leave her here,” the Colonel said. They were all very sad and grave,

and yet it was a droll scene ; and then the old hero offered Lucilla his arm, and led her to the door. " You'll find me in the hall as soon as you are ready," he said, in tones half gruff, half tender, and was glad to go down-stairs, though it was cold, and put on his greatcoat with the aid of Thomas, and stand warming the tips of his boots at the hall fire. As for Lucilla, she obeyed him without a word ; and it was with his unsteady but kind old arm to lean upon that she first saw how the familiar world looked through the mist of this strange change that had come over it, and through the blackness of her crape veil.

But though she succeeded in satisfying her friends that she had made up her mind, she did not secure their approval. There were so many objections to her plan. " If you had been rich even, I don't think I should have approved of it, Lucilla," Mrs Chiley said, with tears ; " and I think we could have made you happy here." So the good old lady spoke, looking round her pretty room, which was so warm and cheery and bright, and where the Colonel, neat and precise as if he had come out of a box, was standing poking the fire. It looked all very solid and substantial, and yet it was as unstable as any gossamer that the careless passenger might brush away. The two good people were so old that they had forgotten to remember they were old.

But neither did Lucilla think of that. This was really what she thought and partly said—

“I am in my own house, that wants no expense nor changing, and Nancy is getting old, and does not mind standing by me. And it is not so much trouble after all keeping everything nice when there is no gentleman coming in, and nothing else to do. And, besides, I don't mean to be Lucilla Marjoribanks for ever and ever.” This was the general scope, without going into all the details, of what Lucilla said.

But, at the same time, though she was so happy as not to be disturbed in her decision, or made uncomfortable, either by lamentation or remonstrance, and had no doubt in her mind that she was doing right, it was disagreeable to Miss Marjoribanks to go thus in the face of all her friends. She went home by herself, and the house did look dreary from the outside. It was just as it had always been, for none of the servants were dismissed as yet, nor any external change made ; but still a look as if it had fallen asleep—a look as if it too had died somehow, and only pretended to be a house and home—was apparent, in the aspect of the place ; and when the servants were gone, and nobody remained except Lucilla and her faithful Nancy, and a young maid—which must be the furthest limit of Miss Marjoribanks's household, and difficult enough to maintain upon two hundred a-year—what would it

look like? This thought was more discouraging than any remonstrances; and it was with a heavy heart that Lucilla re-entered her solitary house. She told Thomas to follow her up-stairs; and when she sank, tired, into a chair, and put up her veil before commencing to speak to him, it was all she could do to keep from crying. The depressing influences of this sad week had told so much on her, that she was quite fatigued by her walk to see Mrs Chiley; and Thomas, too, knew why he had been called, and stood in a formal manner before her, with his hands crossed, against the closed door. When she put back her thick black veil, the last climax of painful change came upon Miss Marjoribanks. She did not feel as if she were Lucilla; so discouraged and depressed and pale, and tired with her walk as she was, with all sorts of projects and plans so quenched out of her; almost if she had been charged with being somebody else, the imputation was one which she could not have denied.

“Thomas,” she said, faintly, “I think I ought to speak to you myself about all that has happened—we are such old friends, and you have been such a good kind servant. You know I shan’t be able to keep up——”

“And sorry we all was, Miss, to hear it,” said Thomas, when Lucilla’s utterance failed. “I am sure there never was a better master, though particular; and for a comfortabler house——”

“If I had been as poor papa expected to leave me,” said Miss Marjoribanks, after a little pause, “everything would have gone on as usual: but after your long service here, and so many people as know you, Thomas, you will have no difficulty in getting as good a place; and you know that anything I can say——”

“Thank you, Miss,” said Thomas; and then he made a pause. “It was not exactly that as I was thinking of; I’ve set my heart, this many a day, on a little business. If you would be so kind as to speak a word for me to the gentlemen as has the licensing. There ain’t nobody as knows better how——”

“What kind of a business, Thomas?” said Lucilla, who cheered up a little in ready interest, and would have been very glad if she could have taken a little business too.

“Well, Miss, a kind of a quiet—public-house, if I don’t make too bold to name it,” said Thomas, with a deprecating air—“not one of them drinking-places, Miss, as, I know, ladies can’t abide; but many a man, as is a very decent man, wants his pint o’ beer now and again, and their little sort of clubs of a night as well as the gentlefolks; and it’s my opinion, Miss, as it’s a man’s dooty to see as that sort of thing don’t go too far, and yet as his fellow-creatures has their bit of pleasure,” said Thomas, who naturally took the defensive side.

“I am sure you are quite right,” said Lucilla, cheering up more and more, and instinctively, with her old statesmanlike breadth of view, throwing a rapid glance upon the subject to see what capabilities there might be in it; “and I hope you will try always to exercise a good influence—What is all that noise and shouting out of doors?”

“It’s one of the candidates, Miss,” said Thomas, “as is addressing of the bargemen at the top o’ Prickett’s Lane.”

“Ah!” said Lucilla; and a deep sigh escaped from her bosom. “But you cannot do anything of that kind, you know, Thomas, without a wife.”

“Yes, Miss,” said Thomas, with great confusion and embarrassment; “that was just what I was going to say. Me and Betsy——”

“Betsy!” said Lucilla, with dismay; for it had been Betsy she had specially fixed upon as the handy, willing, cheerful maid who, when there was no gentleman coming in, and little else to do, might keep even this big house in order. She sighed; but it was not in her power, even if she had desired it, to put any restriction upon Betsy’s wishes. And it was not without a momentary envy that she received the intelligence. It was life the housemaid was about to enter on—active life of her own, with an object and meaning—clogged by Thomas, no doubt, who did not appear to Lucilla as

the bright spot in the picture—but still independent life ; whereas her mistress knew of nothing particularly interesting in her own uncertain future. She was roused from her momentary meditation by the distant shouts which came from the top of Prickett's Lane, and sighed again, without knowing it, as she spoke.

“It's a pity you had not got your—little inn,” said Lucilla, for the sake of euphony, “six months or a year ago, for then you might have voted for Mr Ashburton, Thomas. I had forgotten about the election until now..”

“Not as that needn't stand in the way, Miss,” said Thomas, eagerly ; “there's Betsy's brother as has it now, and he ain't made up his mind about his vote ; and if he knowed as it would be any comfort to you——”

“Of course it will be a comfort to me !” said Miss Marjoribanks ; and she got up from her chair with a sense that she was still not altogether useless in the world. “Go and speak to him directly, Thomas ; and here's one of Mr Ashburton's colours that I made up myself ; and tell him that there can be no doubt *he* is the man for Carlingford ; and send up Nancy to me. And I hope Betsy and you will be very happy,” said Lucilla. She had been dreadfully down, but the rebound was all the more grateful. “I am not done with yet, and, thank heaven ! there must always be some-

thing to do," she said to herself when she was alone. And she threw off her shawl, and began to make the drawing-room look like itself; not that it was not perfectly in order, and as neat as a room could be; but still the neatness savoured of Betsy, and not of Lucilla. Miss Marjoribanks, in five minutes, made it look like that cosy empire of hospitality and kindness and talk and wit, and everything pleasant, that it used to be; and then, when she had finished, she sat down and had a good cry, which did not do her any harm.

Then Nancy appeared, disturbed in her preparations for dinner, and with her arms wrapped in her apron, looking glum and defiant. Hers was not the resigned and resourceful preparation for her fate which had appeared in Thomas. She came in, and put the door ajar, and leant her back against the sharp edge. She might be sent off like the rest, if that was Miss Lucilla's meaning—her that had been in the house off and on for more than thirty years; but if it was so, at least she would not give up without unfolding a bit of her mind.

"Come in," said Lucilla, drying her eyes—"come in and shut the door; you had better come and sit down here, Nancy, for I have a great deal to say, and I want to speak to you as a friend."

Nancy shut the door, but she thought to herself that she knew what all this meant, and made but a

very little movement into the room, looking more forbidding than ever. "Thank you all the same, Miss Lucilla, but I ain't too old to stand," she said; and stood firm to meet the shock, with her arms folded under her apron, thinking in her heart that it was about one of the almshouses, her horror and hope, that her young mistress was going to speak.

"Nancy," said Lucilla, "I want to tell you what I am going to do. I have to make up my mind for myself now. They all go against me, and one says I should do this and another says I should do that; but I don't think anybody knows me so well as you do. Don't stand at the door. I want to consult you as a friend. I want to ask you a question, and you must answer as if you were before a judge—I have such confidence in *you*."

Nancy's distrust and defiance gave way a little before this appeal. She came a step nearer, and let the apron drop from her folded arms. "What is it, Miss Lucilla?—though I ain't pretending to be one to advise," she said, building a kind of intrenchment round her with the nearest chairs.

"You know how things are changed," said Lucilla, "and that I can't stay here as I used to do. People think I should go and live with somebody; but *I* think, you know—if I was one of those ladies that

have a faithful old servant to stand by them, and never to grumble nor make a fuss, nor go back on the past, nor go in for expensive dishes—one that wouldn't mind cooking a chop or making a cup of tea, if that was all we could afford—why, I think, Nancy——”

But Nancy could not hear any more. She made a little rush forward, with a kind of convulsive chuckling that was half sobbing and half laughter. “And me here!” cried Dr Marjoribanks's famous cook, who had spent a fortune on her gravy-beef alone, and was one of the most expensive people in Carlingford—“me as has done for you all your days! me as would—if it was but a roast potato!” cried the devoted woman. She was in such a state of hysterical flutter and excitement that Lucilla had to take her almost into her arms and put the old woman into a chair and bring her to, which was an occupation quite in Miss Marjoribanks's way.

“But I shall only have two hundred a-year,” said Lucilla. “Now don't be rash; there will have to be a maid to keep things tidy, and that is every farthing I shall have. You used to spend as much in gravy-beef,” said Miss Marjoribanks, with a sigh.

“Oh, Miss Lucilla, let bygones be bygones,” said Nancy, with tears. “If I did, it wasn't without many a little something for them as was too poor to buy it

for themselves—for I never was one as boiled the senses out of a bit of meat ; and when a gentleman is well-to-do, and hasn't got no occasion to count every penny—— The Doctor, I will say for him, was never one as asked too many questions. Give him a good dinner on his own table, and he wasn't the gentleman as grudged a bit of broken meat for the poor folks. He did a deal of good as you nor no one never know'd of, Miss Lucilla," said Nancy, with a sob.

And then his daughter and his faithful old servant cried a little in company over Dr Marjoribanks's vacant place. What could a man have more? Nobody was made altogether desolate by his death, nor was any heart broken, but they wept for him honestly, though the old woman felt happy in her sorrow. And Lucilla, on her knees before the fire, told Nancy of that exclamation the Doctor had made in John Brown's office, and how he had put his hand on her shoulder that last night. "All he said was, Poor Lucilla!" sobbed Miss Marjoribanks ; "he never thought of himself nor all his money that he had worked so hard for ;" and once more that touch of something more exquisite than was usual to her went sharply down into Lucilla's heart and brought up tenderer and deeper tears.

She felt all the better for it after, and was even a little cheerful in the evening, and like herself ; and

thus it will be seen that one person in Carlingford—not, it is true, a popular oracle, but of powerful influence and first-rate importance in a practical point of view—gave the heartiest approbation to Miss Marjoribanks's scheme for her new life.

CHAPTER XLVI.

LUCILLA'S calculations were fully justified by the result. Twenty times in a day she recognised the wisdom of her own early decision, which was made while she was still by herself, and before anybody had come in to advise her. If she had left it over until the time when, though much shaken, she was understood to be able to see her friends, it is just possible that the whirlwind of popular opinion which raged about her might have exercised a distracting influence even upon Miss Marjoribanks's clear head and steady judgment. For even now, though they saw her in her own house, in her mourning, people would not believe that it was true, and that Lucilla actually intended to make "no change;" and all that tide of good advice which had been flowing through Carlingford ever since the Doctor's death in the form of opinion, now rushed in upon her, notwithstanding that all the world knew that she had made up her mind. "Everybody says

you are going to stay on, but we do hope it is not true, Lucilla," her friends said, in many voices. "It is dreadful for us to lose you, but you never *could* bear it, dear." And this was repeated so often that if Miss Marjoribanks had been weak-minded, she must have ended by believing not only that it was more than she was equal to, but more than she ought to be equal to — which was a more touching argument still.

"You are excited now," Miss Brown said, who had a great deal of experience in family troubles; "one always is at such a time; but when things have settled down in their ordinary way, then you will find it is more than you can bear. I think it is always best to make a change. If you were to travel a little, you know——"

"But, my dear, I am poor," said Lucilla.

"It doesn't require so much money when you know how to set about it," said her adviser; "and there are so many people who would be glad to have you, Lucilla! And then you might settle a little at Caen or Tours, or some of those nice places, where there is such capital English society, and everything so cheap; or, if you thought your health required it, at Pau or Nice, you know. You are looking quite pale, and I don't think you were ever very strong in the chest, Lucilla; and everything is so different on the Contin-

ent—one feels it the moment one crosses the Channel ; there is something different in the very air.”

“ It smells different, I know,” said Lucilla, meekly ; and then the conversation was interrupted by that afternoon cup of tea, which Nancy could not be got to think was an extravagance, and around which, to tell the truth, the Grange Lane ladies began to resume their habit of gathering—though Miss Marjoribanks, of course, was still quite unequal to society—as in the old times.

“ And unless it is for a very short time, Lucilla,” Mrs Centum said, who had joined them, “ you never can keep it up, you know. *I* could not pretend to afford Nancy, for my part ; and when a cook is extravagant she may promise as faithfully as you please, and make good resolutions, and all that ; but when it is in her, Lucilla—I am sure one or two receipts she has given me have been quite ridiculous. You don’t like to give in, I know, but you’ll be driven to give in ; and if she does not get you into debt as well, you will be very lucky. I know what it is. With my family, you know, a week of Nancy would make an end of me.”

“ And the worst of all is,” said Lady Richmond, who had driven in expressly to add her mite to the treasure of precious counsel, of which Miss Marjoribanks was making so little use, “ that I am sure Lucilla is over-

estimating her strength. She will find after that she is not equal to it, you know; all the associations—and the people coming at night to ask for the Doctor—and—and all that. I know it would kill *me*.”

“Dear Lady Richmond,” said Lucilla, making a desperate stand, and setting, as it were, her back against a rock, “don’t you think I can bear it best here where you are all so kind to me; and where everybody was so fond of—of *him*? You can’t think what a comfort it is to me,” said Lucilla, with a sob, “to see all the hatbands upon the gentlemen’s hats.”

And then there was a pause, for this was an argument against which nobody could find anything to say.

“For my part, I think the only thing she can do is to take Inmates,” said aunt Jemima. “If I were obliged to leave she would be so very lonely. I have known ladies do it who were in a very good position, and it made no difference; people visited them all the same. She could say, ‘In consequence of changes in the family,’ or ‘A lady who has a larger house than she requires;’ which I am sure is quite true. It goes to one’s heart to think of all these bedrooms, and only one lady to sleep in them all—when so many people are so hampered for want of room. Or she might say, ‘For the sake of society;’ for, I am sure, if I should have to go away——”

“ But I hope you are not going away. It would be so sad for Lucilla to be left alone,” said Lady Richmond, who took a serious view of everything, “ at such a time.”

“ Oh, no !” aunt Jemima said, faltering a little ; and then a pink blush, which seemed strangely uncalled for in such a mild little tea-party, came over her mature countenance ; “ but then one can never tell what may happen. I might have other duties—my son might make a call upon my time. Not that I know of anything at present,” she added, hurriedly, “ but I never can bind myself on account of Tom——”

And then she caught Lucilla’s eye, and grew more confused than ever. What could she have to be confused about ? If Tom did make a call upon her time, whatever that might mean, there was nothing in it to call a blush upon his mother’s face. And the fact was, that a letter had come from Tom a day or two before, of which, contrary to all her usual habits, aunt Jemima had taken no notice to Lucilla. These were things which would have roused Miss Marjoribanks’s curiosity if she had been able to think about anything, as she said. But her visitors were taking their cup of tea all the time, in a melancholy, half-sympathetic, half-disapproving way, and they could not be expected to see anything particularly interesting in aunt Jemima’s blush.

And then Rose Lake came in from Grove Street, who was rather an unusual visitor, and whose appearance, though they were all very kind and gracious to her, rather put the others to flight; for nobody had ever quite forgotten or forgiven Barbara's brief entrance into society and flirtation with Mr Cavendish, which might be said to have been the beginning of all that happened to him in Grange Lane. As for Mrs Centum, she took her leave directly, and pressed Lucilla's hand, and could not help saying in her ear that she hoped *the other* was not coming back to Carlingford to throw herself in poor Mr Cavendish's way. "It would do him so much harm," Mrs Centum said, anxiously; "but oh! I forgot, Lucilla, you are on the other side."

"I am on no side *now*," said Miss Marjoribanks, with plaintive meaning; "and Barbara was as old as I am, you know, and she must have gone off."

"I have no doubt she has gone off," said Mrs Centum, with righteous indignation. "As old as you, Lucilla! She must be ten years older at least; and such a shocking style of looks—if men were not so infatuated! And you have not gone off at all, my poor dear," she added, with all the warmth of friendship! And then they were joined at the door by the county lady, who was the next to go away.

"My dear, I hope you will be guided for the best," Lady Richmond said as she went away; but she gave

a deep sigh as she kissed Lucilla, and looked as if she had very little faith in the efficacy of her own wish. Maria Brown had withdrawn to another part of the drawing-room with aunt Jemima, so that Lucilla was, so to speak, left alone with Rose. And Rose, too, had come with the intention of giving advice.

“I hear you are going to stay, Lucilla,” she said, “and I did not think I would be doing my duty if I did not tell you what was in my mind. *I can't do any good to anybody, you know ; but you who are so clever, and have so much in your power——*”

“I am poor now,” said Miss Marjoribanks ; “and as for being clever, I don't know about that. I never was clever about drawing or Art, like you.”

“Oh, like me !” said poor little Rose, whose Career had been sacrificed ten years ago, and who was a little misanthropical now, and did not believe even in Schools of Design ; “I am not so sure about the moral influence of Art as I used to be—except High Art, to be sure ; but we never have any High Art down here. And oh, Lucilla ! the poor people *do* want something done for them. If I was as clever as you, with a great house all to myself like this, and well off, and with plenty of influence, and no ties——” said Rose, with energetic emphasis. She made a pause there, and she was so much in earnest that the tears came into her eyes. “I would make it a House of Mercy, Lucilla !

I would show all these poor creatures how to live and how to manage, if I was as clever as you ; and teach them and their children, and look after them, and be a mother to them !” said Rose ; and here she stopped short, altogether overcome by her own magnificent conception of what her friend could or might do.

Aunt Jemima and Miss Brown, who had drawn near out of curiosity, stared at Rose as if they thought she had gone mad ; but Lucilla, who was of a larger mind and more enlightened ideas, neither laughed nor looked horrified. She did not make a very distinct answer, it is true, but she was very kind to her new adviser, and made her a fresh cup of tea, and even consented, though in an ambiguous way, to the principle she had just enunciated. “ If you won’t be affronted, my dear,” Lucilla said, “ I do not think that Art could do very much in Carlingford ; and I am sure any little thing that I may be of use for——” But she did not commit herself any further, and Rose too found the result of her visit unsatisfactory, and went home disappointed in Lucilla. This was how the afternoon passed ; and at the end of such a day, it may well be imagined how Miss Marjoribanks congratulated herself on having made up her mind before the public, so to speak, were admitted. For Rose was followed by the Rector, who, though he did not propose in so many words a House of Mercy, made no

secret of his conviction that parish-work was the only thing that could be of any service to Lucilla ; and that, in short, such was the inevitable and providential destination of a woman who had "no ties." Indeed, to hear Mr Bury, a stranger would have been disposed to believe that Dr Marjoribanks had been, as he said, "removed," and his fortune swept away, all in order to indicate to Lucilla the proper sphere for her energies. In the face of all this it will be seen how entirely Miss Marjoribanks's wisdom in making her decision by herself before her advisers broke in upon her, was justified. She could now set her back against her rock, and face her assailants, as Fitz-James did.

"Come one, come all, this rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I,"

might have been her utterance ; but she was not in a defiant mood. She kissed all her counsellors that day (except, of course, the Rector), and heard them out with the sweetest patience ; and then she thought to herself how much better it was that she had made up her mind to take her own way.

Notwithstanding, all this commotion of public opinion about her made a certain impression upon Miss Marjoribanks's mind. It was not unpleasant to feel that, for this moment at least, she was the centre of the thoughts of the community, and that

almost everybody in Carlingford had taken the trouble to frame an ideal existence for her, according as he or she regarded life. It is so seldom that any one has it in his power, consciously and evidently, to regulate his life for himself, and make it whatever he wants it to be. And then, at the same time, the best that she could make of it would, after all, be something very limited and unsatisfactory. In her musings on this subject, Lucilla could not but go back a great many times to that last conversation she had with her father, when she walked up Grange Lane with him that night over the thawed and muddy snow. The Doctor had said she was not cut out for a single woman ; and Lucilla, with candour, yet a certain philosophical speculativeness, had allowed that she was not—unless, indeed, she could be very rich. If she had been very rich, the prospect would no doubt have been, to a certain extent, different. And then, oddly enough, it was Rose Lake's suggestion which came after this to Lucilla's mind. She did not smile at it as some people might expect she would. One thing was quite sure, that she had no intention of sinking into a nobody, and giving up all power of acting upon her fellow-creatures ; and she could not help being conscious of the fact that she was able to be of much use to her fellow-creatures. If it had been Maria Brown, for instance,

who had been concerned, the whole question would have been one of utter unimportance, except to the heroine herself; but it was different in Miss Marjoribanks's case. The House of Mercy was not a thing to be taken into any serious consideration; but still there was something in the idea which Lucilla could not dismiss carelessly as her friends could. She had no vocation, such as the foundress of such an establishment ought to have, nor did she see her way to the abandonment of all projects for herself, and that utter devotion to the cause of humanity which would be involved in it; but yet, when a woman happens to be full of energy and spirit, and determined that whatever she may be she shall certainly not be a nonentity, her position is one that demands thought. She was very capable of serving her fellow-creatures, and very willing and well disposed to serve them; and yet she was not inclined to give herself up entirely to them, nor to relinquish her personal prospects—vague though these might be. It was a tough problem, and one which might have caused a most unusual disturbance in Lucilla's well-regulated mind, had not she remembered all at once what deep mourning she was in, and that at present no sort of action, either of one kind or another, could be expected of her. There was no need for making a final decision, either about the parish-work, or about

taking Inmates, as aunt Jemima proposed, or about any other single suggestion which had been offered to her ; no more than there was any necessity for asking what her cousin Tom's last letter had been about, or why his mother looked so guilty and embarrassed when she spoke of him. Grief has its privileges and exemptions, like other great principles of life ; and the recollection that she could not at present be expected to be able to think about anything, filled Lucilla's mind with the most soothing sense of consolation and refreshing calm.

And then other events occurred to occupy her friends ; the election for one thing began to grow a little exciting, and took away some of the superfluous energy of Grange Lane. Mr Ashburton had carried all before him at first ; but since the Rector had come into the field, the balance had changed a little. Mr Bury was very Low-Church ; and from the moment at which he was persuaded that Mr Cavendish was a great penitent, the question as to which was the Man for Carlingford had been solved in his mind in the most satisfactory way. A man who intrenched himself in mere respectability, and trusted in his own good character, and considered himself to have a clear conscience, and to have done his duty, had no chance against a repentant sinner. Mr Cavendish, perhaps, had not done his duty quite so well ; but then he was penitent, and everything was expressed in that word.

The Rector was by no means contemptible, either as an adversary or a supporter—and the worst of it was that, in embracing Mr Cavendish's claims, he could scarcely help speaking of Mr Ashburton as if he was in a very bad way. And feeling began to rise rather high in Carlingford. If anything could have deepened the intensity of Miss Marjoribanks's grief, it would have been to know that all this was going on, and that affairs might go badly with her candidate, while she was shut up, and could give no aid. It was hard upon her, and it was hard upon the candidates themselves—one of whom had thus become generally disapproved of, without, so far as he knew, doing anything to deserve it ; while the other occupied the still more painful character of being on his promotion—a repentant man, with a character to keep up. It was no wonder that Mrs Centum grew pale at the very idea of such a creature as Barbara Lake throwing herself in poor Mr Cavendish's way. A wrong step one way or other—a relapse into the ways of wickedness—might undo in a moment all that it had cost so much trouble to do. And the advantage of the Rector's support was thus grievously counterbalanced by what might be called the uncertainty of it—especially as Mr Cavendish was not, as his committee lamented secretly among themselves, a man of strong will or business habits, in whom implicit confidence could be placed. He might

get restive, and throw the Rector over just at the critical moment; or he might relapse into his lazy Continental habits, and give up church-going and other good practices. But still, up to this moment, he had shown very tolerable perseverance; and Mr Bury's influence thrown into his scale had equalised matters very much, and made the contest very exciting. All this Lucilla heard, not from Mr Cavendish, but from her own candidate, who had taken to calling in a steady sort of way. He never went into any effusions of sympathy, for he was not that kind of man; but he would shake hands with her, and say that people must submit to the decrees of Providence; and then he would speak of the election and of his chances. Sometimes Mr Ashburton was despondent, and then Lucilla cheered him up; and sometimes he had very good hopes.

"I am very glad you are to be here," he said on one of these occasions. "It would have been a great loss to me if you had gone away. I shall never forget our talk about it here *that* day, and how you were the first person that found me out."

"It was not any cleverness of mine," said Lucilla. "It came into my mind all in a moment, like spirit-rapping, you know. It seems so strange to talk of that *now*; there have been such changes since then—it looks like years."

“Yes,” said Mr Ashburton, in his steady way. “There is nothing that really makes time look so long; but we must all bow to these dispensations, my dear Miss Marjoribanks. I would not speak of the election, but that I thought it might amuse you. The writs are out now, you know, and it takes place on Monday week.”

Upon which Miss Marjoribanks smiled upon Mr Ashburton, and held out her hands to him with a gesture and look which said more than words. “You know you will have *all* my best wishes,” she said; and the candidate was much moved—more moved than at such a moment he had thought it possible to be.

“If I succeed, I know whom I shall thank the most,” he said, fervently; and then, as this was a climax, and it would have been a kind of bathos to plunge into ordinary details after it, Mr Ashburton got up, still holding Lucilla’s hand, and clasped it almost tenderly as he said good-bye. She looked very well in her mourning, though she had not expected to do so; for black was not Lucilla’s style. And the fact was, that instead of having gone off, as she herself said, Miss Marjoribanks looked better than ever she did, and was even embellished by the natural tears which still shone by times in her eyes. Mr Ashburton went out in a kind of bewilderment after

this interview, and forgot his overcoat in the hall, and had to come back for it, which was a confusing circumstance; and then he went on his way with a gentle excitement which was not unpleasant. "Would she, I wonder?" he said to himself, as he went up Grange Lane. Perhaps he was only asking himself whether Lucilla would or could be present along with Lady Richmond and her family at the window of the Blue Boar on the great day; but if that was it, the idea had a certain brightening and quickening influence upon his face and his movements. The doubt he had on the subject, whatever it was, was not a discouraging, but a piquant, stimulating, exciting doubt. He had all but proposed the question to his committee when he went in among them, which would have filled these gentlemen with wonder and dismay. But though he did not do that, he carried it home with him, as he trotted back to the Firs to dinner. Mr Ashburton took a walk through his own house that evening, and examined all its capabilities—with no particular motive, as he was at pains to explain to his housekeeper; and again he said to himself, "Would she, I wonder?" before he retired for the night; which was no doubt an unusual sort of iteration for so sensible a man, and one so fully occupied with the most important affairs, to make.

As for Lucilla, she was not in the way of asking herself any questions at that moment. She was letting things take their course, and not interfering ; and consequently, nothing that happened could be said to be her fault. She carried this principle so far, that even when aunt Jemima was herself led to open the subject, in a hesitating way, Miss Marjoribanks never even asked a single question about Tom's last letter. She was in mourning, and that was enough for her. As for appearing at the window of the Blue Boar with Lady Richmond, if that was what Mr Ashburton was curious about, he might have saved himself the trouble of any speculations on the subject. For though Miss Marjoribanks would be very anxious about the election, she would indeed have been ashamed of herself could her feelings have permitted her to appear anywhere in public so soon. Thus, while Mr Ashburton occupied himself much with the question which had taken possession of his mind, Lucilla took a good book, which seemed the best reading for her in her circumstances, and when she had looked after all her straitened affairs in the morning, sat down sweetly in the afternoon quiet of her retirement and seclusion, and let things take their way.

CHAPTER XLVII.

As the election approached, it became gradually the one absorbing object of interest in Carlingford. The contest was so equal that everybody took a certain share in it, and became excited as the decisive moment drew nigh. Most of the people in Grange Lane were for Mr Ashburton, but then the Rector, who was a host in himself, was for Mr Cavendish ; and the coquetting of the Dissenting interest, which was sometimes drawn towards the liberal sentiments of the former candidate, but sometimes could not help reflecting that Mr Ashburton "dealt" in George Street ; and the fluctuations of the bargemen, who were, many of them, freemen, and a very difficult part of the population, excited the most vivid interest. Young Mr Wentworth, who had but lately come to Carlingford, had already begun to acquire a great influence at Wharfside, where most of the bargees lived, and the steady ones would no doubt have been largely swayed

by him had his inclinations been the same as the Rector's ; but Mr Wentworth, perversely enough, had conceived that intuitive repugnance for Mr Cavendish which a high-principled and not very tolerant young man often feels for the middle-aged individual who still conceives himself to have some right to be called young, and whose antecedents are not entirely beyond suspicion. Mr Wentworth's disinclination (and he was a man rather apt to take his own way) lay like a great boulder across the stream of the Rector's enthusiasm, and unquestionably interrupted it a little. Both the candidates and both the committees had accordingly work enough to do up to the last moment. Mr Cavendish all at once became a connoisseur in hams, and gave a magnificent order in the most complimentary way to Tozer, who received it with a broad smile, and "booked" it, as he said. "It ain't ham he's awanting," the buttermilk man said, not without amusement ; for Tozer was well to do, and, except that he felt the honour of a mark of confidence, was not to be moved one way or another by one order. "If he dealt regular, it might be different. Them's the sort of folks as a man feels drawn to," said the true philosopher. Mr Ashburton, on the other side, did not make the impression which his friends thought he ought to have made in Prickett's Lane ; but at least nobody could say that he did not stick very close to

his work. He went at it like a man night and day, and neglected no means of carrying it to a successful issue; whereas, as Mr Centum and Mr Woodburn mourned in secret to each other, Cavendish required perpetual egging on. He did not like to get up in the morning, and get early to his work. It went against all his habits—as if his habits mattered in the face of so great an emergency; and in the afternoon it was hard to prevent him from lounging into some of his haunts, which were utterly out of the way of business. He would stay in Masters's for an hour at a time, though he knew Mr Wentworth, who was Masters's great patron, did not care for him, and that his favour for such a Tractarian sort of place was bitter to the Rector. Anything for a little idleness and waste of time, poor Mr Centum said, who was two stone lighter on the eve of the election than when the canvass began. Such a contrast would make any man angry. Mr Cavendish was goaded into more activity as the decisive moment approached, and performed what seemed to himself unparalleled feats. But it was only two days before the moment of fate when the accident happened to him which brought such dismay to all his supporters. Our own opinion is, that it did not materially affect the issue of the contest one way or other; but that was the reverse of the feeling which prevailed in Grange Lane.

It was just two days before the election, and all seemed going on sufficiently well. Mr Cavendish had been meeting a Dissenting committee, and it was on leaving them that he found himself at the corner of Grove Street, where, under ordinary circumstances, he had no occasion to be. At a later period he was rather fond of saying that it was not of his own motion that he was there at all, but only in obedience to the committee, which ordered him about like a nigger. The spring afternoon was darkening, and the Dissenters (almost wholly unimpressed by his arguments, and remarking more strongly than ever where Mr Ashburton "dealt," and how thoroughly everybody knew all about him) had all dispersed. It was but natural, when Mr Cavendish came to the corner of Grove Street, where, in other days, he had played a very different part, that certain softening influences should take possession of his soul. "What a voice she had, by Jove!" he said to himself; "very different from that shrill pipe of Lucilla's." To tell the truth, if there was one person in Carlingford whom he felt a resentment against, it was Lucilla. She had never done him any harm to speak of, and once she had unquestionably done him a great deal of good. But, on the other hand, it was she who first showed herself candidly conscious that he had grown stout, and who all along had supported and encouraged his rival. It

was possible, no doubt, that this might be pique ; and, mixed with his anger for her sins against him, Mr Cavendish had, at the same time, a counterbalancing sense that there still remained to him in his life one supereminently wise thing that he still could do—and that was, to go down Grange Lane instantly to the Doctor's silenced house, and go down on his knees, or do any other absurdity that might be necessary to make Lucilla marry him ; after which act he would henceforward be, pecuniarily and otherwise (notwithstanding that she was poor), a saved man. It did not occur to him that Lucilla would never have married him, even had he gone down on his knees ; but perhaps that would be too much to ask any man to believe of any woman ; and his feeling that this was the right thing to do, rather strengthened than otherwise the revolt of his heart against Lucilla. It was twilight, as we have said, and he had done a hard day's work, and there was still an hour before dinner which he seemed to have a right to dispose of in his own way ; and he did hesitate at the corner of Grove Street, laying himself open, as it were, to any temptation that might offer itself. Temptations come, as a general rule, when they are sought ; and thus, on the very eve of the election, a grievous accident happened to Mr Cavendish. It might have happened at any time, to be sure, but this was the most inopport-

tune moment possible, and it came accordingly now.

For as he made that pause, some one passed him whom he could not but look after with a certain interest. She went past him with a whisk, as if she too was not without reminiscences. It was not such a figure as a romantic young man would be attracted by on such a sudden meeting, and it was not attraction but recollection that moved Mr Cavendish. It was the figure of a large woman in a large shawl, not very gracefully put on, and making her look very square about the shoulders and bunchy at the neck ; and the robe that was whisked past him was that peculiar kind of faded silk gown which looks and rustles like tin, or some other thin metallic substance. He made that momentary pause at the street corner, and then he went on slowly, not following her, to be sure, but merely, as he said to himself, pursuing his own course ; for it was just as easy to get into Grange Lane by the farther end as by this end. He went along very slowly, and the lady before him walked quickly, even with something like a bounce of excitement, and went in at Mr Lake's door long before Mr Cavendish had reached it. When he came up on a level with the parlour window, which was partially open though the evening was so cold, Mr Cavendish positively started, notwithstanding the old associations which had been

rising in his mind ; for there was pouring forth from the half-open window such a volume of melody as had not been heard for years in Grove Street. Perhaps the voice had lost some of its freshness, but in the surprise of the moment the hearer was not critical ; and its volume and force seemed even greater than before.

It has been already mentioned in this history that a contralto had a special charm for Mr Cavendish. He was so struck that he stood stock-still for the moment, not knowing what to make of it ; and then he wavered for another moment, with a sudden sense that the old allegorical crisis had occurred to him, and that Pleasure, in a magnificent gush of song, wooed him on one side, while Duty, with still small voice, called him at the other. He stood still, he wavered—for fifty seconds perhaps the issue was uncertain, and the victim was still within reach of salvation ; but the result in such a case depends very much upon whether a man really likes doing his duty, which is by no means an invariable necessity. Mr Cavendish had in the abstract no sort of desire to do his unless when he could not help it, and consequently his resistance to temptation was very feeble. He was standing knocking at Mr Lake's door before half the thoughts appropriate to the occasion had got through his mind, and found himself sitting on the little sofa in Mr Lake's parlour as he

used to do ten years ago, before he could explain to himself how he came there. It was all, surely, a kind of enchantment altogether. He was there—he who had been so long away from Carlingford—he who had been so deeply offended by hearing his name seriously coupled with that of Barbara Lake—he who ought to have been anywhere in the world rather than here upon the eve of his election, when all the world was keeping watch over his conduct. And it was Barbara who sat at the piano singing—singing one of the same songs, as if she had spent the entire interval in that occupation, and never had done anything else all these years. The sensation was so strange that Mr Cavendish may be excused for feeling a little uncertainty as to whether or not he was dreaming, which made him unable to answer himself the graver question whether or not he was doing what he ought to do. He did not seem to be able to make out whether it was now or ten years ago—whether he was a young man free to amuse himself, or a man who was getting stout, and upon whom the eyes of an anxious constituency were fixed. And then, after being so virtuous for a length of time, a forbidden pleasure was sweet.

Mr Cavendish's ideas, however, gradually arranged themselves as he sat in the corner of the little hair-cloth sofa, and began to take in the differences as well as the bewildering resemblances of the present and

past. Barbara, like himself, had changed. She did not insult him, as Lucilla had done, by fresh looks and mischievous candour about "going off." Barbara *had* gone off, like himself, and, like himself, did not mean to acknowledge it. She had expanded all over, as was natural to a contralto. Her eyes were blacker and more brilliant in a way, but they were eyes which owned an indescribable amount of usage; and her cheeks, too, wore the deep roses of old, deepened and fixed by wear and tear. Instead of feeling ashamed of himself in her presence, as he had done in Lucilla's, Mr Cavendish felt somehow consoled and justified and sympathetic. "Poor soul!" he said to himself, as he sat by while she was singing. She, too, had been in the wars, and had not come out scatheless. She did not reproach him, nor commiserate him, nor look at him with that mixture of wonder and tolerance and pity which other people had manifested. She did not even remark that he had grown stout. He was not a man fallen, fallen, fallen from his high estate, to Barbara. She herself had fallen from the pinnacles of youth, and Mr Cavendish was still a great man in her eyes. She sang for him as she had sung ten years ago, and received him with a flutter of suppressed delight, and in her satisfaction was full of excitement. The hard-worked candidate sank deeper and deeper into the corner of the sofa and listened to the music, and felt it very

soothing and pleasant, for everybody had united in goading him on rather than petting him for the last month or two of his life.

“ Now tell me something about yourself,” he said, when the song was over, and Barbara had turned round, as she used to do in old times, on her music-stool ; “ I hear you have been away, like me.”

“ Not like you,” said Barbara, “ for you went because you pleased, and I went——”

“ Why did you go ?” asked Mr Cavendish.

“ Because I could not stay here any longer,” said Barbara, with her old vehemence ; “ because I was talked about, and looked down upon, and—— Well, never mind, that’s all over now ; and I am sure I am very glad to see you, Mr Cavendish, as a *friend*.”

And with that something like a tear came into her eye. She had been knocked about a good deal in the world, and though she had not learned much, still she had learned that she was young no longer, and could not indulge in the caprices of that past condition of existence. Mr Cavendish, for his part, could not but smile at this intimation that he was to be received as a friend, and consequently need not have any fear of Barbara’s fascinations,—as if a woman of her age, worn and gone off as she was, could be supposed dangerous ; but still he was touched by her tone.

“ We were once very good friends, Barbara,” said

the inconsistent man ; “ we have lost sight of each other for a long time, as people do in this world ; but we were once very good friends.”

“ Yes,” she said, with a slight touch of annoyance in her voice ; “ but since we have lost sight of each other for so long, I don’t see why you should call me Barbara. It would be much more becoming to say Miss Lake.”

Mr Cavendish was amused, and he was touched and flattered. Most people had been rather forbearing to him since he came back, putting up with him for old friendship’s sake, or supporting his cause as that of a reformed man, and giving him, on the whole, a sort of patronising humiliating countenance ; and to find somebody in whose eyes he was still the paladin of old times, *the* Mr Cavendish whom people in Grange Lane were proud of, was balm to his wounded soul.

“ I don’t know how I am to learn to say Miss Lake —when you are just as good to me as ever, and sing as you have just been doing,” he said. “ I suppose you say so because you find me so changed ? ”

Upon which Barbara lifted her black eyes and looked at him as she had scarcely done before. The eyes were as bright as ever, and they were softened a little for the moment out of the stare that seemed to have grown habitual to them ; and her crimson cheeks glowed as of old ; and though she was untidy,

and looked worn, and like a creature much buffeted about by wind and waves, she was still what connoisseurs in that article call a fine woman. She looked full at Mr Cavendish, and then she cast down her eyes, as if the sight was too much for her. "I don't see any difference," she said, with a certain tremor in her voice ; for he was a man of whom, in the days of her youth, she had been fond in her way.

And naturally Mr Cavendish was more touched than ever. He took her hand, and called her Barbara again without any reproof ; and he saw that she trembled, and that his presence here made to the full as great an impression as he had ever done in his palmyest days. Perhaps a greater impression ; for their old commerce had been stormy, and interrupted by many a hurricane ; and Barbara then had, or thought she might have, many strings to her bow, and did not believe that there was only one Mr Cavendish in the world. Now all that was changed ; and if this old hope should revive again, it would not be allowed to die away for any gratification of temper. Mr Cavendish did not remember ever to have seen her tremble before, and he too was fond of her in his way.

This curious revival did not come to anything of deeper importance, for of course just then Rose came

in from her household affairs, and Mr Lake to tea ; and the candidate recollected that it was time for dinner. But father and sister also gave him, in their different ways, a rather flattering reception. Mr Lake had already pledged him his vote, and was full of interest as to how things were going on, and enthusiastic for his success ; and Rose scowled upon him as of old, as on a dangerous character, whose comings and goings could not be seen without apprehension ; which was an unexpected pleasure to a man who had been startled to find how very little commotion his presence made in Grange Lane. He pressed Barbara's hand as he went away, and went to his dinner with a heart which certainly beat lighter, and a more pleasant sense of returning self-confidence, than he had felt for a long time. When he was coming out of the house, as a matter of course, he met with the chief of his Dissenting supporters, accompanied (for Mr Bury, as has been said, was very Low-Church, and loved, wherever he could do it, to work in unison with his Dissenting brethren) by the Rector's churchwarden, both of whom stopped with a curiously critical air to speak to the Candidate, who had to be every man's friend for the time being. The look in their eyes sent an icy chill through and through him, but still the forbidden pleasure had been sweet. As he walked home, he could not help thinking it over, and going

back ten years, and feeling a little doubtful about it, whether it was then or now. And as he mused, Miss Marjoribanks, whom he could not help continually connecting and contrasting with the other, appeared to him as a kind of jealous Queen Eleanor, who had a right to him, and could take possession at any time, should she choose to make the effort ; while Barbara was a Rosamond, dilapidated indeed, but always ready to receive and console him in her bower. This was the kind of unconscious sentiment he had in his mind, feeling sure, as he mused, that Lucilla would be very glad to marry him, and that it would be very wise on his part to ask her, and was a thing which might still probably come to pass. Of course he could not see into Miss Marjoribanks's mind, which had travelled such a long way beyond him. He gave a glance up at the windows as he passed her door, and felt a kind of disagreeable satisfaction in seeing how diminished the lights were in the once-radiant house. And Lucilla was so fond of a great deal of light ! but she could not afford now to spend as much money upon wax as a Continental church might do. Mr Cavendish had so odd a sense of Lucilla's power over him, that it gave him a certain pleasure to think of the coming down of her pride and diminution of her lights.

But the fact was, that not more than ten minutes after he had passed her door with this reflection, Lu-

cilla, sitting with her good book on the table and her work in her hand, in the room which was not so well lighted as it used to be, heard that Mr Cavendish had been met with coming out of Mr Lake's, and that Barbara had been singing to him, and that there was no telling what might have happened. "A man ain't the man for Carlingford as takes up with that sort," Thomas said, indignantly, who had come to pay his former mistress a visit, and to assure her of his brother-in-law's vote. He was a little more free-spoken than of old, being now set up, and an independent householder, and calling no man master; and he was naturally indignant at an occurrence which, regarded in the light of past events, was an insult not only to Carlingford, but to Lucilla. Miss Marjoribanks was evidently startled by the news. She looked up quickly as if she had been about to speak, and then stopped herself and turned her back upon Thomas, and poked the fire in a most energetic way. She had even taken the hearth-brush in her hand to make all tidy after this onslaught, but that was a thing that went to Thomas's heart.

"I could't stand by and see it, Miss Lucilla," said Thomas; "it don't feel natural;" and there was actually a kind of moisture in his eye as he took that domestic implement out of her hand. Mr Cavendish pitied Lucilla for having less light than of old, and

Thomas for being reduced so low as to sweep her own hearth. But Lucilla was very far from pitying her own case. She had been making an effort over herself, and she had come out of it triumphant ; after reading so many good books, it is not to be wondered at if she felt herself a changed and softened and elevated character. She had the means in her hands of doing her candidate's rival a deadly mischief, and yet, for old friendship's sake, Lucilla made up her mind to forbear.

“ I will give it you, Thomas,” she said, with dignity, holding the hearth-brush, which was in such circumstances elevated into something sublime, “ if you will promise, never, until after the election—never to say a word about Mr Cavendish and Miss Lake. It was quite right to tell me, and you are very kind about the hearth ; but you must promise never to say a syllable about it, not even to Nancy, until the election is over ; or I will never give it you, nor ask you to do a single thing for me again.”

Thomas was so much struck with this address that he said “ Good Lord !” in sheer amazement ; and then he made the necessary vow, and took the hearth-brush out of Lucilla's hand.

“ No doubt he was asking for Mr Lake's vote,” said Miss Marjoribanks. “ They say everybody is making great exertions, and you know they are both my

friends. I ought to be pleased whoever wins. But it is impressed on my mind that Mr Ashburton will be the man," Lucilla added, with a little solemnity, "and, Thomas, we must give them fair-play."

It would be vain to assert that Thomas understood this romantic generosity, but he was taken by surprise, and had relinquished his own liberty in the matter, and had nothing further to say. Indeed he had so little to say down-stairs, that Nancy, who was longing for a little gossip, insulted and reviled him, and declared that since he took up with *that* Betsy there never was a sensible word to be got out of him. And all the time the poor man was burning with this bit of news. Many a man has bartered his free-will before under the influence of female wiles, or so at least history would have us believe; but few have done it for so poor a compensation as that hearth-brush. Thomas withdrew sore at heart, longing for the election to be over, and kept his word like an honest man; but notwithstanding, before the evening was over, the fatal news was spreading like fire to every house in Grange Lane.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IT is probable that Mr Cavendish considered the indulgence above recorded all the more excusable in that it was Saturday night. The nomination was to take place on Monday, and if a man was not to be supposed to be done with his work on the Saturday evening, when could he be expected to have a moment of repose? He had thought as he went home—for naturally, while putting himself so skilfully in the way of temptation, such questions had not entered into his mind—that the fact of to-morrow being Sunday would effectually neutralise any harm he could have been supposed to have done by a visit so simple and natural, and that neither his sister nor his committee, the two powers of which he stood in a certain awe, could so much as hear of it until the election was over, and all decided for good or for evil. This had been a comfort to his mind, but it was the very falsest and most deceitful consolation. That intervening Sunday was a

severer calamity for Mr Cavendish than half-a-dozen ordinary days. The general excitement had risen so high, and all the chances on both sides had been so often discussed and debated, that something new was as water in the desert to the thirsting constituency. The story was all through Grange Lane that very night, but Carlingford itself, from St Roque's to the wilderness of the North End, tingled with it next morning. It is true, the Rector made no special allusion to it in his sermon, though the tone of all his services was so sad, and his own fine countenance looked so melancholy, that Mr Bury's devoted followers could all see that he had something on his mind. But Mr Tufton at Salem Chapel was not so reticent. He was a man quite famous for his extempore gifts, and who rather liked to preach about any very recent public event, which it was evident to all his hearers could not have found place in a "prepared" discourse; and his sermon that morning was upon wickedness in high places, upon men who sought the confidence of their fellows only to betray it, and offered to the poor man a hand red with his sister's (metaphorical) blood.

But it would be wrong to say that this was the general tone of public opinion in Grove Street; most people, on the contrary, thought of Mr Cavendish not as a wolf thirsting for the lamb's blood, but rather

himself as a kind of lamb caught in the thicket, and about to be offered up in sacrifice. Such was the impression of a great many influential persons who had been wavering hitherto, and inclining on the whole to Mr Cavendish's liberal principles and supposed Low-Church views. A man whose hand is red metaphorically with your sister's blood is no doubt a highly objectionable personage ; but it is doubtful whether, under the circumstances, an enlightened constituency might not consider the man who had given a perfectly unstained hand to so thoroughly unsatisfactory a sister as more objectionable still ; and the indignation of Grange Lane at Barbara's reappearance was nothing to the fury of George Street, and even of Wharfside, where the bargees began to scoff openly. Society had nothing worse to say than to quote Mrs Chiley, and assert that "these artist people were all adventurers ;" and then Grange Lane in general could not forget that it "had met" Barbara, nor dismiss from its consideration her black eyes, her level brows, and her magnificent contralto ; whereas in the other region the idea of the Member for Carlingford marrying "that sort !" cast all the world into temporary delirium. It was a still more deadly offence to the small people than to the great. And the exceptional standing which poor Mr Lake and his daughter Rose used to lay claim to—the "rank of their own" which they

possessed as artists—was a pretension much more disagreeable to the shopkeepers than to society in general. Thus in every sense Mr Cavendish had done the very worst for himself by his ill-timed indulgence ; and his guilt was about the same with most of his critics whether he meant perfectly well and innocently, or entertained the most guilty intentions ever conceived by man.

And all his misfortunes were increased by the fact that the intervening day was a Sunday. Barbara Lake herself, who did not know what people were saying, and who, if she had known, would not have cared, came to church, as was natural, in the morning ; and under pretence that the family pew was full, had the assurance, as people remarked, to come to the middle aisle, in that same silk dress which rustled like tin, and made more demonstration than the richest draperies. The pew-opener disapproved of her as much as everybody else did, but she could not turn the intruder out ; and though Barbara had a long time to wait, and was curiously inspected by all the eyes near her while she did so, the end was that she got a seat in her rustling silk not very far from where Lucilla sat in deep mourning, a model of every righteous observance. As for poor Barbara, she too was very exemplary in church. She meant nobody any harm, poor soul. She could not help the flashing of those big black eyes, to which

the level line above them gave such a curious appearance of obliqueness—nor was it to be expected that she should deny herself the use of her advantages, or omit to “take the second” in all the canticles with such melodious liquid tones as made everybody stop and look round. She had a perfect right to do it; indeed it was her duty, as it is everybody’s duty, to aid to the best of their ability in the church-music of their parish, which was what Lucilla Marjoribanks persisted in saying in answer to all objections. But the effect was great in the congregation, and even the Rector himself was seen to change colour as his eye fell upon the unlucky young woman. Mr Cavendish, for his part, knew her voice the moment he heard it, and gave a little start, and received such a look from his sister, who was standing by him, as turned him to stone. Mrs Woodburn looked at him, and so did her husband, and Mr Centum turned a solemnly inquiring reproachful gaze upon him from the other side of the aisle. “Oh, Harry, you will kill me with vexation! why, for goodness’ sake, did you let her come?” his sister whispered when they had all sat down again. “Good heavens! how could I help it?” cried poor Mr Cavendish, almost loud enough to be heard. And then by the slight, almost imperceptible, hum around him, he felt that not only his sister and his committee, but the Rector and all Carlingford, had their eyes upon him,

and was thankful to look up the lesson, poor man, and bury his face in it. It was a hard punishment for the indiscretion of an hour.

But perhaps of all the people concerned it was the Rector who was the most to be pitied. He had staked his honour upon Mr Cavendish's repentance, and here was he going back publicly to wallow in the mire—and it was Sunday, when such a worldly subject ought not to be permitted to enter a good man's mind, much less to be discussed and acted upon as it ought to be if anything was to be done; for there was little more than this sacred day remaining in which to undo the mischief which a too great confidence in human nature had wrought. And then, to tell the truth, the Rector did not know how to turn back. It would have been hard, very hard, to have told all the people who confided in him that he had never had any stronger evidence for Mr Cavendish's repentance than he now had for his backsliding; and to give in, and let the other side have it all their own way, and throw over the candidate with whom he had identified himself, was as painful to Mr Bury as if, instead of being very Low-Church, he had been the most muscular of Christians. Being in this state of mind, it may be supposed that his sister's mild wonder and trembling speculations at lunch, when they were alone together, were well qualified to raise some sparks of that old Adam, who,

though well kept under, still existed in the Rector's, as in most other human breasts.

"But, dear Edward, I would not quite condemn him," Miss Bury said. "He has been the cause of a good deal of remark, you know; and the poor girl has been talked about. He may think it is his duty to make her amends. For anything we can tell, he may have the most honourable intentions——"

"Oh, bother his honourable intentions!" said the Rector. Such an exclamation from him was as bad as the most dreadful oath from an ordinary man, and very nearly made Miss Bury drop from her chair in amazement. Things must have gone very far indeed when the Rector himself disregarded all proprieties and the sacredness of the day in such a wildly-daring fashion. For, to tell the truth, in his secret heart Mr Bury was himself a little of the way of thinking of the people in Grove Street. Strictly speaking, if a man has done anything to make a young woman be talked about, every well-principled person ought to desire that he should make her amends; but at the same time, at such a crisis there was little consolation in the fact that the candidate one was supporting and doing daily battle for had honourable intentions in respect to Barbara Lake. If it had been Rose Lake, it would still have been a blow; but Rose was unspeakably respect-

able, and nobody could have said a syllable on the subject: while Barbara, who came to church in a tin gown, and rustled up the middle aisle in it, attracting all eyes, and took such a second in the canticles that she overwhelmed the choir itself—Barbara, who had made people talk at Lucilla's parties, and had been ten years away, wandering over the face of the earth, nobody could tell where—governessing, singing, play-acting, perhaps, for anything that anybody could tell! A clergyman, it is true, dared not have said such a thing, and Mr Bury's remorse would have been bitter could he have really believed himself capable even of thinking it; but still it is certain that the unconscious, unexpressed idea in his mind was, that the honourable intentions were the worst of it—that a candidate might be a fool, or even an unrepentant sinner, and after all it would be chiefly his own concern; but that so much as to dream of making Barbara Lake the Member's wife, was the deepest insult that could be offered to Carlingford. The Rector carried his burden silently all day, and scarcely opened his lips, as all his sympathetic following remarked; but before he went to bed he made a singular statement, the complete accuracy of which an impartial observer might be disposed to doubt, but which Mr Bury uttered with profound sincerity, and with a sigh of self-compassion. "*Now I understand Lucilla Marjoribanks,*" was what the good

man said, and he all but puffed out the candle he had just lighted, with that sigh.

Lucilla, however, in her own person took no part in it at all, one way or other. She shook hands very kindly with Barbara, and hoped she would come and see her, and made it clearly apparent that *she* at least bore no malice. "I am very glad I told Thomas to say nothing about it," she said to aunt Jemima, who, however, did not know the circumstances, and was very little the wiser, as may be supposed.

And then the two ladies walked home together, and Miss Marjoribanks devoted herself to her good books. It was almost the first moment of repose that Lucilla had ever had in her busy life, and it was a repose not only permitted but enjoined. Society, which had all along expected so much from her, expected now that she should not find herself able for any exertion ; and Miss Marjoribanks responded nobly, as she had always done, to the requirements of society. To a mind less perfectly regulated, the fact that the election which had been so interesting to her was now about, as may be said, to take place without her, would have been of itself a severe trial ; and the sweet composure with which she bore it was not one of the least remarkable phenomena of the present crisis. But the fact was that this Sunday was on the whole an oppressive day. Mr Ashburton came in for a moment, it is true,

between services ; but he himself, though generally so steady, was unsettled and agitated. He had been bearing the excitement well until this last almost incredible accident occurred, which made it possible that he might not only win, but win by a large majority. "The Dissenters have all held out till now, and would not pledge themselves," he said to Lucilla, actually with a tremble in his voice ; and then he told her about Mr Tufton's sermon and the wickedness in high places, and the hand imbrued metaphorically in his sister's blood.

"I wonder how he could say so," said Lucilla, with indignation. "It is just like those Dissenters. What harm was there in going to see her ? I heard of it last night, but even for your interest I would never have spread such mere gossip as that."

"No—certainly it is mere gossip," said Mr Ashburton ; "but it will do him a great deal of harm all the same," and then once more he got restless and abstracted. "I suppose it is of no use asking you if you would join Lady Richmond's party at the Blue Boar ? You could have a window almost to yourself, you know, and would be quite quiet."

Lucilla shook her head, and the movement was more expressive than words. "I did not think you would," said Mr Ashburton ; and then he took her hand, and his looks too became full of meaning. "Then I must say adieu," he said—"adieu until it is all over. I shall

not have a moment that I can call my own—this will be an eventful week for me.”

“You mean an eventful day,” said Lucilla ; for Mr Ashburton was not such a novice as to be afraid of the appearance he would have to make at the nomination. He did not contradict her, but he pressed her hand with a look which was equivalent to kissing it, though he was not romantic enough to go quite that length. When he was gone, Miss Marjoribanks could not but wonder a little what he could mean by looking forward to an eventful week. For her own part, she could not but feel that after so much excitement things would feel rather flat for the rest of the week, and that it was almost wrong to have an election on a Tuesday. Could it be that Mr Ashburton had some other contest or candidateship in store for himself which he had not told her about? Such a thing was quite possible ; but what had Lucilla in her mourning to do with worldly contingencies? She went back to her seat in the corner of the sofa and her book of sermons, and read fifty pages before tea-time ; she knew how much, because she had put a mark in her book when Mr Ashburton came in. Marks are very necessary things generally in sermon-books ; and Lucilla could not but feel pleased to think that since her visitor went away she had got over so much ground.

To compare Carlingford to a volcano that night (and

indeed all the next day, which was the day of nomination) would be a stale similitude; and yet in some respects it was like a volcano. It was not the same kind of excitement which arises in a town where politics run very high—if there are any towns nowadays in such a state of unsophisticated nature. Neither was it a place where simple corruption could carry the day; for the freemen of Wharfside were, after all, but a small portion of the population. It was in reality a quite ideal sort of contest—a contest for the best man, such as would have pleased the purest-minded philosopher. It was the man most fit to represent Carlingford for whom everybody was looking, not a man to be baited about parish-rates and Reform Bills and the Irish Church;—a man who lived in, or near the town, and “dealt regular” at all the best shops; a man who would not disgrace his constituency by any unlawful or injudicious sort of love-making—who would attend to the town’s interests and subscribe to its charities, and take the lead in a general way. This was what Carlingford was looking for, as Miss Marjoribanks, with that intuitive rapidity which was characteristic of her genius, had at once remarked; and when everybody went home from church and chapel, though it was Sunday, the whole town thrilled and throbbed with this great question. People might have found it possible to condone a sin or wink at a mere backslid-

ing ; but there were few so bigoted in their faith as to believe that the man who was capable of marrying Barbara Lake could ever be the man for Carlingford ; and thus it was that Mr Cavendish, who had been flourishing like a green bay-tree, withered away, as it were, in a moment, and the place that had known him knew him no more.

The hustings were erected at that central spot, just under the windows of the Blue Boar, where Grange Lane and George Street meet, the most central point in Carlingford. It was so near that Lucilla could hear the shouts and the music and all the divers noises of the election, but could not, even when she went into the very corner of the window and strained her eyes to the utmost, see what was going on, which was a very trying position. We will not linger upon the proceedings or excitement of Monday, when the nomination and the speeches were made, and when the show of hands was certainly thought to be in Mr Cavendish's favour. But it was the next day that was the real trial. Lady Richmond and her party drove past at a very early hour, and looked up at Miss Marjoribanks's windows, and congratulated themselves that they were so early, and that poor dear Lucilla would not have the additional pain of seeing them go past. But Lucilla did see them, though, with her usual good sense, she

kept behind the blind. She never did anything absurd in the way of early rising on ordinary occasions ; but this morning it was impossible to restrain a certain excitement, and though it did her no good, still she got up an hour earlier than usual, and listened to the music, and heard the cabs rattling about, and could not help it if her heart beat quicker. It was perhaps a more important crisis for Miss Marjoribanks than for any other person, save one, in Carlingford ; for of course it would be foolish to attempt to assert that she did not understand by this time what Mr Ashburton meant ; and it may be imagined how hard it was upon Lucilla to be thus, as it were, in the very outside row of the assembly—to hear all the distant shouts and sounds, everything that was noisy and inarticulate, and conveyed no meaning, and to be out of reach of all that could really inform her as to what was going on.

She saw from her window the cabs rushing past, now with her own violet-and-green colours, now with the blue-and-yellow. And sometimes it seemed to Lucilla that the blue-and-yellow predominated, and that the carriages which mounted the hostile standard carried voters in larger numbers and more enthusiastic condition. The first load of bargemen that came up Grange Lane from the further end of Wharfside were all Blues ; and when a spectator is thus

held on the very edge of the event in a suspense which grows every moment more intolerable, especially when he or she is disposed to believe that things in general go on all the worse for his or her absence, it is no wonder if that spectator becomes nervous, and sees all the dangers at their darkest. What if, after all, old liking and friendship had prevailed over that beautiful optimism which Lucilla had done so much to instil into the minds of her townfolk? What if something more mercenary and less elevating than the ideal search for the best man, in which she had hoped Carlingford was engaged, should have swayed the popular mind to the other side? All these painful questions went through Lucilla's mind as the day crept on; and her suspense was much aggravated by aunt Jemima, who took no real interest in the election, but who kept saying every ten minutes—"I wonder how the poll is going on—I wonder what that is they are shouting—is it 'Ashburton for ever!' or 'Cavendish for ever!' Lucilla? Your ears should be sharper than mine; but I think it is Cavendish." Lucilla thought so too, and her heart quaked within her, and she went and squeezed herself into the corner of the window, to try whether it was not possible to catch a glimpse of the field of battle; and her perseverance was finally rewarded by the sight of the extremity

of the wooden planks which formed the polling-booth ; but there was little satisfaction to be got out of that. And then the continual dropping of aunt Jemima's questions drove her wild. "My dear aunt," she said at last, "I can see nothing and hear nothing, and you know as much about what is going on as I do"—which, it will be acknowledged, was not an answer such as one would have expected from Lucilla's perfect temper and wonderful self-control.

The election went on with all its usual commotion while Miss Marjoribanks watched and waited. Mr Cavendish's committee brought their supporters very well up in the morning—no doubt by way of making sure of them, as somebody suggested on the other side ; and for some time Mrs Woodburn's party at Masters's windows (which Masters had given rather reluctantly, by way of pleasing the Rector) looked in better spirits and less anxious than Lady Richmond's party, which was at the Blue Boar. Towards noon Mr Cavendish himself went up to his female supporters with the bulletin of the poll—the same bulletin which Mr Ashburton had just sent down to Lucilla. These were the numbers ; and they made Masters's triumphant, while silence and anxiety fell upon the Blue Boar :—

Cavendish,	.	.	.	.	283
Ashburton,	.	.	.	.	275

When Miss Marjoribanks received this disastrous intelligence, she put the note in her pocket without saying a word to aunt Jemima, and left her window, and went back to her worsted-work ; but as for Mrs Woodburn, she gave her brother a hug, and laughed, and cried, and believed in it, like a silly woman as she was.

“ It is something quite unlooked-for, and which I never could have calculated upon,” she said, thrusting her hand into an imaginary waistcoat with Mr Ashburton’s very look and tone, which was beyond measure amusing to all the party. They laughed so long, and were so gay, that Lady Richmond solemnly levelled her opera-glass at them with the air of a woman who was used to elections, but knew how such *parvenus* have their heads turned by a prominent position. “ That woman is taking some of us off,” she said ; “ but if it is me, I can bear it. There is nothing so vulgar as that sort of thing, and I hope you never encourage it in your presence, my dears.”

Just at that moment, however, an incident occurred which took up the attention of the ladies at the windows, and eclipsed even the interest of the election. Poor Barbara Lake was interested, too, to know if her friend would win. She was not entertaining any particular hopes or plans about him. Years and hard experiences had humbled Barbara. The Brussels veil which she used to dream of had faded as much from her

memory as poor Rose's Honiton design, for which she had got the prize. At the present moment, instead of nourishing the ambitious designs which everybody laid to her charge, she would have been content with the very innocent privilege of talking a little to her next employers about Mr Cavendish, the member for Carlingford, and his visits to her father's house. But at the same time, she had once been fond of him, and she took a great interest in him, and was very anxious that he should win. And she was in the habit, like so many other women, of finding out, as far as she could, what was going on, and going to see everything that there might be to see. She had brought one of her young brothers with her, whose anxiety to see the fun was quite as great as her own; and she was arrayed in the tin dress—her best available garment—which was made long, according to the fashion, and which, as Barbara scorned to tuck it up, was continually getting trodden on, and talked about, and reviled at, on that crowded pavement. The two parties of ladies saw, and even it might be said heard, the sweep of the metallic garment, which was undergoing such rough usage, and which was her best, poor soul. Lady Richmond had alighted from her carriage carefully tucked up, though there were only a few steps to make, and there was no *lady* in Carlingford who would have swept "a good gown" over the stones

in such a way ; but then poor Barbara was not precisely a lady, and thought it right to look as if it did not matter. She went up to read the numbers of the poll—in the sight of everybody ; and she clasped her hands together with ecstatic satisfaction as she read ; and young Carmine, her brother, dashed into the midst of the fray, and shouted “Cavendish for ever! hurrah for Cavendish !” and could scarcely be drawn back again to take his sister home. Even when she withdrew, she did not go home, but went slowly up and down Grange Lane with her rustling train behind her, with the intention of coming back for further information. Lady Richmond and Mrs Woodburn both lost all thought of the election as they watched ; and lo ! when their wandering thoughts came back again, the tide had turned.

The tide had turned. Whether it was Barbara, or whether it was fate, or whether it was the deadly unanimity of those Dissenters, who, after all their wavering, had at last decided for the man who “dealt” in George Street—no one could tell ; but by two o’clock Mr Ashburton was so far ahead that he felt himself justified in sending another bulletin to Lucilla—so far that there was no reasonable hope of the opposite candidate ever making up his lost ground. Mrs Woodburn was not a woman to be content when reasonable hope was over—she clung to the last possibility desperately, with a pertinacity beyond all reason,

and swore in her heart that it was Barbara that had done it, and cursed her with her best energies ; which, however, as these are not melodramatic days, was a thing which did the culprit no possible harm. When Barbara herself came back from her promenade in Grange Lane, and saw the altered numbers, she again clasped her hands together for a moment, and looked as if she were going to faint ; and it was at that moment that Mr Cavendish's eyes fell upon her, as ill fortune would have it. They were all looking at him as if it was his fault ; and the sight of that sympathetic face was consoling to the defeated candidate. He took off his hat before everybody ; probably, as his sister afterwards said, he would have gone and offered her his arm had he been near enough. How could anybody wonder, after that, that things had gone against him, and that, notwithstanding all his advantages, he was the loser in the fight ?

As for Lucilla, she had gone back to her worsted-work when she got Mr Ashburton's first note, in which his rival's name stood above his own. She looked quite composed, and aunt Jemima went on teasing with her senseless questions. But Miss Marjoribanks put up with it all ; though the lingering progress of these hours from one o'clock to four, the sound of cabs furiously driven by, the distant shouts, the hum of indefinite din that filled the air, exciting

every moment a keener curiosity, and giving no satisfaction or information, would have been enough to have driven a less large intelligence out of its wits. Lucilla bore it, doing as much as she could of her worsted-work, and saying nothing to nobody, except, indeed, an occasional word to aunt Jemima, who would have an answer. She was not walking about Grange Lane repeating a kind of prayer for the success of her candidate, as Barbara Lake was doing ; but perhaps, on the whole, Barbara had the easiest time of it at that moment of uncertainty. When the next report came, Lucilla's fingers trembled as she opened it, so great was her emotion ; but after that she recovered herself as if by magic. She grew pale, and then gave a kind of sob, and then a kind of laugh, and finally put her worsted-work back into her basket, and threw Mr Ashburton's note into the fire.

"It is all right," said Lucilla. "Mr Ashburton is a hundred ahead, and they can never make up that. I am so sorry for poor Mr Cavendish. If he only had not been so imprudent on Saturday night !"

"I am sure I don't understand you," said aunt Jemima. "After being so anxious about one candidate, how can you be so sorry for the other ? I suppose you did not want them both to win ?"

"Yes, I think that *was* what I wanted," said Lucilla, drying her eyes ; and then she awoke to the practical

exigencies of the position. "There will be quantities of people coming to have a cup of tea, and I must speak to Nancy," she said, and went down-stairs with a cheerful heart. It might be said to be as good as decided, so far as regarded Mr Ashburton; and when it came for her final judgment, what was it that she ought to say?

It was very well that Miss Marjoribanks's unflinching foresight led her to speak to Nancy; for the fact was, that after four o'clock, when the polling was over, everybody came in to tea. All Lady Richmond's party came, as a matter of course, and Mr Ashburton himself, for a few minutes, bearing meekly his new honours; and so many more people besides, that but for knowing it was a special occasion, and that "our gentleman" was elected, Nancy's mind never could have borne the strain. And the tea that was used was something frightful. As for aunt Jemima, who had just then a good many thoughts of her own to occupy her, and did not care so much as the rest for all the chatter that was going on, nor for all those details about poor Barbara and Mr Cavendish's looks, which Lucilla received with such interest, she could not but make a calculation in passing as to this new item of fashionable expenditure into which her niece was plunging so wildly. To be sure, it was an occasion that never might occur again, and everybody was so

excited as to forget even that Lucilla was in mourning, and that such a number of people in the house so soon might be more than she could bear. And she was excited herself, and forgot that she was not able for it. But still aunt Jemima, sitting by, could not help thinking, that even five-o'clock teas of good quality and unlimited amount would very soon prove to be impracticable upon two hundred a-year.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MR ASHBURTON, it may be supposed, had but little time to think on that eventful evening; and yet he was thinking all the way home, as he drove back in the chilly spring night to his own house. If his further course of action had been made in any way to depend upon the events of this day, it was now settled beyond all further uncertainty; and though he was not a man in his first youth, nor a likely subject for a romantic passion, still he was a little excited by the position in which he found himself. Miss Marjoribanks had been his inspiring genius, and had interested herself in his success in the warmest and fullest way; and if ever a woman was made for a certain position, Lucilla was made to be the wife of the Member for Carlingford. Long long ago, at the very beginning of her career, when it was of Mr Cavendish that everybody was thinking, the ideal fitness of this position had struck everybody. Circumstances had

changed since then, and Mr Cavendish had fallen, and a worthier hero had been placed in his stead ; but though the person was changed, the circumstances remained unaltered. Natural fitness was indeed so apparent, that many people would have been disposed to say that it was Lucilla's duty to accept Mr Ashburton, even independent of the fact that he was perfectly eligible in every other respect.

But with all this the new Member for Carlingford was not able to assure himself that there had been anything particular in Lucilla's manner to himself. With her as with Carlingford, it was pure optimism. He was the best man, and her quick intelligence had divined it sooner than anybody else had done. Whether there was anything more in it, Mr Ashburton could not tell. His own impression was, that she would accept him ; but if she did not, he would have no right to complain of " encouragement," or to think himself jilted. This was what he was thinking as he drove home ; but at the same time he was very far from being in a desponding state of mind. He felt very nearly as sure that Lucilla would be his wife, as if they were already standing before the Rector in Carlingford Church. He had just won one victory, which naturally made him feel more confident of winning another ; and even without entertaining any over-exalted opinion of himself, it was evident that, under

all the circumstances, a woman of thirty, with two hundred a-year, would be a fool to reject such an offer. And Lucilla was the very furthest in the world from being a fool. It was in every respect the beginning of a new world to Mr Ashburton, and it would have been out of nature had he not been a little excited. After the quiet life he had led at the Firs, biding his time, he had now to look forward to a busy and important existence, half of it spent amid the commotion and ceaseless stir of town. A new career, a wife, a new position, the most important in his district—it was not much wonder if Mr Ashburton felt a little excited. He was fatigued at the same time, too much fatigued to be disposed for sleep; and all these united influences swayed him to a state of mind very much unlike his ordinary sensible calm. All his excitement culminated so in thoughts of Lucilla, that the new Member felt himself truly a lover; and late as the hour was, he took up a candle and once more made a survey all alone of his solitary house.

Nothing could look more dismal than the dark rooms, where there was neither light nor fire—the great desert drawing-room, for example, which stood unchanged as it had been in the days of his grand-aunts, the good old ladies who had bequeathed the Firs to Mr Ashburton. He had made no change in it, and scarcely ever used it, keeping to his library and dining-

room, with the possibility, no doubt, always before him of preparing it in due course of time for his wife. That moment had now arrived, and in his excitement he went into the desolate room with his candle, which just made the darkness visible, and tried to see the dusky curtains and faded carpet, and the indescribable fossil air which everything had. There were the odd little spider-legged stands, upon which the Miss Penrhyns had placed their work-boxes, and the old sofas on which they had sat, and the floods of old tapestry-work with which they had decorated their favourite sitting-room. The sight of it chilled the Member for Carlingford, and made him sad. He tried to turn his thoughts to the time when this same room should be fitted up to suit Lucilla's complexion, and should be gay with light and with her presence. He did all he could to realise the moment when, with a mistress so active and energetic; the whole place would change its aspect, and glow forth resplendent into the twilight of the county, a central point for all. Perhaps it was his fatigue which gained upon him just at this moment, and repulsed all livelier thoughts ; but the fact is, that however willing Lucilla might turn out to be, her image was coy, and would not come. The more Mr Ashburton tried to think of her as in possession here, the more the grim images of the two old Miss Penrhyns walked out of the darkness and asserted their

prior claims. They even seemed to have got into the library before him when he went back, though there his fire was burning, and his lamp. After that there was nothing left for a man to do, even though he had been that day elected Member for Carlingford, but to yield to the weakness of an ordinary mortal, and go to bed.

Thoughts very different, but even more disturbing, were going on at the same time in Grange Lane. Poor Mr Cavendish, for one thing,—upbraided by everybody's looks, and even by some people's words—feeling himself condemned, censured, and despised on all sides—smarting under his sister's wild reproaches and her husband's blunt commentary thereupon,—had slunk away from their society after dinner, not seeing *now* why he should bear it any longer. "By Jove! if it had only been for *her* sake, you might have left over your philandering for another night," Mr Woodburn had said, in his coarse way; and it was all Mr Cavendish could do to refrain from saying that one time and another he had done quite enough for *her* sake, but he did not see any reason why he should put up with it any longer. He strolled out of doors, though the town was still in commotion, and could not but think of the sympathetic countenance which had paled to-day at sight of the numbers of the poll. She, by heaven! might have had reason to find fault with

him, and she had never done so ; *she* had never perceived that he was stout, or changed from old times. As he entertained these thoughts, his steps going down Grange Lane gradually quickened, but he did not say to himself where he was going. He went a very roundabout way, as if he did not mean it, as far as St Roque's, and then up by the lane to the far-off desert extremity of Grove Street. It was simply to walk off his excitement and disappointment, and free himself from criticism for that evening at least ; but as he walked he could not help thinking that Barbara, if she were well dressed, would still be a fine woman, that her voice was magnificent in its way, and that about Naples, perhaps, or the baths of Lucca, or in Germany, or the south of France, a man might be able to get on well enough with such a companion, where society was not so exacting or stiff-starched as in England. And the end was, that the feet of the defeated candidate carried him, ere ever he was aware, with some kind of independent volition of their own, to Mr Lake's door—and it may be here said once for all, that this visit was decisive of Mr Cavendish's fate.

This will not be regarded as anything but a digression by such of Lucilla's friends as may be solicitous to know what she was making up her mind to under the circumstances ; but the truth is that Lucilla's historian cannot, any more than Miss Marjoribanks

herself could, refrain from a certain regret over Mr Cavendish. That was what he came to, poor man! after all his experiences; a man who was capable of so much better things—a man even who, if he had made a right use of his opportunities, might once have had as good a chance as any other of marrying Lucilla herself. If there ever was an instance of chances thrown away and lost opportunities, surely here was that lamentable example. And thus, poor man! all his hopes and all his chances came to an end.

As for Miss Marjoribanks herself, it would be vain to say that this was not a very exciting moment for her. If there ever could be said to be a time when she temporarily lost the entire sway and control of herself and her feelings, it would be at this crisis. She went about all that evening like a woman in a dream. For the first time in her life she not only did not know what she would do, but she did not know what she wanted to do. There could now be no mistaking what Mr Ashburton's intentions were. Up to a very recent time Lucilla had been able to take refuge in her mourning, and conclude that she had no present occasion to disturb herself. But now that calm was over. She could not conceal from herself that it was in her power by a word to reap all the advantages of the election, and to step at once into the only position which she had ever felt might be superior to her own

in Carlingford. At last this great testimonial of female merit was to be laid at her feet. A man thoroughly eligible in every way—moderately rich, well connected, able to restore to her all, and more than all, the advantages which she had lost at her father's death—a man, above all, who was Member for Carlingford, was going to offer himself to her acceptance, and put his happiness in her hands; and while she was so well aware of this, she was not at all so well aware what answer she would make him. Lucilla's mind was in such a commotion as she sat over her embroidery, that she thought it strange indeed that it did not show, and could not understand how aunt Jemima could sit there so quietly opposite her, as if nothing was the matter. But, to tell the truth, there was a good deal the matter with aunt Jemima too, which was perhaps the reason why she saw no signs of her companion's agitation. Mrs John Marjoribanks had not been able any more than her niece to shut her eyes to Mr Ashburton's evident meaning, and now that matters were visibly coming to a crisis, a sudden panic and horror had seized her. What would Tom say? If she stood by and saw the prize snapped up under her very eyes, what account could she give to her son of her stewardship? how could she explain her silence as to all *his* wishes and intentions, her absolute avoidance of his name in all her conversations with Lucilla?

While Miss Marjoribanks marvelled that the emotion in her breast could be invisible, and at aunt Jemima's insensibility, the bosom of that good woman was throbbing with equal excitement. Sometimes each made an indifferent remark, and panted after it as if she had given utterance to the most exhausting emotions ; but so great was the preoccupation of both that neither observed how it was faring with the other.

But perhaps, on the whole, it was aunt Jemima that suffered the most ; for her there was nothing flattering, nothing gratifying, no prospect of change or increased happiness, or any of the splendours of imagination involved. All that could happen to her would be the displeasure of her son and his disappointment ; and it might be her fault, she who could have consented to be chopped up in little pieces, if that would have done Tom any good ; but who, notwithstanding, was not anxious for him to marry his cousin, now that her father's fortune was all lost and she had but two hundred a-year. They had a silent cup of tea together at eight o'clock, after that noisy exciting one at five, which had been shared by half Carlingford, as aunt Jemima thought. The buzz of that impromptu assembly, in which everybody talked at the same moment, and nobody listened, except perhaps Lucilla, had all died away into utter stillness ; but the excitement had not died away ; *that* had only risen to a

white heat, silent and consuming, as the two ladies sat over their tea.

“Do you expect Mr Ashburton to-morrow, Lucilla?” aunt Jemima said, after a long pause.

“Mr Ashburton?” said Lucilla, with a slight start; and, to tell the truth, she was glad to employ that childish expedient to gain a little time, and consider what she should say. “Indeed I don’t know if he will have time to come. Most likely there will be a great deal to do.”

“If he does come,” said Mrs John, with a sigh—“or *when* he does come, I ought to say, for you know very well he *will* come, Lucilla—I suppose there is no doubt that he will have something very particular to say.”

“I am sure I don’t know, aunt Jemima,” said Miss Marjoribanks; but she never raised her eyes from her work, as she would have done in any other case. “Now that the election is over, you know——”

“I hope, my dear, I have been long enough in the world to know all about that,” aunt Jemima said, severely, “and what it means when young ladies take such interest in elections;” and then some such feeling as the dog had in the manger—a jealousy of those who sought the gift though she herself did not want it—came over Mrs John, and at the same time a sudden desire to clear her conscience and make a stand for Tom. She did it suddenly, and went further than she

meant to go ; but then she never dreamt it would have the least effect. "I would not say anything to disturb your mind, Lucilla, if you have made up your mind ; but when you receive your new friends, you might think of other people who perhaps have been fond of you before you ever saw them, or heard their very name."

She was frightened at it herself before the words were out of her mouth, and the effect it had upon Miss Marjoribanks was wonderful. She threw her embroidery away, and looked Tom's mother keenly in the face. "I don't think you know anybody who is fond of me, aunt Jemima," she said ; "I don't suppose anybody is fond of me. Do you?" said Lucilla. But by that time aunt Jemima had got thoroughly frightened, both at herself and her companion, and had nothing more to say.

"I am sure all these people to-day have been too much for you," she said. "I wonder what they could all be thinking of, for my part, flocking in upon you like that, so soon after—— I thought it was very indelicate of Lady Richmond. And Lucilla, my dear, your nerves are quite affected, and I am sure you ought to go to bed."

Upon which Miss Marjoribanks recovered herself in a moment, and folded up her worsted-work. "I do feel tired," she said, sweetly, "and perhaps it *was* too

much. I think I will take your advice, aunt Jemima. The excitement keeps one up for the moment, and then it tells after. I suppose the best thing is to go to bed."

"Much the best, my dear," aunt Jemima said, giving Lucilla a kiss ; but she did not take her own advice. She took a long time to think it all over, and sat up by the side of the decaying fire until it was midnight—an hour at which a female establishment like this should surely have been all shut up and at rest. And Lucilla did very much the same thing, wondering greatly what her aunt could tell her if she had a mind, and having the greatest inclination in the world to break into her chamber, and see, at any risk, what was in Tom's last letter. If she could have seen that, it might have thrown some light on the problem Lucilla was discussing, or given her some guidance through her difficulties. It was just then that Mr Ashburton was inviting her image into the fossil drawing-room, and finding nothing but the grim shades of the Miss Penrhyns answer to his call. Perhaps this was because Lucilla's image at that moment was called upon more potently from another quarter in a more familiar voice.

But after this exhausting day and late sitting-up, everybody was late in the morning, at least in Grange Lane. Miss Marjoribanks had slept little all night, and she was not in a more settled state of mind when

the day returned which probably would bring the matter to a speedy decision. Her mind was like a country held by two armies, one of which by turns swept the other into a corner, but only to be driven back in its turn. After the unaccountable stupidity of the general public—after all the Cavendishes, Beverleys, and Riders who had once had it in their power to distinguish themselves by at least making her an offer, and who had not done it—here at last, in all good faith, honesty, and promptitude, had appeared a man superior to them all—a man whom she would have no reason to be ashamed of in any particular, sensible like herself, public-spirited like herself—a man whose pursuits she could enter into fully, who had a perfectly ideal position to offer her, and in whose person, indeed, all sorts of desirable qualities seemed to meet. Miss Marjoribanks, when she considered all this, and thought over all their recent intercourse, and the terms of friendship into which the election had brought them, felt, as any other sensible person would have felt, that there was only one answer which could be given to such a man. If she neglected or played with his devotion, then certainly she never would deserve to have another such possibility afforded to her, and merited nothing better than to live and die a single woman on two hundred a-year. But then, on the other hand, there would rush forth a crowd of quick-coming and

fantastic suggestions which took away Lucilla's breath, and made her heart beat loud. What if there might be "other people" who had been fond of her before she ever heard Mr Ashburton's name? What if there might be some one in the world who was ready, not to offer her his hand and fortune in a reasonable way, as Mr Ashburton no doubt would, but to throw himself all in a heap at her feet, and make the greatest fool of himself possible for her sake? Miss Marjoribanks had been the very soul of good sense all her days, but now her ruling quality seemed to forsake her. And yet she could not consent to yield herself up to pure unreason without a struggle. She fought manfully, womanfully against the weakness which hitherto must have been lying hidden in some out-of-the-way corner in her heart. Probably if Mr Ashburton had asked her all at once amid the excitement of the election, or at any other unpremeditated moment, Lucilla would have been saved all this self-torment; but it is hard upon a woman to have a proposal hanging over her head by a hair, as it were, and to look forward to it without any uncertainty or mystery, and have full time to make up her mind. And there was no accounting for the curious force and vividness with which that strange idea about "other people," upon which aunt Jemima would throw no light, had come into Lucilla's head.

She was still in the same frightful chaos of uncertainty when Mr Ashburton was shown into the drawing-room. She had not even heard him ring, and was thus deprived of the one possible moment of coming to a decision before she faced and confronted her fate. Miss Marjoribanks's heart gave a great jump, and then she recovered herself, and rose up without faltering, and shook hands with him. She was all alone, for aunt Jemima had not found herself equal to facing the emergency; and there was not the least possibility of evading or postponing, or in any way running away from it now. Lucilla sat down again upon her sofa where she had been sitting, and composed herself with a certain despairing tranquillity, and trusted in Providence. She had thrown herself on other occasions, though never at an equally important crisis, upon the inspiration of the moment, and she felt it would not forsake her now.

"I should be sorry the election was over," said Mr Ashburton, who was naturally a little agitated too, "if I thought its privileges were over, and you would not let me come—— I shall always think I owe my success to you; and I would thank you for being so kind—so very kind to me, if——"

"Oh dear, no; pray don't say so," cried Lucilla. "I only felt sure that you were the best man—the only man—for Carlingford."

“ I wish I might but prove the best man for something else,” said the candidate, nervously ; and then he cleared his throat. “ I would say you had been kind if I did not hope—if I was not so very anxious that you should be something more than kind. It may be vain of me, but I think we could get on together. I think I could understand you, and do you justice—— Lucilla ! what is the matter ? Good heavens ! is it possible that I have taken you quite by surprise ? ”

What caused this question was, that Miss Marjoribanks had all at once changed colour, and given a great start, and put her hand to her breast, where her heart had taken such a leap that she felt it in her throat. But it was not because of what Mr Ashburton was saying ; it was because of one of the very commonest sounds of everyday existence—a cab driving down Grange Lane ; but then it was a cab driving in such a way that you could have sworn there was somebody in it in a terrible hurry, and who had just arrived by the twelve o'clock train.

“ Oh no, no,” said Miss Marjoribanks ; “ I know you have always done me more than justice, Mr Ashburton, and so have all my friends ; and I am sure we always will get on well together. I wish you joy with all my heart, and I wish you every happiness ; and I always thought, up to this very last moment——”

Lucilla stopped again, and once more put her hand to her breast. Her heart gave another jump, and, if such a thing were possible to a heart, went off from its mistress altogether, and rushed down-stairs bodily to see who was coming. Yet, with all her agitation, she had still enough self-control to lift an appealing look—a look which threw herself upon his mercy, and implored his forbearance—to Mr Ashburton's face.

As for the Member for Carlingford, he was confounded, and could not tell what to make of it. What was it she had thought up to the very last moment? Was this a refusal, or was she only putting off his claim, or was it something altogether independent of him and his intentions that agitated Lucilla to such an unusual extent? While he sat in his confusion trying to make it out, the most startling sound interrupted the interview. The old disused bell that had so often called Dr Marjoribanks up at night, and which hung near the door of the old Doctor's room, just over the drawing-room, began to peal through the silence, as if rung by a hand too impatient to notice what it was with which it made its summons.

"Papa's bell!" Miss Marjoribanks cried, with a little shriek; and she got up trembling, and then dropped upon her seat again, and in her agitated state burst into tears. And Mr Ashburton felt that, under these most extraordinary circumstances, even so sen-

sible a woman as Lucilla might be justified in fainting, embarrassing and uncomfortable as that would be.

“I will go and see what it means,” he said, with still half the air of a man who had a right to go and see, and was, as it were, almost in his own house. As he turned round, the door bell pealed wildly below in correction of the mistake. It was evident that somebody wanted admission who had not a moment to lose, and who was in the habit of pulling wildly at whatever came in his way. Mr Ashburton went out of the room to see who it was, a little amused and a little alarmed, but much annoyed at bottom, as was only natural, at such an interruption. He did not very well know whether he was accepted or rejected; but it was equally his duty in either case to put a stop to the ringing of that ghostly bell. He went away, meaning to return immediately and have it out and know his fate. And Lucilla, whose heart had come back, having fully ascertained who it was, and was now choking her with its beating, was left to await the new event and the new-comer alone.

CHAPTER I.

MR ASHBURTON went away from Lucilla's side, thinking to come back again, and clear everything up ; but he did not come back. Though he heard nothing, and saw nothing, that could throw any distinct light on the state of her mind, yet instinct came to his aid, it is to be supposed, in the matter. He did not return : and Lucilla sat on her sofa with her hands clasped together to support her, and her heart leaping in her very mouth. She was in a perfect frenzy of suspense, listening with her whole heart and soul ; but that did not prevent the same crowd of thoughts which had been persecuting her for twenty-four hours from keeping up their wild career as before. What reason had she to suppose that "any one" had arrived? Who could arrive in that accidental way, without a word of warning? And what possible excuse had she to offer to herself for sending the new member for Carlingford—a man so excellent and honourable and eligible—

away? The minutes, or rather the seconds, passed over Miss Marjoribanks like hours, as she sat thus waiting, not daring to stir lest the slightest movement might keep from her ears some sound from below, till at last the interval seemed so long that her heart began to sink, and her excitement to fail. It could not be any one—if it had been any one, something more must have come of it before now. It must have been Lydia Richmond coming to see her sister next door, or somebody connected with the election, or——

When she got as far as this, Lucilla's heart suddenly mounted up again with a spring into her ears. She heard neither words nor voice, but she heard something which had as great an effect upon her as either could have had. On the landing half-way up the stairs, there had stood in Dr Marjoribanks's house from time immemorial a little old-fashioned table, with a large china bowl upon it, in which the cards of visitors were placed. It was a great bowl, and it was always full, and anybody rushing up-stairs in a reckless way might easily upset table and cards and all in their progress. This was what happened while Lucilla sat listening. There was a rumble, a crash, and a sound as of falling leaves, and it made her heart, as we have said, jump into her ears. "It is the table and all the cards," said Lucilla—and in that moment her composure came back to her as by a miracle. She un-

clasped her hands, which she had been holding pressed painfully together by way of supporting herself, and she gave a long sigh of unutterable relief, and her whirl of thought stopped and cleared up with an instantaneous rapidity. Everything seemed to be explained by that sound ; and there never was a greater change upon the looks and feelings of any one in this world than that which passed upon the looks and feelings of Lucilla, in the interval between the drawing up of that cab and the rush of Tom Marjoribanks at the drawing-room door.

For after the commotion on the staircase Lucilla had no further doubt on the subject. She even had the strength to get up to meet him, and hold out her hands to him by way of welcome—but found herself, before she knew how, in the arms of a man with a beard, who was so much changed in his own person that he ventured to kiss her, which was a thing Tom Marjoribanks, though her cousin, had never dared to do before. He kissed her—such was his audacity ; and then he held her at arm's length to have a good look at her ; and then, according to all appearance, would have repeated his first salutation, but that Lucilla had come to herself, and took the reins at once into her hand.

“ Tom ! ” she said, “ of course it is you ; nobody else would have been so impertinent. When did you come ? Where did you come from ? Who could ever have

thought of your appearing like this, in such an altogether unexpected——?”

“Unexpected!” said Tom, with an astonished air. “But I suppose you had other things to think of. Ah, Lucilla, I could not write to you. I felt I ought to be beside you, trying if there was not something I could do. My mother told you, of course; but I could not trust myself to write to *you*.”

Then Lucilla saw it all, and that aunt Jemima had meant to do Mr Ashburton a good turn. And she was not grateful to her aunt, however kind her intentions might have been. But Tom was holding her hand, and looking into her face while this thought passed through her mind, and Miss Marjoribanks was not the woman, under any circumstances, to make dispeace.

“I am sure I am very glad,” said Lucilla. “I would say you were changed, but only of course that would make you think how I am changed; and though one knows one has gone off——”

“I never saw you look so nice all your life,” cried Tom, energetically; and he took hold of both her hands, and looked into her face more and more. To be sure he had a kind of right, being a cousin, and newly returned after so long an absence; but it was embarrassing all the same.

“Oh, Tom, don’t say so,” cried Lucilla; “if you but

knew how different the house is, and everything so altered—and dear papa !”

It was natural, and indeed it was only proper, that Miss Marjoribanks should cry—which she did abundantly, partly for grief, and partly because of the flutter of agitation, and something like joy, in which she was, and which, considering that she had always frankly owned that she was fond of Tom, was quite natural too. She cried with honest abandonment, and did not take much notice what her cousin was doing to comfort her, though indeed he applied himself to that benevolent office in the most anxious way.

“Don’t cry, Lucilla,” he said, “I can’t bear it. It don’t look natural to see you cry. My poor uncle was an old man, and you were always the best daughter in the world——”

“Oh, Tom! sometimes I don’t think so,” sobbed Lucilla; “sometimes I think if I had sat up that last night—— And you don’t know how good he was. It was me he was thinking of, and never himself. When he heard the money was lost, all that he said was, Poor Lucilla! You rang his bell though it is the night-bell, and nobody ever touches it now; I knew it could be nobody but you; and to see you again brings up everything so distinctly. Oh, Tom! he was always very fond of you.”

“Lucilla,” said Tom Marjoribanks, “you know I

always had a great regard for my uncle. But it was not for him I came back. He was never half so fond of me as I am of you. You know that as well as I do. There never was a time that I would not have gone to the other end of the world if you had told me ; and I have done it as near as possible. I went to India because you sent me away. And I have come back——”

“ You have not come back only for an hour, I hope ? ” said Miss Marjoribanks, with momentary impatience ; “ you are not obliged to talk of everything all in a moment—and when one has not even got over one’s surprise at seeing you. When *did* you come back ? When did you have anything to eat ? You want your breakfast or your lunch or something ; and, Tom ! the idea of sitting here talking to me, and talking nonsense, when you have not seen your mother. She is in her own room, you unnatural boy—the blue room, next to what used to be yours. To think aunt Jemima should be in the house, and you should sit here talking nonsense to me ! ”

“ This minute,” said Tom, apologetically ; but he drew his chair in front of Miss Marjoribanks, so that she could not get away. “ I have come back to stay as long as you will let me,” he said ; “ don’t go away yet. Look here, Lucilla—if you had married, I would have tried to bear it ; but as long as you are not married, I can’t help feeling as if there might be a chance

for me yet. And that is why I have come home. I met somebody coming down-stairs."

"Tom," said Miss Marjoribanks, "it is dreadful to see that you have come back just as tiresome as ever. I always said I would not marry for ten years. If you mean to think I have never had any opportunities——"

"Lucilla," said Tom, and there was decision in his eye, "somebody came down-stairs as I came in. I want to know whether it is to be him or me!"

"Him—or you!" said Lucilla, in dismay. Blunderer as he was, he had gone direct to the very heart of the question, and it was impossible not to tremble a little in the presence of such straightforward clear-sightedness. Miss Marjoribanks had risen up to make her escape as soon as it should be possible, but she was so much struck by Tom's unlooked-for perspicuity, that she sat down again in her consternation. "I think you are going out of your mind," she said. "What do you know about the gentleman who went down-stairs? I am not such a wonderful beauty, nor such a witch, that everybody who sees me should want to— to marry me. Don't talk any more nonsense, but let me go and get you something to eat."

"They would if they were of my way of thinking," said the persistent Tom. "Lucilla, you shan't go. This is what I have come home for. You may as well

know at once, and then there can be no mistake about it. My poor uncle is gone, and you can't be left by yourself in the world. Will you have him or me?"

"I am not going to be tyrannised over like this," said Lucilla, with indignation, again rising, though he still held her hands. "You talk as if you had just come for a call, and had everything to say in a moment. When a man comes off a long journey it is his breakfast he wants, and not a——not anything else that I know of. Go up to your mother, and let me go."

"Will you have him or me?" repeated Tom. It was not wisdom, it was instinct, that made him thus hold fast by his text; and as for Lucilla, nothing but the softened state in which she was, nothing but the fact that it was Tom Marjoribanks who had been ten years away, and was always ridiculous, could have kept her from putting down at once such an attempt to coerce her. But the truth was, that Miss Marjoribanks did not feel her own mistress at that moment, and perhaps that was why he had the audacity to repeat, "Will you have him or me?"

Then Lucilla found herself fairly driven to bay. "Tom!" she said, with a solemnity that overwhelmed him for the moment, for he thought at first, with natural panic, that it was himself who was being rejected, "I would not have *him* if he were to go down

on his knees. I know he is very nice and very agreeable, and the best man—— And I am sure I ought to do it," said Miss Marjoribanks, with a mournful sense of her own weakness; "and everybody will expect it of me; but I am not going to have him, and I never meant it, whatever you or anybody may say."

When Lucilla had made this decisive utterance she turned away with a certain melancholy majesty to go and see after lunch—for he had loosed her hand and fallen back in consternation, thinking for the moment that it was all over. Miss Marjoribanks sighed, and turned round, not thinking of Tom, who was safe enough, but with a natural regret for the member for Carlingford, who now, poor man, was as much out of the question as if he had been dead and buried. But before she reached the door Tom had recovered himself. He went up to her in his ridiculous way without the slightest regard either for the repast she was so anxious to prepare for him, or for his mother's feelings, or indeed for anything else in the world, except the one thing which had brought him, as he said, home.

"Then, Lucilla, after all, it is to be me," he said, taking her to him, and arresting her progress as if she had been a baby; and though he had such a beard, and was twice as big and strong as he used to be,

there were big tears in the great fellow's eyes. "It is to be me after all," said Tom, looking at her in a way that startled Lucilla. "Say it is to be me!"

Miss Marjoribanks had come through many a social crisis with dignity and composure. She had never yet been known to fail in an emergency. She had managed Mr Cavendish, and, up to the last moment, Mr Ashburton, and all the intervening candidates for her favour, with perfect self-control and command of the situation. Perhaps it was because, as she had herself said, her feelings had never been engaged. But now, when it was only Tom—he whom, once upon a time, she had dismissed with affectionate composure, and given such excellent advice to, and regarded in so motherly a way—all Lucilla's powers seemed to fail her. It is hard to have to wind up with such a confession after having so long entertained a confidence in Lucilla which nothing seemed likely to impair. She broke down just at the moment when she had most need to have all her wits about her. Perhaps it was her past agitation which had been too much for her. Perhaps it was the tears in Tom Marjoribanks's eyes. But the fact was that Lucilla relinquished her superior position for the time being, and suffered him to make any assertion he pleased, and was so weak as to cry, for the second time, too—which, of all things in the world, was surely the last thing to have been expected

of Miss Marjoribanks at the moment which decided her fate.

Lucilla cried, and acquiesced, and thought of her father and of the Member for Carlingford, and gave to each a tear and a regret; and she did not even take the trouble to answer any question, or to think who it was she was leaning on. It was to be Tom after all—after all the archdeacons, doctors, generals, members of Parliament—after the ten years and more in which she had not gone off—after the poor old Doctor's grudge against the nephew whom he did not wish to inherit his wealth, and aunt Jemima's quiet wiles, and attempt to disappoint her boy. Fate and honest love had been waiting all the time till their moment came; and now it was not even necessary to say anything about it. The fact was so clear that it did not require stating. It was to be Tom after all.

To do him justice, Tom behaved at this moment, in which affairs were left in his hands, as if he had been training for it all his life. Perhaps it was the first time in which he had done anything absolutely without a blunder. He had wasted no time, and no words, and left no room for consideration, or for that natural relenting towards his rival which was inevitable as soon as Mr Ashburton was off the field. He had insisted, and he had perceived that there was but one alternative for Lucilla. Now that all was over, he

took her back to her seat, and comforted her, and made no offensive demonstrations of triumph. "It is to be me after all!" he repeated; and it was utterly impossible to add anything to the eloquent brevity of this succinct statement of the case.

"Tom," said Miss Marjoribanks, when she had a little recovered, "if it is to be you, that is no reason why you should be so unnatural. Go up directly and see your mother. What will aunt Jemima think of me if she knows I have let you stay talking nonsense here?"

"Yes, Lucilla—this moment," said Tom; but all the same he showed not the slightest inclination to go away. He did not quite believe in it as yet, and could not help feeling as if, should he venture to leave her, the whole fabric of his incredible good fortune must dissolve and melt away. As for Lucilla, her self-possession gradually came back to her when the crisis was over, and she felt that her involuntary abdication had lasted long enough, and that it was full time to take the management of affairs back into her own hands.

"You shall go *now*," she said, drying her eyes, "or else you cannot stay here. I thought of letting you stay in the house, as aunt Jemima is with me; but if you do not mean to go and tell your mother, I will tell Nancy to send your things up to the Blue Boar. Ring the bell, please; if you will not ring the bell, I can do

it myself, Tom. You may say what you like, but I know you are famishing ; and aunt Jemima is in the blue room, next door to——oh, here is Nancy. It is Mr Tom, who has come home,” said Lucilla, hastily, not without a rising colour ; for it was hard to explain why, when his mother was in the blue room all this time, he should have stayed here.

“ Yes, Miss Lucilla—so I heard,” said Nancy, dropping a doubtful curtsy. And then only Tom was persuaded, and bethought himself of his natural duty, and rushed up-stairs. He seized Nancy’s hand, and shook it violently, as he passed her, to her great consternation. The moment of his supremacy was over. It was to be Tom after all ; but Lucilla had recovered her self-possession, and taken the helm in her hand again, and Tom was master of the situation no more.

“ Yes, it is Mr Tom,” said Lucilla, shaking her head with something between a smile and a sigh. “ It could be nobody but him that would ring *that* bell, and upset all the cards. I hope he has not broken dear papa’s punch-bowl that he used to be so fond of. He must have something to eat, Nancy, though he is such an awkward boy.”

“ I don’t see nothing like a boy in him,” said Nancy ; “ he’s big and stout, and one o’ them awful beards. There’s been a deal of changes since he went away ; but if he’s new comed off that terrible long journey, it

is but natural, as you say, Miss Lucilla, that he should want something to eat."

And then Miss Marjoribanks made various suggestions, which were received still doubtfully by her prime minister. Nancy, to tell the truth, did not like the turn things were taking. Lucilla's maiden household had been on the whole getting along very comfortably, and there was no telling how long it might have lasted without any new revolution. To be sure, Mr Ashburton had looked dangerous, but Nancy had seen a great many dangers of that kind blow over, and was not easily alarmed. Mr Tom, however, was a very different person ; and Nancy was sufficiently penetrating to see that something had happened. Therefore, she received very coldly Lucilla's suggestions about lunch. " It ain't like the old times," she said at last, " when there was always something as one could put to the fire in a hurry ;" and Nancy stood turning round the handle of the door in her hand, and contemplating the changed state of affairs with a sigh.

" That would be all very true if you were like anybody else," said Lucilla ; " but I hope you would not like to send Mr Tom off to the Blue Boar. After all, perhaps it is better to have a—a gentleman in the house. I know you always used to think so. They are a great deal of trouble ; but—for some things, you know——" said Lucilla ; " and then Mr Tom is not just

like other people; and whatever happens, Nancy, you are an old dear, and it shall never make any difference between you and me."

When she had said these words, Lucilla gave her faithful servant a hug, and sent her off to look after Tom Marjoribanks's meal; and then she herself went half-way down-stairs and picked up the cards that were still scattered about the landing, and found with satisfaction that the Doctor's old punch-bowl was not broken. All Tom's things were lying below in the hall—heaps of queer Indian-looking baggage—tossed down anyhow in a corner, as if the owner had been in much too great a hurry to think of any secondary circumstances. "And it was there he met poor Mr Ashburton," said Lucilla to herself, with a certain pathos. There it was indeed that the encounter had taken place. They had seen each other but for a moment, but that moment had been enough to send the Member for Carlingford away dejected, and to impress upon Tom's mind the alternative that it was either to be "him or me." Miss Marjoribanks contemplated the spot with a certain tender sentimental interest, as any gentle moralist might look at a field of battle. What feelings must have been in the minds of the two as they met and looked at each other! What a dread sense of disappointment on the one side; what sharp stimulation on the other! Thus Lucilla stood and looked

down from her own landing upon the scene of that encounter, full of pensive interest. And now it was all over, and Mr Ashburton had passed away as completely as Mr Chiltern, who was in his grave, poor man ; or Mr Cavendish, who was going to marry Barbara Lake. The thought of so sudden a revolution made Lucilla giddy as she went thoughtfully up-stairs. Poor Mr Ashburton ! It hardly seemed real even to Miss Marjoribanks when she sat down again in the drawing-room, and confessed to herself that, after all, it was to be Tom.

But when he came down-stairs again with his mother, Lucilla was quite herself, and had got over all her weakness. Aunt Jemima, for her part, was in a very agitated state of mind. Tom had come too soon or Mr Ashburton too late, and all the fruits of her little bit of treachery were accordingly lost, and, at the same time, the treachery itself remained, revealed at least to one person in the very clearest light. It did not seem possible to aunt Jemima that Lucilla would not tell. If she had not done it now, in the excitement of the moment, at least it would come out some time when she was least expecting it, and her son's esteem and confidence would be lost. Therefore it was with a very blank countenance that Mrs John Marjoribanks came down-stairs. She dared not say a word, and she had to kiss her niece, and take her to her maternal

bosom, Tom looking on all the while; but she gave Lucilla a look that was pitiful to see. And when Tom finally was dismissed to his room, to open his trunks, and show the things he had brought home, aunt Jemima drew near her future daughter with wistful guiltiness. There was no comfort to her in the thought of the India shawl, which her son had gone to find. Any day, any hour, Lucilla might tell; and if the unlucky mother were put on her defence, what could she say?

“Lucilla,” said the guilty woman, under her breath, “I am sure you think it very strange. I don’t attempt to deceive *you*. I can’t tell you how thankful and glad I am that it has all ended so well; but you know, Lucilla, in the first place, I did not know what your feelings were; and I thought, perhaps, that if anything would tell, it would be a surprise, and then——”

“Did you, aunt Jemima?” said Miss Marjoribanks, with gentle wonder. “I thought you had been thinking of Mr Ashburton, for my part.”

“And so I was, Lucilla,” said the poor lady, with great relief and eagerness. “I thought he was coming forward, and of course he would have been a far better match than my Tom. I had to think for you both, my dear. And then I never knew what your feelings were, nor if you would care; and then it was not as if there had been a day fixed——”

“Dear aunt Jemima,” said Miss Marjoribanks, “if you are pleased now, what does it matter? but I do hope you are pleased now?”

And Mrs John took her niece into her arms again this time with better will, and cried. “I am as happy as ever I can be,” said the inconsistent mother. “I always knew you were fond of each other, Lucilla; before you knew it yourselves, I saw what would come of it. But my poor brother-in-law—— And you will make my boy happy, and never turn him against his mother,” cried the repentant sinner. Lucilla was not the woman to resist such an appeal. Mrs John had meant truly enough towards her in other ways, if not in this way; and Miss Marjoribanks was fond of her aunt, and it ended in a kiss of peace freely bestowed, and a vow of protection and guidance from the strong to the weak, though the last was only uttered in the protectress’s liberal heart.

CHAPTER LI.

WHEN Miss Marjoribanks had time to consider the prospect which had thus so suddenly opened before her, it also had its difficulties, like everything else in the world. Her marriage now could not be the straightforward business it might have been had it been Mr Ashburton instead of Tom. In that case she would have gone to an established house and life—to take her place in the one and her share in the other, and to find the greater part of her surroundings and duties already fixed for her, which was a thing that would have very greatly simplified the matter. But Tom, who had dashed home from India at full speed as soon as he heard of his uncle's death, had left his profession behind him at Calcutta, and had nothing to do in England, and was probably too old to resume his (non) practice at the bar, even if he had been in the least disposed to do so; while, at the same time, an idle man—a man to be found everlastingly at

home—would have been insupportable to Lucilla. Miss Marjoribanks might feel disposed (for everybody's good) to assume the sovereign authority in her own house, but to marry anybody that would be merely an appendage to her was a thing not to be thought of ; and as soon as the first preliminaries were arranged her active mind sprang up with redoubled vigour from the maze in which it had been. Her intelligence had suspended, so to speak, all its ordinary operations for twenty-four hours at least, while it was busy investigating the purely personal question : from the moment when the Member for Carlingford was finally elected until Tom Marjoribanks rang the night-bell at the old Doctor's door, Lucilla's thoughts had been in that state of overstimulation and absorption which is almost as bad as having no power of thought at all. But as soon as the pressure was removed—as soon as it was all over, and the decision made, and no further question was possible—then Miss Marjoribanks's active mind sprang up with renewed energy. For it was not only a new beginning, but everything had to be settled and arranged.

Her mind was full of it while her hands were busy putting away all the Indian presents which Tom had brought—presents which were chronological in their character, and which he had begun to accumulate from the very beginning of his exile. It could not but be touching to Lucilla to see how he had thought of her

for all these years ; but her mind being, as everybody is aware, of a nobly practical kind, her thoughts, instead of dallying with these tokens of the past, went forward with serious solicitude into the future. The marriage could not take place until the year was out ; and there was, accordingly, time to arrange everything, and to settle all the necessary preliminaries to a point as near perfection as is possible to merely human details. Tom, no doubt, was very urgent and pressing, and would have precipitated everything, and had the whole business concluded to-morrow, if he could have had his way. But the fact was that, having once given in to him in the memorable way which we have already recorded, Lucilla did not now, so far as the final arrangements were concerned, make much account of Tom's wishes. Heaven be praised, there was one of the two who knew what was right and proper, and was not to be moved from the correct path by any absurd representations. Miss Marjoribanks was revolving all these important questions when she laid her hand by chance, as people say, upon the ' Carlingford Gazette,' all damp and inky, which had just been laid upon the library table. It contained, of course, all the news of the election, but Lucilla was too well acquainted with that beforehand to think of condescending to derive her information from a newspaper. She looked at the advertisements with an eye which saw all that was

there without pausing upon anything in particular. She saw the usual notice about Marmalade oranges, and the announcement that young Mr Vincent, who after that made himself so well known in Carlingford, was to preach the next Sunday in Salem Chapel, and all the other important novelties in the place ; but naturally she took but a moderate amount of interest in such details as these.

Suddenly, however, Lucilla's eye, which, if it could ever be said to be vacant, had been regarding vacantly the list of advertisements, kindled up, and all its usual energy and intelligence came back to it. Her thoughtful face woke up as from a dream. Her head, which had been drooping in pensive meditation, grew erect—her whole figure expanded. She clasped her hands together, as if in the fervour of the moment, nobody else being present, she could not refrain from shaking hands with herself, and giving vent to a self-congratulation. "It is a special providence," said Lucilla to herself, with her usual piety ; and then she folded up the paper in a little square, with the announcement in the middle which had struck her so much, and placed it where Tom could not fail to see it when he came in, and went up-stairs with a new and definite direction given to her thoughts. That was how it must be ! Lucilla, for her part, felt no difficulty in discerning the leadings of Providence, and she could not but

appreciate the readiness with which her desires were attended to, and the prompt clearing-up of her difficulties. There are people whose inclinations Providence does not seem to superintend with such painstaking watchfulness; but then, no doubt, that must be their own fault.

And when Tom came in, they had what aunt Jemima called "one of their discussions" about their future life, although the only thing in it worthy consideration, so far as Tom was concerned, seemed to be the time when they should be married, which occupied at present all that hero's faculties. "Everything else will arrange itself after, you know," he said, with calm confidence. "Time enough for all the rest. The thing is, Lucilla, to decide when you will leave off those formalities, and let It be. Why shouldn't it be now? Do you think my uncle would wish to keep us unhappy all for an idea?"

"My dear Tom, I am not in the least unhappy," said Lucilla, interrupting him sweetly, "nor you either, unless you tell dreadful stories; and as for poor dear papa," Miss Marjoribanks added, with a sigh, "if we were to do exactly as *he* wished, I don't think It would ever be. If you were not so foolish, you would not oblige me to say such things. Tom, let us leave off talking nonsense—the thing that we both want is something to do."

“That is what *I* want,” said Tom, quickly, “but as for you, Lucilla, you shall do nothing but enjoy yourself and take care of yourself. The idea of *you* wanting something to do !”

Miss Marjoribanks regarded her betrothed with mild and affectionate contempt as he thus delivered himself of his foolish sentiments. “It is of no use trying to make him understand,” she said, with an air of resignation. “Do you know that I have always been doing something, and responsible for something, all my life ?”

“Yes, my poor darling,” said Tom, “I know ; but now you are in my hands I mean to take care of you, Lucilla ; you shall have no more anxiety or trouble. What is the good of a man if he can’t save the woman he is fond of from all that ?” cried the honest fellow—and Lucilla could not but cast a despairing glance round her, as if appealing to heaven and earth. What was to be done with a man who had so little understanding of her, and of himself, and of the eternal fitness of things ?

“My dear Tom,” she said once more, mildly, “we may have lost some money, but we are very well off, and Providence has been very kind to us. And there are a great many poor people in the world who are not so well off. I have always tried to be of some use to my fellow-creatures,” said Lucilla, “and I

don't mean, whatever you may say, to give it up now."

"My dearest Lucilla, if it was the poor you were thinking of——! I might have known it was something different from my stupid notions," cried Tom. This kind of adoration was new to Lucilla, notwithstanding her many experiences. And he thought it so good of her to condescend to be good, that she could not help thinking a little better of herself than ordinary, though that, perhaps, was not absolutely needful; and then she proceeded with the elucidation of her views.

"I have been of some use to my fellow-creatures in my way," said Miss Marjoribanks, modestly, "but it has been hard work, and people are not always grateful, you know. And then things are a good deal changed in Carlingford. A woman may devote herself to putting some life into society, and give up years of her time, and—and even her opportunities and all that, and do a great deal of good; but yet if she is put aside for a moment, there is an end of it. I have been doing the best I could for Carlingford for ten years," said Lucilla, with a little natural sadness, "and if any one were to examine into it, where is it all now? They have only got into the way of looking to me; and I do believe if you were to go up and down from Elsworthy's to St Roque's, though you

might find people at dinner here and there, you would not find a shadow of what could really be called society in all Grange Lane !”

Lucilla paused, for naturally her feelings were moved, and while Tom bent over her with tender and respectful devotion, it was not to be wondered at if Miss Marjoribanks, in the emotion of her heart, should wipe away a tear.

“After working at it for ten years !” said Lucilla ; “and now, since poor papa died, who was always full of discrimination—— This is what will come of it, Tom,” she added, solemnly—“they will go back to their old ridiculous parties, as if they had never seen anything better ; and they will all break up into little cliques, and make their awful morning calls and freeze one another to death. That will be the end of it all, after one has slaved like a—like a woman in a mill,” said the disappointed reformer, “and given up ten years.”

“My poor darling !” cried Tom, who would have liked to go and challenge Carlingford for being so insensible to his Lucilla’s devotion and cherishing maternal care.

“But if it had been the poor,” said Miss Marjoribanks, recovering her spirits a little, “they could not help being the better for what one did for them. They might continue to be as stupid as ever, and un-

grateful, and all that; but if they were warm and comfortable, instead of cold and hungry, it would always make a difference. Tom, I will tell you what you will do if you want to please me. You will take all our money and realise it, you know, whatever that means, and go off directly, as fast as the train can carry you, and buy an Estate."

"An estate!" cried Tom, in consternation; and the magnitude of the word was such, and Lucilla was so entirely in earnest, that he jumped from his chair and gazed at her as if constrained, notwithstanding his amazement, to rush off instantly and obey.

"I did not mean just this moment," said Lucilla; "sit down and we can talk it all over, Tom. You know it would be something for you to do; you cannot just go living on like this at your age; you could improve the land, you know, and do all that sort of thing, and the people you could leave to me."

"But Lucilla," said Tom, recovering a little from his consternation, "it is not so easy buying an estate. I mean all that I have to be settled upon you, in case of anything happening. Land may be a safe enough investment; but, you know, very often, Lucilla—the fact is, it doesn't pay."

"*We* could make it pay," said Miss Marjoribanks, with a benevolent smile, "and besides there are estates and estates. I don't want you to go and throw away

your money. It was in the 'Carlingford Gazette' this morning, and I can't help feeling it was a special providence. Of course you never looked at it in the paper, though I marked it for you. Tom, it is Marchbank that I want you to buy. You know how papa used to talk of it. He used to say it was just a nice little property that a gentleman could manage. If he had been spared," said Lucilla, putting her handkerchief to her eyes, "and these wicked dreadful people had not failed, nor nothing happened, I know he would have bought it himself. Dear papa! and he would have given it to me; and most likely, so far as one can tell, it would have come to you at the last, and you would have been Marjoribanks of Marchbank, like our great-great-grandpapa; and that is what I want you to do."

Lucilla's proposition, as it thus unfolded itself, took away Tom Marjoribanks's breath, for notwithstanding that it came from a (young) lady, and was confused by some slightly unintelligible conditions about doing good to one's fellow-creatures, it was not a trifling or romantic suggestion. Tom, too, could remember Marchbank, and his uncle's interest in it, and the careful way in which he explained to the ignorant that this was the correct pronunciation of his own name. While Lucilla made her concluding address, Tom seemed to see himself a little

fellow, with his eyes and his ears very wide open, trotting about with small steps after the Doctor, as he went over the red brick house and neglected gardens at Marchbank: it was only to be let then, and had passed through many hands, and was in miserable case, both lands and house. But neither the lands nor the house were bad of themselves, and Tom was, like Lucilla, perfectly well aware that something might be made of them.

This idea gave a new direction to his thoughts. Though he had been brought up to the bar, he had never been a lover of town, and was in reality, like so many young Englishmen, better qualified to be something in the shape of a country gentleman than for any other profession in the world; and he had left his profession behind, and was in most urgent want of something to do. He did not give in at once with a lover's abject submission, but thought it over for twenty-four hours at all his spare moments,—when he was smoking his evening cigar in the garden, and studying the light in his lady's window, and when he ought to have been asleep, and again in the morning when he sallied forth, before Miss Marjoribanks's blinds were drawn up or the house had fairly awoke. He was not a man of brilliant ability, but he had that sure and steady eye for the real secret of a position which must have been revealed to every

competent critic by the wonderful clear-sightedness with which he saw, and the wise persistence with which he held to the necessity of an immediate choice between himself and Mr Ashburton. He had seen that there was but one alternative, and he had suffered no delay nor divergence from the question in hand. And it was this same quality which had helped him to the very pretty addition to his small patrimony which he had meant to settle on Lucilla, and which would now make the acquisition of Marchbank an easy thing enough. And though Tom had looked wise on the subject of investment in land, it was a kind of investment in every way agreeable to him. Thus Lucilla's arrow went straight to the mark—straighter even than she had expected; for besides all the other and more substantial considerations, there was to Tom's mind a sweet sense of poetic justice in the thought that, after his poor uncle's failure, who had never thought him good enough for Lucilla, it should be he and no other who would give this coveted possession to his cousin. Had Marchbank been in the market in Dr Marjoribanks's time, it was, as Lucilla herself said, his money that would have bought it; but in such a case, so far as the Doctor was concerned, there would have been little chance for Tom. Now all that was changed, and it was in Tom's hands that the wealth of the family lay.

It was he who was the head, and could alone carry out what Lucilla's more original genius suggested. If the Doctor could but have seen it, he who had formed plans so very different—but perhaps by that time Dr Marjoribanks had found out that Providence after all had not been so ill-advised as he once thought in committing to his care such a creative intelligence as that of Lucilla, and withholding from him “the boy.”

As for Miss Marjoribanks, after she had made up her mind and stated her conviction, she gave herself no further trouble on the subject, but took it for granted, with that true wisdom which is unfortunately so rare among women. She did not talk about it overmuch, or display any feverish anxiety about Marchbank, but left her suggestion to work, and had faith in Tom. At the same time, the tranquillising sense of now knowing, to a certain extent, what lay before her came into Lucilla's mind. It would be a new sphere, but a sphere in which she would find herself at home. Still near enough to Carlingford to keep a watchful eye upon society and give it the benefit of her experience, and yet at the same time translated into a new world, where her influence might be of untold advantage, as Lucilla modestly said, to her fellow-creatures. There was a village not far from the gates at Marchbank, where every kind of village nuisance was to be found.

There are people who are very tragical about village nuisances, and there are other people who assail them with loathing, as a duty forced upon their consciences ; but Lucilla was neither of the one way of thinking nor of the other. It gave her the liveliest satisfaction to think of all the disorder and disarray of the Marchbank village. Her fingers itched to be at it—to set all the crooked things straight, and clean away the rubbish, and set everything, as she said, on a sound foundation. If it had been a model village, with prize flower-gardens and clean as Arcadia, the thought of it would not have given Miss Marjoribanks half so much pleasure. The recollection of all the wretched hovels and miserable cottages exhilarated her heart.

“ They may be as stupid and ungrateful as they like,” she said to herself, “ but to be warm and comfortable instead of cold and hungry always makes a difference.” Perhaps it was not the highest motive possible, and it might be more satisfactory to some people to think of Lucilla as actuated by lofty sentiments of philanthropy ; but to persons acquainted with Miss Marjoribanks’s character, her biographer would scorn to make any pretence. What would be the good of a spirit full of boundless activity and benevolent impulses if there was nobody to help ?—what would be the use of self-devotion if the race in general stood in no need of charitable ministrations ?

Lucilla had been of use to her fellow-creatures all her life; and though she was about to relinquish one branch of usefulness, that was not to say that she should be prevented from entering into another. The state of the Marchbank village did her good to the very bottom of her soul. It justified her to herself for her choice of Tom, which, but for this chance of doing good, might perhaps have had the air of a merely selfish personal preference. Now she could regard it in a loftier light, and the thought was sweet to Lucilla; for such a beautiful way of helping her neighbour would no doubt have been to a certain extent impracticable amid the many occupations of the Member's wife.

Perhaps the most difficult thing in Miss Marjoribanks's way at this otherwise satisfactory moment was the difficulty she found in persuading society, first of the reality, and then of the justice, of the step she had taken. Most of them, to tell the truth, had forgotten all about Tom Marjoribanks. It is true that when Lucilla's intentions and prospects were discussed in Grange Lane, as they had been so often, it was not uncommon for people to say, "There was once a cousin, you know;" but nobody had ever given very much heed to the suggestion. When Lucilla went to tell Mrs Chiley of what had happened, she was but inadequately prepared for the surprise with which her

intelligence was received. For it all seemed natural enough to Miss Marjoribanks. She had gone on very steadily for a long time, without thinking particularly about anybody, and disposed to accept the most eligible and satisfactory person who happened to present himself; but all the time there had been a warm corner in her heart for Tom. And then the eligible person had not come, and she had been worried and wearied, and had had her losses, like most other people. And it had always been pleasant to remember that there was one man in the world who, if she but held out a finger to him—— But then the people in Grange Lane were not capable of discrimination on such a delicate subject, and had never, as was to be expected, had the smallest insight into Lucilla's heart.

“You have something to tell me, Lucilla?” said old Mrs Chiley. “You need not say no, for I can see it in your eyes. And how lucky it is the Colonel is out, and we can have it all to ourselves! Come here and sit by me, and tell me all——every word.”

“Dear Mrs Chiley,” said Lucilla, “you can always see what one means before one says a word. And it has all happened so suddenly; but the very first thing I thought of doing was to come and tell you.”

Mrs Chiley gave her young friend, who was leaning over her, a hug, which was the only answer which could be made to so touching a speech, and drew

Lucilla down upon a low chair that had been placed by the side of her sofa. She kept Miss Marjoribanks's hand in her own, and caressed it, and looked at her with satisfaction in every line of her face. After waiting so long, and having so many disappointments, everything was going to turn out so entirely as it ought to do at last.

"I think I know what you are going to tell me, my dear," said Mrs Chiley; "and I am so pleased, Lucilla. I only wonder you did not give me a hint from the very first. You remember I asked you when you came here that snowy evening. I was a hard-hearted old woman, and I daresay you were very vexed; but I am so glad to think that the Colonel never stood out against him, but gave his consent that very day."

This was the moment, if there ever was such a moment, when Lucilla lost courage. Mrs Chiley was so entirely confident as to what was coming, and it was something so different that was really coming; and it was hard upon Miss Marjoribanks to feel that she was about to disappoint everybody's expectations. She had to clear her throat before she spoke—she who was generally so ready for every emergency; and she could not help feeling for the moment as if she was a young girl who had run away with somebody, and deceived all her anxious friends.

"Dear Mrs Chiley, I am afraid I am not going to

say what you expected," said Lucilla. "I am very comfortable and happy, and I think it's for the best ; and I am so anxious that you should like him ; but it is not the person you are thinking of. It is——"

Here the old lady, to Lucilla's surprise, rose up upon her pillows and threw her arms round her, and kissed her over again, and fell a-crying. "I always said how generous you were, Lucilla," cried Mrs Chiley. "I knew it from the first. I was always fond of him, you know ; and now that he has been beaten, poor dear, and disappointed, you've gone and made it up to him ! Lucilla, other people may say what they like, but it is just what I always expected of you !"

This unlooked-for burst of enthusiasm took Lucilla entirely by surprise. She could not say in reply that Mr Cavendish did not want her to make it up to him ; but the fact that this was the only alternative which occurred to Mrs Chiley filled Miss Marjoribanks with a sense of something like positive guilt. She had deceived everybody, and raised false expectations, and how was she to explain herself ? It was with humility and embarrassment that she spoke.

"I don't know what you will say when you hear who it really is," she said. "He has been fond of me all this time, though he has been so far away. He went to India because I sent him, and he came back as soon as ever he heard about—what had happened.

And what could I do? I could not be so ungrateful or so hard-hearted *again*, as to send him away?"

"Lucilla, who is it?" said Mrs Chiley, growing pale—for she generally had a little wintry bloom on her cheek like the China roses she was so fond of. "Don't keep me like this in suspense."

"Dear Mrs Chiley," said Lucilla, with the brevity of excitement, "I don't see what other person in the world it could be but my cousin Tom."

Poor Mrs Chiley started, so that the sofa and Lucilla's chair and the very room shook. She said herself afterwards that she felt as if somebody had discharged a pistol into her breast. She was so shocked and startled that she threw off all her coverings and the Affghanistan blanket Mrs Beverley had sent, and put her tottering feeble old feet to the floor; and then she took her young friend solemnly by both her hands.

"Oh, Lucilla, my poor dear!" she cried, "you have gone and done it without thinking what you were doing. You have taken it into your head that it was all over, and that there was nothing more to look for. And you are only nine-and-twenty, Lucilla; and many a girl marries very well—better than common—long after she's nine-and-twenty; and I know for a fact—oh! my poor dear child, I know for a *certain* fact!—that Mr Ashburton was coming forward. He as good

as said it to Lady Richmond, Lucilla. He as good as said, as soon as the election was over—and now you have gone and got impatient, and thrown yourself away !”

Miss Marjoribanks was quiet carried away for the moment by this flood of sorrowful eloquence. She was silenced, and had nothing to answer, and accepted it as in some respect the just penalty for the disappointment she was causing to everybody. She let Mrs Chiley say out her say, and then she restored the old lady to her sofa, and made her comfortable, and covered her up with all her wraps and blankets. Though she ran on in a feeble strain all the time weeping and lamenting, Lucilla took no notice. She wrapped her old friend up, and put her pillows just as she liked them, and sat down again on the low chair ; and by that time the poor old lady had sunk into a faint sob of vexation and disappointment, and had given her remonstrances up.

“ Now, I will tell you all about it,” said Miss Marjoribanks. “ I knew you would be surprised ; and if it would be any comfort to you, dear Mrs Chiley, to know that Mr Ashburton *did*——”

“ And you refused him, Lucilla ?” Mrs Chiley asked, with horror in her face.

“ Ought I to have accepted him when there was somebody I liked better ?” said Lucilla, with the force

of conscious virtue, "and you used always to say just the contrary. One great thing that supported me was, that *you* would be sure to understand. I did not know it at the time," said Miss Marjoribanks, with sweet confidence and simplicity, "but I see it all now. Why it never came to anything before, you know, was, that I never could in my heart have accepted anybody but Tom."

Mrs Chiley turned round with an unaffected surprise, which was not unmingled with awe. Up to this moment she had been under the impression that it was the blindness, and folly, and stupidity of the gentlemen which had kept it from ever coming to anything. It was altogether a new light that broke upon her now, confusing, though on the whole satisfactory; but for the moment she was struck dumb, and had no answer to make.

"I never knew it myself until—quite lately," said Miss Marjoribanks, with confidential tenderness, "and I don't think I could tell it to any one but you. Dear Mrs Chiley, you have always taken such an interest in me! I sent him away, you know, and thought I was only fond of him because he was my cousin. And then there were all the others, and some of them were very nice; but always when it came to the point—And it never came into my head that Tom was at the bottom of it all—never till the other day."

Mrs Chiley was still so much confounded by this unexpected revelation that it was some time before she could find her voice ; and even now the light penetrated slowly into her mind, and it was only by degrees that she accepted the new fact thus presented to her faith—that it was not the gentlemen who were to blame—that it was all Lucilla's or rather Tom Marjoribanks's fault.

“ And Mr Ashburton, Lucilla ? ” she asked, faintly.

“ I am very sorry,” said Miss Marjoribanks, “ very very sorry ; but I don't think I can blame myself that I gave him encouragement, you know. I may have been foolish at other times, but I am sure I was very careful with him. It was all the election that was to blame. I spoke very frankly to him,” Lucilla added, “ for I knew he was a man to do me justice ; and it will always be a comfort to me to think that we had our—our explanation, you know, before I knew it was Tom.”

“ Well, Lucilla, it is a great change,” said Mrs Chiley, who could not reconcile herself to the new condition of affairs. “ I don't mean to pretend that I can make up my mind to it all at once. It seems so strange that you should have been setting your heart on some one all these ten years, and never saying a word ; I wonder how you could do it. And when people were always in the hopes that you would

marry at home, as it were, and settle in Carlingford. I am sure your poor dear papa would be as much astonished as anybody. And I suppose now he will take you away to Devonshire, where his mother lives, and we shall never see you any more." And once more Mrs Chiley gave a little sob. "The Firs would almost have been as good as Grange Lane," she said, "and the Member for Carlingford, Lucilla!"

As for Miss Marjoribanks, she knelt down by the side of the sofa and took her old friend, as well as the blankets and pillows would permit, into her arms.

"Dear Mrs Chiley, we are going to buy Marchbank and settle," said Lucilla, weeping a little for company. "You could not think I would ever go far away from you. And as for being Member for Carlingford, there are Members for counties too," Miss Marjoribanks said in her excitement. It was a revelation which came out unawares, and which she never intended to utter; but it threw a gleam of light over the new world of ambition and progress which was opened to Lucilla's far-seeing vision; and Mrs Chiley could not but yield to the spell of mingled awe and sympathy which thrilled through her as she listened. It was not to be supposed that what Lucilla did was done upon mere unthinking impulse; and when she thought of Marchbank, there arose in Mrs Chiley's mind "the slow beginnings of content."

“But, Lucilla,” the old lady said with solemnity, as she gave her a last kiss of reconciliation and peace, “if all Grange Lane had taken their oaths to it, I never could have believed, had you not told me, that, after all, it was to be Tom!”

CHAPTER THE LAST.

THIS was the hardest personal encounter which Miss Marjoribanks was subjected to ; but when the news circulated in Grange Lane there was first a dead pause of incredulity and amazement, and then such a commotion as could be compared to nothing except a sudden squall at sea. People who had been going peaceably on their way at one moment, thinking of nothing, were to be seen the next buffeted by the wind of Rumour and tossed about on the waves of Astonishment. To speak less metaphorically (but there are moments of emotion so overwhelming and unprecedented that they can be dealt with only in the language of metaphor), every household in Grange Lane, and at least half of the humbler houses in Grove Street, and a large proportion of the other dwellings in Carlingford, were nearly as much agitated about Lucilla's marriage as if it had been a daughter of their own. Now that he was recalled to

their minds in such a startling way, people began to recollect with greater and greater distinctness that "there was once a cousin, you know," and to remember him in his youth, and even in his boyhood, when he had been much in Carlingford. And by degrees the Grange Lane people came to see that they knew a great deal about Tom, and to remind each other of the abrupt end of his last visit, and of his going to India immediately after, and of many a little circumstance in Lucilla's looks and general demeanour which this *dénouement* seemed to make plain.

Lady Richmond, though she was a little annoyed about Mr Ashburton's disappointment, decided at once that it was best to ignore that altogether, and was quite glad to think that she had always said there must be somebody. "She bore up a great deal too well against all her little disappointments," she said, when discussing the matter. "When a girl does that one may be always sure there is somebody behind—and you know I always said, when she was not just talking or busy, that there was a preoccupation in Lucilla's eye." This was a speech which Mrs Woodburn, as might have been expected, made a great deal of—but, notwithstanding, it had its effect in Grange Lane. Going back upon their recollections, most people were able to verify the fact that Miss Marjoribanks had borne her little disappointments very well,

and that there was sometimes a preoccupation in her eye. The first was beyond dispute ; and as for the second, it was a thing which did not require a very great stretch of imagination to suppose — and the unexpected sensation of finding at last a distinct bit of romance to round off Lucilla's history, was pleasant to most people. If she had married Mr Ashburton, it would have been (so far as anything connected with Miss Marjoribanks could be) a commonplace conclusion. But now she had upset everybody's theories, and made an altogether original and unlooked-for ending for herself, which was a thing to have been expected from Lucilla, though nobody could have foreseen the special turn which her originality would take.

And nothing could have come in more appropriately after the election, when people felt the blank of ordinary existence just beginning to settle down upon them again. It kept all Carlingford in conversation for a longer time than might be supposed in these busy days ; for there was not only the fact itself, but what *they* were to do, and where they were to go, to be discussed. And then Tom himself began to be visible about Grange Lane ; and he had heaps of Indian things among his baggage, and recollected so affectionately the people he used to know, and dispensed his curiosities with such a liberal hand, that

the heart of Carlingford was touched. He had a way of miscalculating distances, as has been said, and exercised some kind of magnetic influence upon all the little tables and unsteady articles of furniture, which somehow seemed to fall if he but looked at them. But, on the other hand, John Brown, who had in hand the sale of Marchbank, found him the most straightforward and clear-headed of clients. The two had all the preliminaries arranged before any other intending purchaser had time to turn the matter over in his mind. And Tom had the old brick house full of workmen before anybody knew it was his. When the summer had fairly commenced he went over and lived there, and saw to everything, and went so far as to fit up the drawing-room with the same well-remembered tint of pale green which had been found ten years ago to suit so well with Lucilla's complexion. It was perhaps a little hazardous to repeat the experiment, for green, as everybody knows, is a very trying colour ; but it was a most touching and triumphant proof that to Tom, at least, Lucilla was as young as ever, and had not even begun to go off. It was Mr Holden who supplied everything, and he was naturally proud of the trust thus reposed in him, and formed the very highest opinion of his customer ; and it was probably from his enthusiasm on this subject that might be traced the commencement of that singular

revolution of sentiment in Grange Lane, which suddenly woke up all in an instant without knowing how, to recognise the existence of Mr Marjoribanks, and to forget the undue familiarity which had ventured upon the name of Tom.

When Lucilla went over in the most proper and decorous way, under the charge of aunt Jemima, to see her future home, the sight of the village at Marchbank was sweet to her eyes. That it was not by any means sweet to any other sense did but enhance Miss Marjoribanks's satisfaction. "A year after this!" she said to herself, and her bosom swelled; for to realise clearly how much she had it in her power to do for her fellow-creatures was indeed a pleasure. It occupied her a great deal more than the gardens did, which Tom was arranging so carefully, or even than the kitchen, which she inspected for the information of Nancy; for at that time the drawing-room was not fitted up. Lucilla's eyes went over the moral wilderness with the practical glance of a statesman, and, at the same time, the sanguine enthusiasm of a philanthropist. She saw of what it was capable, and already, in imagination, the desert blossomed like a rose before her beneficent steps, and the sweet sense of well-doing rose in her breast. And then to see Tom at Marchbank was to see his qualities. He was not a man of original mind, nor one

who would be likely to take a bold initiative. Considering all the circumstances, that was a gift which was scarcely to be wished for ; but he had a perfect genius for carrying out a suggestion, which, it need scarcely be added, was a faculty that, considering the good fortune which Providence had so long reserved for him, made his character as near perfect as humanity permits. Lucilla felt, indeed, as she drove away, that approbation of Providence which a well-regulated mind, in possession of most things which it desires, might be expected to feel. Other delusive fancies *had* one time and another swept across her horizon ; but after all there could be no doubt that only thus could she have been fitly mated, and full development afforded to all the resources of her spirit. As the carriage passed the Firs she sighed and put down her veil with a natural sentiment ; but still she felt it was for the best. The Member for Carlingford must be a busy man, occupied about his own affairs, and with little leisure for doing good to his fellow-creatures except in a parliamentary way. " And there are members for counties as well," Lucilla, in the depths of her soul, said to herself. Then there rose up before her a vision of a parish saved, a village reformed, a county reorganised, and a triumphant election at the end, the recompense and crown of all, which should put the government of the country itself, to a certain

extent, into competent hands. This was the celestial vision which floated before Miss Marjoribanks's eyes as she drove into Carlingford, and recollected, notwithstanding occasional moments of discouragement, the successful work she had done, and the good she had achieved in her native town. It was but the natural culmination of her career that transferred her from the town to the county, and held out to her the glorious task of serving her generation in a twofold way, among the poor and among the rich. If a momentary sigh for Grange Lane, which was about to lose her, breathed from her lips, it was sweetened by a smile of satisfaction for the county which was about to gain her. The lighter preface of life was past, and Lucilla had the comfort of feeling that its course had been full of benefit to her fellow-creatures ; and now a larger sphere opened before her feet, and Miss Marjoribanks felt that the arrangements of Providence were on the whole full of discrimination, and that all was for the best, and she had not lived in vain.

This being the case, perhaps it is not necessary to go much further into detail. Mr Ashburton never said anything about his disappointment, as might have been expected. When he did mention that eventful day at all, he said that he had happened accidentally to be calling on Miss Marjoribanks the day her cousin came home, and saw at once the state of affairs ; and

he sent her a very nice present when she was married. After all, it was not her fault. If Providence had ordained that it was to be Tom, how could Lucilla fly in the face of such an ordinance? and, at the same time, there was to both parties the consoling reflection, that whatever might happen to them as individuals, the best man had been chosen for Carlingford, which was an abiding benefit to all concerned.

Under all the circumstances, it was to be looked for that Miss Marjoribanks's spirits should improve even in her mourning, and that the tenacity with which she clung to her father's house should yield to the changed state of affairs. This was so much the case, that Lucilla took heart to show Mrs Rider all over it, and to point out all the conveniences to her, and even, with a sigh, to call her attention to the bell which hung over the Doctor's bedroom door. "It breaks my heart to hear it," Miss Marjoribanks said; "but still Dr Rider will find it a great convenience." It was a very nice house; and so the new Doctor's wife, who had not been used to anything so spacious, was very willing to say; and instead of feeling any grudge against the man who was thus in every respect to take her father's place, so sweet are the softening influences of time and personal wellbeing, that Lucilla, who was always so good-natured, made many little arrangements for their comfort, and even *left the carpets*, which was a thing nobody

could have expected of her, and which aunt Jemima did not scruple to condemn. "They are all fitted," Lucilla said, "and if they were taken up they would be spoiled; and besides, we could have no use for them at Marchbank." It was a very kind thing to do, and simplified matters very much for the Riders, who were not rich. But aunt Jemima, in the background, could not but pull Lucilla's sleeve, and mutter indistinct remarks about a valuation, which nobody paid any particular attention to at the moment, as there were so many things much more important to think of and to do.

And the presents that came pouring in from every quarter were enough to have made up for twenty carpets. Lucilla got testimonials, so to speak, from every side, and all Carlingford interested itself, as has been said, in all the details of the marriage, as if it had been a daughter of its own. "And yet it is odd to think that, after all, I never shall be anything but Lucilla Marjoribanks!" she said, in the midst of all her triumphs, with a certain pensiveness. If there could be any name that would have suited her better, or is surrounded by more touching associations, we leave it to her other friends to find out; for at the moment of taking leave of her, there is something consoling to our own mind in the thought that Lucilla can now suffer no change of name. As she was in

the first freshness of her youthful daring, when she rose like the sun upon the chaos of society in Carlingford, so is she now as she goes forth into the County to carry light and progress there. And in this reflection there is surely comfort for the few remaining malcontents, whom not even his own excellent qualities, and Lucilla's happiness, can reconcile to the fact, that after all it was Tom.

THE END.

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