THE

AUTHOR'S DAUGHTER.

BY

CATHERINE ELLEN SPENCE,

AUTHOR OF

"MR. HOGARTH'S WILL," "TENDER AND TRUE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1868.

CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

ways feel
to him."
e the in-
as your
thoughts
allel with
er. You
husband
tance was
e sense of
that Mr.
r brother.
nfort and
sent; the
which he
nt forget
a way as
terly. I
married
ould be
er."
ing it?"

s at any
ay you
or your
ar ser-

THE [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

"So [illegible]
of his [illegible]
Lucy [illegible]
turing [illegible]
Lord Darlington [illegible]
ning to [illegible]
"[illegible]
time [illegible]
Edith [illegible]
sure that [illegible]
"W[illegible]
I am [illegible]
seem to [illegible]
ing [illegible]
Rectory, [illegible]
had [illegible]

make a morning call at Hampstead, or wherever it is that your cousin is visiting."

"Anthony said he was going out of town to visit the Beresfords."

"Yes; he said it so elaborately that I was convinced that he was going in another direction. I don't mean that he was conscious of what he was going to do, but I think he would change his destination when he got out of the house, thinking he ought to make that call first. It will depend on what sort of people Miss Evans is staying with, but at present I think her chance a good one. Your brother never has met, and may possibly never meet again a girl who suits him in every way as she does; but then again men seldom marry the persons who suit them, or rather whom their friends think suit them."

"Do you really think Lucy so fit a wife for Anthony? Would she raise his character and help to make him less sensitive and more easily pleased?"

"Do you believe Anthony would be happy with a wife who would improve him, or do you think that such a woman could be happy with him? If you with your talents and your gentleness can do nothing better than try to manage him, what can you expect from any one else?"

"I have so much less power and influence than

a wife could have," said Amy; "and I always feel stupid with Anthony, for I owe so much to him."

"Young ladies are apt to over-estimate the influence of a wife on such a nature as your brother's," said the earl. "Lucy Evans's thoughts and hopes and ambitions would run parallel with his, and he would be satisfied with her. You would be surprised how indulgent a husband he would be to one whose whole importance was derived from himself, and who had a due sense of that importance. Recollect, however, that Mr. Derrick is only interesting to me as your brother. I am sorry to think how much your comfort and happiness depends on him for the present; the more so as all that he has done for you, which he takes care you should never for a moment forget or lose sight of, has been done in such a way as to make your sister unkind and unsisterly. I can only fancy that if he were happily married as he accounts happiness, his temper would be easier and his requirements from you fewer."

"Is not that a heartless way of viewing it?" said Amy.

"I don't want you to think me heartless at any time, and particularly now when you say you want my advice. What is your trouble or your difficulty? My best counsels are at your service."

Amy hesitated and coloured. She had thought it would be very easy to speak about Allan's letter to Lord Darlington, but the words would not come. He felt the matter was more serious than he had anticipated.

"This correspondent of yours in Australia—no love affair, I hope," said the earl with an effort.

"I don't think so—at least I am almost sure that it *cannot* be, but he thinks differently."

"Ah! you wish to give your friend at the antipodes a gentle dismissal," said Lord Darlington, with a sense of relief. "No one could do such a thing more kindly than you, I am sure. You know that Mr. Derrick would be highly displeased if you did anything else."

"I know it well," said Amy. "I never dared to speak to him on the subject; but you have so much kindness and forbearance, you are so much older and more reasonable on these matters, that I feel as if I could come to you like a father (the earl winced), and that you would have patience with me."

"And this is your friend the blacksmith," said the earl, courteously enough, but indignant at the thought of the ignoble rival.

"Allan loves me I cannot tell you how much better than I deserve; if I had stayed at Branx-

holm I should have married him, and I am sure we should have been happy."

"It is very probable that you might, but you did *not* stay in Australia. You are now moving in very different society, surrounded by all England has to give of luxury and refinement. I do not suppose that the life in Australia would satisfy you now," said Lord Darlington.

"Have I grown so artificial?" said Amy.

"And you owe something to your brother, who has really been most kind and generous to you in his own way. It would never do to make an irreconcilable breach with your family, as your mother did, and suffer for it as she did."

"Mamma was happy, my lord," said Amy, seriously. "Mamma never regretted what she did in marrying my father. And if Allan really is my first love—and I have seen no one yet whom I can compare to him, no one yet who is so dear to me—and if I cast him off because he is not rich enough or great enough, and because he cannot lodge me in a palace, or hedge me round with servants, I shall do wrong. You say I owe something to Anthony, but I owe something to Allan too. If I could only make you have some idea how good he is, how straightforward, how manly, yet how gentle, how clever, how affectionate. I wonder I held out

when he pleaded so hard; but my heart was set upon going to England and making Anthony my friend."

"But before you make up your mind to return to Australia, and make Anthony your enemy by doing so, think over the matter. I have no doubt that your friend (he could not bring himself to say lover) is an excellent young man, very superior to his family, and his position, and if you could take England, and culture, and civilization with you it might be all very well for you to imagine that he was your first love, and to rest contentedly in your lot. But after seeing and knowing a fuller and higher life, you could not be satisfied to descend to a lower. You have told me that at first Australian bush ways were strange and uncouth to you, even when you went to them as a child from a poor home. What will they be to you now when you go from circumstances of such external polish and luxury as you have here?" and the earl glanced round the splendid drawing-room in which they sat, where every possible arrangement was introduced to give comfort and to anticipate the wishes of the occupants. Of this place she might be the mistress, and smile at Anthony's caprices and Edith's envy; but although he felt tempted to speak, he knew this was not the proper place or time for a declaration.

The advice must be disinterested, or supposed to be so.

"Do you think, then, that happiness depends on external circumstances?"

"To a very great extent it does, and I think it is painful to every one to go back in the world. You may fancy that you love your Australian friend, but I say you could not make him happy."

"Not happy! He is not hard to please."

"No lover ever appears to be hard to please; it is a way they have got of being thankful for very little; but I am looking a little further forward than you are. Do you recollect telling me that it was a pity when a great portion of your life was tabooed, so that nobody took any interest in it, or would hear you talk of it? Now, of the time you have spent in England lately, in which you have seen so much and heard so much—in which, I am told, you have improved so much, you would never be able to speak to—to—the person in question. Do you think, if you married this young Australian, that he could bear to hear you describe scenes which he never could enter, or talk about the people you met, the parties, the excursions, the exhibitions, the concerts, the antiquities of England? And if you feel it hard for a brother to dislike what interests you,

how much worse would it be in the other case? A brother is only your guardian for a time. It depends very much on yourself for how long or how short a time, whereas if there is any point which your husband shrinks from you must be on your guard for life. Did not this young man dislike the resolution you took, and try to make you suspect your brother's liberality and generosity? I assure you, my dear Amy, that though you might have made him happy if you had never left Australia, it is different now. It is impossible for you to return the same Amy Staunton who left him; it is impossible for you to have the same appreciation of his virtues and the same blindness to his faults or weaknesses. You must not dignify the liking of an inexperienced child with the name of a first love; but judge seriously whether you love him enough now to risk a serious quarrel with your brother, an estrangement from all your English friends, relinquishment of all the pleasures of the best society which are now opening for you, with the chance—I may almost say the certainty—of being disappointed yourself, and also disappointing your friend."

This was a new way of putting it. Amy was prepared to be told that Australian life might not make her happy; but she had thought that

there was nothing wanted to make Allan perfectly happy for life but her consent to be his wife. It was wonderfully generous in Lord Darlington to take his happiness into consideration, and not to rail at poor Allan for his presumption, as Anthony would have done. But was it true that she was so changed as to be unfit for such a life again? Would not Mrs. Lindsay think her more like a chimneypiece-ornament than a helpmeet for an industrious man? Would it not be very painful if any of the family were dissatisfied with her, and above all if there were to be reserves between her and Allan? And yet it was quite possible he might feel a dislike to English talk as Anthony had to Australian.

"Don't you think I have learned prudence in England?" said Amy. "I am sure I have had many lessons."

"You have, but it is evident that you do not love this young man, or you would not speak of such a thing as prudence. Besides, if you were silent on these subjects, you could not help thinking of them, and that he would know and dislike. It seems an unkind thing to do, but it would really be the truest kindness to write to him decidedly to put an end to his hopes. I am sorry for him, because he will feel it severely for a time; but considering all the difficulties, draw-

backs, and dangers it saves him, it really is the wisest and the kindest thing you can do."

"And so your unbiassed opinion is that what he wishes so much would not really make him happy, my lord. I never thought I was good enough for him or loved him enough. It will grieve him dreadfully to hear that I never can be his wife, but that would be better for him than if I was a bad wife. Must I write so decidedly?"

"I think from what you say of his letter that the thing should be settled at once. If you take no notice of it, he will consider that you sanction his hopes, and I think that would be cruel, as I feel certain that, however much you dislike to give pain, you do not feel towards him as he wishes you to do. If you did, you would have no hesitation and ask no advice, but act for yourself. I am very sorry I have had such an unthankful, unpleasant post, but you may depend on my view being the correct one." He drew the girl gently to him and kissed her cheek. The action seemed so natural and so paternal under the circumstances that she took no alarm; indeed, she returned the kiss, and let a tear fall off her eyelid on his cheek.

He had divined the doubt that always haunted her mind with regard to Allan—the doubt that she loved him enough. Although Amy was natu-

rally affectionate and grateful, she was not impulsive, she was not carried away by vehemence or passion, and her position at Stanmore had made her more diffident of herself. She longed to escape from censure, and to be able to speak without forethought and restraint, and the fondest of her recollections of Branxholm was the feeling of freedom and the open intercourse which she had held with every one there. If to Branxholm she was to bring any of that atmosphere of restraint which she had felt so oppressive, it would take away its dearest charm. And she could not help thinking that the only occasions in which Allan had appeared unreasonable or unamiable were when he spoke or thought of her brother's claims on her affection, or of the friends and pleasures she looked forward to in England.

It was a comfort that Lord Darlington did not think her regret absurd, that he did not scold her for crying at the thought of what Allan would suffer, that he did not grow impatient with her hesitation as to acting on his advice. He gave her a little time to think over the subject, and though he watched her closely, it was done without causing her any uneasiness. She read Allan's letter again, and felt that it must be answered decidedly. She had given him no right

to express himself so confidently, and she perceived that the old bitterness with regard to her going away from old friends to try new, tinged his condolences with her on her disappointment in Anthony and Edith.

"Have you written to your friend?" asked Lord Darlington, on the following morning, which was the day of the departure of the Marseilles mail.

"Yes, I have written as you advised; I suppose it is the best thing to do."

"Have you been decided?"

"I think so; at least I tried to be so."

"Firm and gentle, that is characteristic of you."

"I daresay he will think it cruel."

"He may for a time; but however much he may admire you, am I rude to say that he may find some one else soon who may console him? I know it is not conventional to detract from your hold of your friend at the antipodes, but when he could not keep you there, he could scarcely expect to win you back."

Amy's letter was indeed decided. She spoke of no coercion and no persuasion, but that she had come to the conclusion that it was better for them both, and especially for Allan himself, that they should give up the thought of being more

to each other than friends. She begged him not to write again till he could accept the new relation in which she wished to stand with him. It was with many tears and many pauses, and much re-writing that she completed this the shortest letter she had ever written to Allan Lindsay. She did not give the usual details of the month's proceedings which she had written to him regularly before. It would only grieve him the more to hear about them, and, for aught she said to the contrary, her brother might have been dead, and her sister married, and the Hammonds sunk in the bottom of the sea, since her last minute and voluminous letter which had been sent from Belton. She must not write to him again till she heard how he received this, and she could not help anticipating the pain with which she must read the letters now on their way or to be written before he knew how unkind she was.

CHAPTER II.

MISS EVANS ABANDONS HER TOUR TO THE LAKES.

WHEN Anthony Derrick, according to Lord Darlington's surmise, went to call on Miss Evans he was fortunate enough to find the young lady at home. She was, however, just going out to see the pictures at the Royal Academy, and, although Mr. Derrick had seen them before more than once, he offered to accompany her and her party, partly because he thought it would be pleasant, and partly because he thought nothing could be more annoying to Edith. She had wanted to go in that direction, and had asked him to accompany her, but he had excused himself by pleading engagements out of town. Lucy was as delightful at the Academy as she was in the country; her criticisms were exactly to his taste; she asked for information as to the painters whose names she saw in the catalogue, and was often very much amused

with the titles which they gave to their pictures. Stopping at one entitled "The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers," treated in the somewhat pre-Raphaelite manner, Lucy could not help laughing at the sombre group of ugly, ill-dressed men, women and children whom the artist had transferred to his canvas. She did not observe the fidelity of the details, the manner in which sea and sky and wood and rock combined and contrasted, the lofty expression on the rugged features, or the childish and womanly beauty that looked out of the unbecoming and puritanical dress of their time and class. She was only eager to know who had painted such an absurd picture, and, seeing it was a Mr. Hubbard, asked if that was not Amy's friend. Anthony recollected the name as that of an artist whom Amy had mentioned, but, as he believed he was somewhat of a Bohemian, living on his wits in a scrambling way, he had forbidden her to take lessons from him or to visit him—for young ladies could not be too much on their guard as to their associates.

"I am quite certain that Lord Darlington and your sister have been often at his studio, however," said Lucy.

"Indeed it is the first time I ever heard of it," said Anthony.

"I have heard the earl say, 'there is a bit of

sky for our friend Hubbard;' and] otherwise allude to the painter as if they knew him well."

"Upon my word his lordship carries things with rather a high hand, and Amy rather with an under hand for my taste. If Amy goes to such a place I have a right to know of it. And you think they went often?"

"I may be wrong, but my impression was that they were very frequent visitors; but I never dreamed of its being without your knowledge, and against your wish, Mr. Derrick. I should not have mentioned it if I had thought so."

"I wonder what they could be doing there," said Anthony, whose curiosity was easily excited.

"Suppose you call and see. There is no necessity for your putting the artist on his guard by telling him your name, and your relationship to his young friend."

"If you will accompany me, Miss Evans, I shall be only too happy. Suppose we get this Mr. Hubbard's address, and hunt him up together. I am at your service for the day."

As Anthony said these words he met full in face his sister Edith, who had been persuaded by a friend to look in at the Academy pictures for half an hour. It was a delicious moment for Anthony; he introduced Miss Evans to his sister as "a sort of cousin of ours, you know—at least

Amy's cousin." Lucy was looking her best, and both appeared to be very happy, so that Edith's indignation at all the unfortunate results of her brother's rash acknowledgment of Amy and of his invitation to her rose to a point of silent rage such as it never before reached. That is to say, her anger was voiceless to him; she only contented herself by a disclaimer of the relationship, and a satirical remark that his engagements out of town had been surprisingly soon got over, and looked Lucy over from head to foot with what she mistakenly supposed to be *civil* contempt; but she gave utterance to her indignation to Amy, who, dispirited and depressed with the idea of writing so cruel a letter to Allan, could not stand the reproaches which were poured on her for leading Anthony away from his own relatives and friends in order to put him into the designing hands of her unprincipled Belton connections.

Amy could only say truly that Anthony had told her that he did not care anything at all for her cousin, and that he had been displeased at her for supposing such a thing possible; that he considered himself so far above all the family at Belton Rectory that no one could misunderstand any slight attentions he might pay to Miss Evans.

"*Slight* attentions!" said Edith. "He positively refused to accompany me to town to-day, alleging he had engagements for the whole of the day in the country, and he goes—I do not know how far—for this girl, and takes her just where he might expect me to see her, and says he is at her service for the rest of the day. He introduces her as my cousin to me and my friends, and laughs at my surprise. Anthony never did such a thing before. He is going to marry her. You have manœuvred very nicely indeed to strengthen your own position with him, Amy Staunton."

"Indeed! Edith, it is nothing of my doing. I think Anthony is too young to marry yet, and so he says himself."

"So he is, ages too young. A man is a fool if he marries before he is thirty; and, although Anthony thinks himself so very cautious, he is really very easily duped. Miss Evans makes an excellent catch of his simplicity. I am sure she is a deceitful artful girl; I could see it in the smile and the expression of interest she cast on Anthony; and the insolent way in which she hung on his arm and looked at me was intolerable."

"I think—I am sure—I hope—you will find yourself mistaken. Not that I consider it right

in Anthony to pay such marked attentions without meaning anything serious by them."

"Then you would rather he meant something serious, Amy," said Edith. "Of course she's your cousin, and not mine, as he most impertinently said. Thank goodness and my grandpapa, I am independent of his whims and caprices, and I cannot stoop to say what I do not think. If she were twenty times Anthony's wife I should never look on her as a sister. The half-sister he brought from Australia has been trying enough, and I want nothing more of his choosing, and so I shall tell him when I see him, but he gives me very little of his company. It is all very well for you here in Lord Darlington's house, with him to take you about everywhere, but no one seems to care what becomes of me."

"I daresay Lord Darlington would do as much for you as for me."

"I daresay he would *not*," said Edith, significantly. "However, you deserve something for your patience with his dreary daughter and her stupid aunt; and, as he is doing the exemplary parent for once (what a purgatory it must be for a pleasure-lover like him to go through), it is very kind in you to help him in his unwonted cares. And you go with the party to Darlington Castle; and, if Anthony can tear himself away from Miss

Evans, he can go too; but I have had no invitation, and yet you say the earl would do as much for me as for you."

Amy could not disarm her sister's suspicions with regard to Lucy Evans; and she could scarcely help sharing them when she took Lord Darlington's opinion into consideration also. Anthony came in the evening, and told her in a defiant sort of manner that he had thought it his duty to call on her cousin and had been led to accompany her to the Academy, where he had met Edith, and where he had wished to join the two parties, but that Edith had been so extremely disagreeable, and, indeed rude, that he had left her to get rid of her ill-humour, and had gone sight-seeing with Miss Evans, who had been very grateful for his company. She had asked when Amy would be at home, and on hearing that she was to be out after luncheon, had offered to call on the following morning; and he had promised to meet her at Lord Darlington's, and go with her to Kew.

Amy wanted to say that this did not agree well with his professed indifference to Miss Evans, and tried to begin a remonstrance, but her mouth was shut by an attack in another quarter.

"Do you know how we found out your engagement for to-morrow? We went to see your friend, Mr. Hubbard, and were called on by him to admire

his next year's Academy picture, 'The Author's Daughter' he calls it. I really think, Amy, that I have some right to be consulted with regard to a portrait for which you are giving sittings, and I think you ought to know that such a grouping and such accessories as this fellow is putting in were likely to be most offensive to me. I don't want the world to be reminded of your Grub-street life; and the likeness is so unmistakable that every one would say at once it was Mr. Derrick's sister; and the whole old story that every one has forgotten will come up fresh and strong."

"I knew you would not like it; I said so from the first," said Amy.

"Then why do you so persistently do things that you know I do not like?" said Anthony.

"It was Lord Darlington's idea to give Mr. Hubbard the opportunity of making a good picture."

"And of course to get me to buy it, so as to prevent its being seen."

"I meant to pay for it, myself. Mr. Hubbard was a friend of papa's—of Lucy's uncle. Did Lucy tell her relationship?"

"No, indeed! we went *incog.* Lucy is not so very proud of her connection with literature as you seem to be. But as for your paying for it,

you have no idea of the value Mr. Hubbard puts on the picture. I am not mean about money matters, Amy; you know how liberal I have always been to you, but I object to have hundreds extorted from me in this underhand way for a thing which I can never show."

"Hundreds!" said Amy, looking aghast.

"Yes, I assure you your friend values his picture at three hundred pounds, and says he expects to get that for it when it has been seen and admired by the world; and I believe he will ask more, because I will not allow it to be seen. So, as you have appointed to-morrow for a sitting, you may tell him to be more chary of showing it for the future. I assure you he boasted of getting admittance to the very room Gerald Staunton lived in, and painting the old carpet and curtains from the life. I did not think you could have done anything so underhanded and deceitful as this. You might have gone to Frith for a portrait if you wanted one. It is not that I grudge money, but I dislike being deceived."

"I wish Lord Darlington had not been so pressing about it."

"Lord Darlington seems to me to be a very convenient scapegoat at present. I hope he finds you more manageable than I do. Well, I shall tell the earl my feelings with regard to

Mr. Hubbard's great academy picture before you take your last sitting, and that is my main reason for meeting Miss Evans here to-morrow. I shall be able to speak more calmly and temperately about it after I have slept off some of my annoyance."

Miss Evans's visit was ostensibly paid to Lady Olivia and Miss Pennithorne, but the conversation was conducted almost exclusively between her and Mr. Derrick. Lord Darlington had been entrusted with Amy's letter to Allan to post in the course of his morning ride, for he thus made sure of its being despatched; and when he returned for luncheon he found Miss Evans in full possession of the field. Edith, who had called at Darlington House to ascertain something of her brother's proceedings, was enraged, Amy bewildered, and Lady Olivia stunned with one of her most distracting headaches, which Lucy's sharp, loud voice was very apt to give to her. Some voices soothed the invalid, but others made her painfully nervous, as if she was all ear, and Lucy's was one of the latter.

The conversation was so lively and pleasant that Anthony forgot to call Lord Darlington to account for his conduct with regard to "The Author's Daughter," and started with Miss Evans for Kew. The earl was amused to see how Edith

Derrick's dislike and contempt, which she took no pains to conceal, drove her brother in the contrary direction from her wishes, and how Anthony, in his security that he was not to be taken in, was led day after day into Miss Evans's company, and day after day found it more and more agreeable. Even the friends with whom she stayed were pleasanter than those with whom he was accustomed to associate. His ambition and his tastes had hitherto made him rather aspiring with regard to the society which he kept. It was at Belton Rectory that he first made the acquaintance of educated people, who had a proper sense of his importance, and who studied his wishes and seemed to hang upon his moods, and it was a delightful change from the jangling at home with his aunt and Edith, and from the occasional wholesome snubbing that Lady Gower and the Beresfords bestowed on him.

So thoroughly happy did he feel with his new friends that every day was full of engagements with them; and, before the time appointed for the visit to Darlington Castle, he informed his sisters that he had proposed to Miss Evans, and had been so fortunate as to be accepted by that lady. Edith received the news, as he expected, with a burst of angry tears, and a declaration

that she would live with her aunt Anne henceforward; but from Amy he had expected a better and more cordial reception to his great piece of news. It was Amy's cousin and friend whom he had honoured by his proposal; it was, in fact, Amy who had first put the idea into his head, and from her he looked for an enthusiastic congratulation. She tried to feel pleased; she knew she was expected to be delighted; but Lucy's character had opened out to her of late, and that not pleasantly.

When she received a long letter from her aunt Evans, congratulating her on the approaching happy event, and rejoicing that Lucy's happiness and *dear* Mr. Derrick's were certain—speaking of Lucy's *fine* disposition and *good* temper, and *excellent* heart, with all the adjectives underlined, and of the train of events which had made Mr. Derrick's generosity and liberality to his half-sister the means (under Providence) of procuring him the greatest blessing on this side heaven—for it had shown him to dear Lucy in such an amiable light that it had won her heart—and speaking of the blank it would make in the rectory household when Lucy left it to adorn a sphere for which she was so well fitted, but that they must make up their minds to the sacrifice when it was for her happi-

ness as well as that of dear Mr. Derrick—Amy felt disposed to question almost all of the propositions contained in it, and found it very difficult to write an answer that could at all correspond with her aunt's high-flown ideas.

She had grown accustomed to confide everything to her friend, Lord Darlington, and, in great doubt as to whether what she had written would do, she gave him both letters to read. He smiled at the exaggerated praise of the mother.

"One would think that these two people were the hero and heroine of romance, instead of being the most common-place persons of our acquaintance. Mr. Derrick is heavy common-place, and Miss Evans is lively common-place, and they suit each other very well; but as for the perfect happiness Mrs. Evans speaks of, they are not capable of it, and I don't know if they would like it. Your answer is rather tame after all these gushing tendernesses. Your sincere self cannot be altogether concealed behind conventionalities. But this is a fine phrase of Mrs. Evans's—she hopes they will be as happy as they deserve to be. Why do not you echo that with a little emphasis? No, you cannot bring yourself to use even true words when they may be supposed to have a false meaning. But to tell

you the truth, Miss Evans, since her engagement, is not what she was before; and I am almost sorry I did not have your sanction to crush the affair in the bud. I fear you will not be happy with her."

"I daresay we shall get on very well, although I do not think quite so much of my future sister-in-law as her mother does. Anthony looks very happy, and she will be always able to amuse him and to interest him, so that it will not be of so much consequence what I say or do. I should not speak in that way to you of my only brother, but you know you are the only person to whom I can open my heart."

Not even with this temptation would Lord Darlington speak; he reserved his declaration till she was his guest at his country seat, among the scenes of which her mother had so often spoken to her. Anthony was anxious that Lucy should be asked to accompany him; but as the earl thought lovers were tiresome company, and as he knew that Olivia disliked Lucy's voice, he did not invite her, and he hoped that Mr. Derrick would accompany his *fiancée* to the Lakes, and he and Amy would enjoy themselves much better without another pair of lovers being in their way. But Anthony had no wish to give up the Darlington preserves or the *éclat* of the visit to

his ancestral halls, which he had so long wished for; and, besides, he ought to go to look after Amy a little. Lucy, too, was bent on having such a recognition of her claims by the head of the family; and she and her lover thought it was only because Amy did not wish her company that she did not receive an invitation, for she could do anything she pleased with the earl.

Anthony determined that Lucy should be asked, and so he insisted on Amy's requesting, as a personal favour to herself, that her brother's intended wife should be of the party.

"What right have I to dictate what guests Lord Darlington invites to his own house?" said Amy, surprised.

"Not to dictate, but if you say you wish it, it will be done; that is to say if you say it as if you really wished it. You have more influence with Lord Darlington than any one else has. I don't know how you manage to acquire it."

"But it is absurd to suppose that I have such influence as that implies."

"I believe you really don't wish Lucy to go, for I am sure it is so natural that we should like to be together, that Darlington has only to have it put into his head to accede to it at once. I think after doing so much as you did to bring

about a match between us, the least you can do is to try to keep in Lucy's good graces, and do a good-natured thing for her with Darlington, for she has set her heart very much on going."

"Well, Anthony, if you insist on it I shall try my influence. Perhaps his lordship only wants reminding, as you say."

Amy did as she was desired accordingly, and her request was acceded to with a slight demur and hesitation on the earl's part. She was a little surprised to see him give up his wishes to please her, but her good offices had the effect of putting her brother and Lucy into such high good humour with her that she could not help rejoicing over it. It was gall and wormwood to Edith to see *that* Miss Evans invited to Darlington Castle as her brother's affianced bride, while she who had a right to go, and who had wished to go so much, was left with her aunt Anne at Stanmore. Indeed there would have been no prospect of peace or pleasure for anybody if Edith had been in the same house with her future sister-in-law. Lucy's northern tour was relinquished joyfully. Her course was otherwise directed. She had transacted the important business of her life; she had won a lover—young, rich, and well-born—whom she loved, or believed she loved, with all her

heart. He was pliant and pleasant in her hands, and her success with him made her confident of success in every walk in life which they might take together.

CHAPTER III.

LORD DARLINGTON MAKES HIS FIRST PLUNGE.

MISS PENNITHORNE'S views of love and matrimony had been widened by the glimpses she had of Mr. Derrick's rapid and prosperous wooing of Miss Evans. It bewildered her to see how little the parties were improved or softened by their happiness in a marriage which they had gone into of their own accord, and which appeared so suitable in every way. Amy felt that she had inflicted on her and on Olivia an unwelcome companion for their visit; but still, although the lovers were sufficiently fond of making a parade of their felicity, and thought every one must be deeply interested in every speech or incident which carried on their successful love-making, there were hours of every day in which they were out of the way, and when Olivia escaped the sharp thin voice which used to set her all on edge.

Of all her life, this was the happiest time which the invalid had spent; her father was so indulgent, Amy was so delightful, the country was so lovely, and she had such an entirely new lookout from the couch at the open window that she feasted on it for hours together. Then she was taken out in a garden-chair of a new and peculiarly easy construction, and could herself admire the lawns and pleasure-grounds and garden and conservatories. She could do more, she could be taken right into the wood, and see how nature really looked in her less trim and orderly dress; she could reach out her own hand for flowers, and arrange them for herself. She could feel the delicious sounds and scents of the lovely autumnal scenes steal over her senses and lap her in Elysium; no air she had ever breathed had been so invigorating; she felt better, and was willing to own it. Sometimes she would watch a game at croquet on the lawn, in which Anthony and Lucy so excelled that they would have played at it every day for hours; but as it was not so pleasant to be invariably beaten, Lord Darlington would give up and propose something else. At other times, Lady Olivia would be taken out, with her father and Amy beside her talking pleasantly either to her or to each other, but never speaking on subjects which did not interest the invalid.

When their engagements prevented their accompanying her, there was always dear aunt Sophy at her service, and plenty to talk to her about. No one had ever supposed that Olivia had such a faculty for seeing as she now displayed in her slow quiet rambles. She was the first to discern a bird's nest, a distant squirrel, a hidden flower, a curious insect, a wonderful butterfly, and her ears were equally quick to perceive the distant fall of water, or the chirp of the tiniest bird.

"Oh! aunty," she would say, "I never thought, even when I longed for it so, that life was so sweet, that the great world was so beautiful. How very good of papa it was to bring me here and to contrive that I should have all this great joy. I feel as if I was well, although I cannot walk."

Miss Pennithorne rejoiced in the improvement in the health of her darling, and could not help congratulating herself that, whatever of evil might come of it in future, this visit had made the earl pay so much attention to his daughter that he had procured for her some mitigation of her lot. The wonderful garden-chair was a thing that would be available at all times, and would be as great a comfort at Thrush Grove as at the Castle.

Everybody in and about Darlington Castle de-

lighted Amy, especially everything that was old in it. Her mother's descriptions Lord Darlington professed to be able to verify, and if he did sometimes make mistakes, she could not find them out. She had begged, if possible, to have her mother's very own room for her own; and, although it went to the earl's heart to think that Lucy Evans was far more magnificently lodged than her, he never refused her anything she set her heart on, and the housekeeper had had orders to make it as bright as possible for the young lady.

There was an old gardener still on the establishment, although only in a subordinate capacity, who recollected Lady Eveline, and was willing to talk about her to her daughter, and who used to point out her favourite walks and the trees under which she would sit for hours with a book till people thought she was lost; but he was always the one to find her out—they always came to him when Lady Eveline was missing—he was of more account then than he was now-a-days, more's the pity.

In spite of Lord Darlington's numerous sporting engagements, he contrived to be Miss Staunton's escort in many of her rambles; and, although he was satisfied with the impression which the beauty of his mansion and property

made on her, Anthony and Lucy were getting quite out of patience with the very leisurely nature of the earl's wooing. They wished for the *éclat* of his engagement to lend a little lustre to their own. They did not know if they would like both marriages to take place at once, in case that they might be considered secondary personages; but still the thing would have its advantages too. Anthony began to fear that perhaps the earl was not really in earnest, for he had never spoken to him of his intentions, which he ought to have done. On one occasion, when Anthony had taken courage and asked about Mr. Hubbard's picture, the earl had quietly said it was all his doing and all his concern, Mr. Hubbard knew for whom it was being painted, and Mr. Derrick need give himself no uneasiness on the matter. Mr. Staunton was a literary man whose portrait was a most desirable addition to the picture-gallery at the castle, and his daughter's likeness only made it the more valuable in his (the earl's) eyes. If Mr. Derrick disliked its being exhibited it need not be done.

"He tells me nothing, Lucy," said Anthony, after this conversation. "Upon my word I think I have a right to feel ill-used. If he does not come forward Amy's prospects are ruined for life."

"What a fool she must be," said Lucy in reply, "with such cards in her hands to play them so badly, frittering her time away with that stupid aunt and Lady Olivia, when she ought to secure him. But perhaps he is shy."

So he was, though not in the sense which Lucy supposed. The more confidence Amy reposed in him, the more affectionately she talked to him, the more he felt convinced that the idea of marrying him had never entered her head, and that it would shock her to be told in what light she was regarded by him. Of course the shock must be undergone, but he shrank from it a little, and his having been so recently asked for disinterested advice with regard to Allan Lindsay, made him feel more disposed to delay his declaration. It was from fear that Anthony or Lucy might rudely cut the Gordian knot, which he alone thought he had skill enough to untie, and that their hints and looks might open to her his secret wishes without in any way advancing them, that he spoke at last. Anthony one day had said awkwardly, without looking at his noble host, that he wished other people were as prompt and as straightforward in their love affairs as he had been, and without waiting for any answer, had retreated with Lucy to surmise the effect of this shot. The earl felt the hint, and acknowledged

to himself that, after so many months of apparent devotion, he owed it to the family, if not to Amy herself, to propose to her.

So he chose time, place, and circumstances as favourable as possible to his suit. It was in the fading autumn light, when he was seated beside Amy under a noble elm, which had been (according to the old gardener) a favourite seat of Lady Eveline's, and which therefore was a frequent haunt of her daughter's. Lord Darlington had on that day surprised her with a present, the most graceful that an author's daughter could receive. He had commissioned a literary man on the staff of the *Palladium* newspaper to make a collection of all Gerald Staunton's best pieces, and to have a few copies beautifully printed and sumptuously bound for private distribution. He had apologized to Amy for not bringing out a people's edition, because that could not be done without considering Anthony's feelings; but he had wished that he himself, his daughter Olivia, and especially the author's daughter herself, should have this volume. The gift might not have been so costly as the diamonds which Anthony had presented to Miss Evans the day before, but it showed so much sympathy, so much thoughtfulness, and such an appreciation of what was admirable in her father's writings,

that Amy was moved to tears of grateful pleasure by it.

"Now," said the earl, "let me hear you read something of it, so long as the light lasts. You can see to read this one essay. I think it is a good one."

The subject was repose—how hard often to obtain amidst the incessant claims of a busy world, how precious after work, how soothing after sorrow or disappointment to have an hour in which to forget them, and in the quiet sanctity of home to find sympathy and relief in communion with those dear ones who lay aside their daily burdens of allotted care.

There were little touches that called up her father and her mother to her recollection; a quotation or two which she had often heard in their familiar talk. The light had failed, or the eyes were dim, for the essay was not finished at that sitting.

"Oh! if mamma could have looked forward to my sitting here under this dear old tree reading papa's thoughts to one who can so well appreciate them how happy it would have made her. But she sees and knows it now. I have been so very happy here."

"Then why should you leave Darlington

Castle, my dear Amy? Why should you not remain always here?"

"It is very delightful, but of course I must go home soon," said Amy, with a sigh.

"Do you not think that your brother could spare you now that his head and heart are so full of your cousin?"

"Oh, perhaps he could; but I cannot remain here when Lady Olivia and all of them are gone."

"But there is no occasion for Olivia going. I think of keeping her at home. She seems to have got so much stronger here. They used to say the air was too keen for her, but I fancy it is a mistake."

"That will make her so happy, and Miss Pennithorne too. I daresay I could persuade Anthony to let me stay another month or two."

"I think your brother will be delighted if you accede to what I wish; and do not you think you should be happier here than at Stanmore?"

"I am sure of it. Oh! how good you are to arrange all this so nicely. I have not half explored the woods yet, and you must take me to those beautiful hills before I go. I don't know what I can say to thank you."

"You need not say much, Amy."

"No, for you know how much I feel," and Amy took the earl's hand in hers.

"But you do not know how much *I* feel," said the earl, returning the gentle pressure with interest. How singularly pale he grew, how curiously his lips quivered. "Do not you know that there is only one relation under which you can stay here." He paused.

"As your adopted daughter and Olivia's sister," said Amy, timidly, for there was something ominous in his manner and in his pause. "Or could not I call you uncle, as Olivia calls her cousin, aunt?"

"No, my dearest girl, not that—that is not what I mean. Can you think of nothing else? Could you not bear to think of yourself as—my—wife? Then all this which you admire so much would be your own."

Tears of sorrow and of terror at the sudden shock rose to Amy's eyes.

"Oh! no, my dear Lord Darlington, don't speak to me in that way. I daresay you mean it very kindly. I daresay it was very absurd in me to think that I could stay here as Olivia's friend and sister. And you thought that this might make it possible; but never mind it, it was only a passing thought. Let us get back to our old relations again."

"My dear Miss Staunton, my dear Amy, if we must return to our old relations again, it will bring no change on my part. I have thought of you in the way you have only now discovered almost from the first day I saw you. Every one sees it, every one knows it but yourself. Even aunt Sophy perceived it at a glance. Your brother and Miss Evans are calculating when I am to propose, and indeed losing patience with my delays; but I knew it would surprise you a little at first, and I have been so happy with you that I dread giving you even momentary pain."

"But you know it is impossible—absolutely impossible."

"There is no such word as impossible in my vocabulary. The idea is new to you, and you think it cannot be realized; but I can wait. I have waited already—and I can wait longer."

"But—but—" said Amy, despairingly.

"I know what you would say. There certainly is some disparity of years between us; but in every other respect there is sympathy and affection. On my side there is love; on yours there will be. Women have been known to love ugliness and deformity when accompanied by a noble soul or an affectionate heart, and I cannot, I will not believe that you cannot be

won by me when I feel how deeply, how entirely I love you. Do you think that your brother loves Lucy Evans as I love you, or your Australian lover or that boy Hammond, with his great eyes, loves you yourself as I do. They can forget, and do forget. But with me it is my only chance for happiness. Think what a failure my domestic life has been. I do not speak to you of the home we could make for Olivia. I do not speak of the position you would take in the world, or remind you that by acceding to my wishes you will once for all satisfy your brother, and be independent of his caprices for the future."

"No," said Amy, "do not speak of these things. If there was any one on this side of the world that I really liked, it was you. You must not think me unkind and ungrateful. If there was anything else I could do for you I should be so glad to do it, but this I cannot do. I must go home to Edith to-morrow. I must not stay here after this. But now I recollect something Edith said; I suppose she saw all that I was so blind to?'

"Yes, every one saw it. I made no secret of my devotion. No one thought it impossible or ridiculous but yourself."

"Not ridiculous, my lord, but very very sad.

Is it not terrible to lose my friend, my dear friend in this way? I have not a friend left in the world now that I have been so cruel to Allan."

"You look reproachfully at me, Amy; but when you asked my advice could I make it valueless by telling you how much interested I felt in the matter? But my opinion was correct. Would not my jealous heart have told me rightly if you had loved the young man? But you did not love him, and not even in your anger at me are you in love with him now. It would seem a path to take you out of your dilemma to write to him that you will marry him, but that is not love now, and it is not happiness for the future. If your heart was his, I should not ask for it. There are plenty of women I could dazzle with the prospects I could hold out to them, but that is not what I want. I know that your heart is disengaged, and I think you are noble enough to love me in spite of a disparity that I would fain make less if possible. I don't say to-day or to-morrow, but by-and-by."

"No, never—never," said Amy. "I ought not to let you speak, but all I have to say seems so ungrateful. You have been so kind," and she stooped to pick up the book he had given her, and put it into his hands.

"You do not mean to return *that* to me. Am I not ten times paid for that by hearing you read to me for those precious ten minutes, and with the look of those grateful eyes and the touch of that dear hand?"

"Oh! if I had only known, I should have behaved so differently. But I do not like giving this again to you, because I thought it a friend's gift and accepted it as such. You will forget all this, and be my friend again, for I am so desolate now."

"I shall be anything that you wish, Amy, and do anything that you please."

"Then let me go, please; I must be by myself now," and she stopped the protestations which the earl was about to make about the continuance of friendship and the unselfish character of his attachment. She hurried back to the castle, and locked herself up in her own room to reflect on the changed position of her affairs, to anticipate Anthony's disappointment and displeasure, and to wonder as to how far Lord Darlington was right in saying that her heart was disengaged.

In the meantime the rejected suitor took a solitary stroll. He had not expected a favourable answer at once; he knew that the idea was too new to Amy for such good fortune as that, but he had hoped for a conditional one, and so

far he was disappointed. But as for despairing he had no feeling of that kind. Anthony's ill-humour, Lucy's impertinence, Olivia's entreaties, and his own prudence would work wonders; and Amy's liking for him was so great that it only needed a little fostering to transform it into more love than he had ever thought he could inspire until he had seen her.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS PENNITHORNE FINDS THAT SHE CAN DO SOME GOOD.

If Lord Darlington had been generous he would have kept Amy's answer to himself, at least as long as he could; but he wished that Anthony Derrick's influence should be brought to bear upon her while she was in the midst of scenes which had pleased her so much, and which he felt must plead strongly in his favour. Anthony was certainly eager to know what had been done; but the earl might have parried his questions or softened the revelations he had to make if he had felt so disposed; but he made a point of telling the whole affair at once. As there was a tacit understanding to that effect between them, Lord Darlington considered it due to Mr. Derrick to say that he had formally proposed to Miss Staunton, and that he had been refused.

"Positively refused?" asked Anthony in alarm.

"Positively; for the present, at least. Indeed, the young lady was very decided; but if you, Mr. Derrick, have no objection, my offer may be renewed by-and-by, when Miss Staunton is familiarized with the idea."

"Familiarized? You don't mean to say that she did not expect it, my lord?"

"So she tells me, and I am bound to believe her; but I thought my attentions could only have been understood in one way by your sister." Lord Darlington was not generous enough to own the doubt and hesitation which he had really felt, and the knowledge he had had that this had been a surprise and a shock to Amy.

"She must have been wilfully blind not to see it. I am sure that both Lucy and myself have given her the strongest hints on the subject, and all the world knows that Amy has given you every encouragement. I thought you were shy in speaking out, and indeed said as much this morning."

"Your hint only precipitated my own mortification and deep disappointment."

"I must say that Amy has behaved very badly indeed, but I shall talk to her."

"Of course young ladies should be free agents in these matters; but yet I am glad that you are disposed to exert your legitimate influence in my

favour. I am aware that I am not so likely to win a young and lovely girl's heart now as I was some years ago; but I had flattered myself that Amy was superior to the considerations which weigh most with young people of her age, and that the perfect harmony of feeling and tastes which subsists between us might have ripened into something more affectionate than the friendship which she still feels for me. Her love for my poor daughter I can never be sufficiently grateful for, although my dearest personal hopes have been disappointed."

"Only for a time, my lord," said Anthony, eagerly. "Amy is not so absurd as to continue to decline your very flattering offer. There is nothing, next to my own union with my dear Lucy, so near to my heart as that Amy should reward your attachment. She cannot persist in her refusal if you are disposed to persevere."

"I have said I do not yet relinquish the hope of winning her; but I have no wish to be obtrusive or disagreeable. There must be a little pause in *my* proceedings."

Anthony's displeasure at Amy's conduct was first confided to Lucy, who fanned the flame, for she felt as much injured at the rejection of this great connection for the family as her lover did, and had trusted to Amy's marriage with Lord

Darlington as strengthening her own position with Lady Gower and the Beresfords, and the other aristocratic relatives of Mr. Derrick. It also would have afforded her a signal triumph over Edith, who had been so rude and disagreeable, if *her* cousin, with whom she was always so friendly, was a countess; whereas now, if Amy persisted in her obstinacy, Lord Darlington probably would have as little to say to the Derricks as he had before his introduction to the girl who had captivated him so much. And what objection Amy could make she could not conceive; indeed she said so much in praise of the earl and his property and his liberality, that Anthony of course asked if *she*, Lucy, would have married the earl if he had asked her; and was told that if she had not seen Anthony she might; but that it was singular how she had been fascinated from the first day she had seen him. She had felt in some way as if this was her fate, partly because she had thought so very much about Mr. Derrick and his generosity to Amy before he arrived at the rectory, and this generosity and kindness appeared to be very little appreciated by the object of it, when she could thwart her brother's dearest wishes as she did.

So when Amy rose on the morning after the earl's declaration, after a miserable and sleepless

night, she received from both her brother and her cousin a terrible battery of censure and persuasion. Many things were recalled to her memory that she ought to have understood—Anthony had often hinted at Lord Darlington's preference, Lucy had rallied her on it. They could not believe, and the world could not believe, that she was ignorant of the meaning of his attentions. They had all gone to visit at the castle, on the understanding that she would very soon be its mistress, and now that the earl had come forward in the handsomest way, after innumerable acts of kindness which ought to have touched her heart, to be rudely repulsed by one who ought to have been only too grateful for his sincere and disinterested attachment was cruel and even unprincipled. Of course she did not mind how grieved the earl was, or how disappointed her brother felt at her declining an offer so far above her deserts.

Amy tried to say something in vindication. She had looked upon him as a father or an uncle —never as a lover. She was only nineteen, and he was fifty or more. It could not be a right thing to marry him.

"And yet you like him?" said Anthony.

"Yes, I do, in another way."

"And respect him?"

"Yes, I have always respected him."

"And you agree in most of your opinions and tastes?"

"Yes, I think so."

"You don't complain of his temper?"

"No; I think his temper is a very good one."

"And you believe in the sincerity of his attachment?"

"Yes, but I cannot return it; don't press me, Anthony. I would do anything to please you that I can; but this is my affair and Lord Darlington's, and not yours."

"Well, I did think that my sister Amy had a nobler nature than to refuse a most flattering and most unobjectionable offer, for no other cause than a disparity of years. It shows a want—I can scarcely express myself; but with all I have done for you there is a sort of lowness of mind that makes it impossible for you to take the position I claim for my sister."

"I know you are disappointed, Anthony; but if you had only given me a hint of your suspicions long ago I should have stopped this affair in the bud, and not been so foolish and wrong."

"I would have spoken to tell you that I sanctioned Lord Darlington's addresses; but Lady Gower said I had better not, for he could manage his own affairs. Nicely he has managed them—

managed to give the world to understand that you were leading him on, only to jilt him cruelly at last."

"Lord Darlington would not speak thus to me. Oh! he was very good and gentle about it."

"I am sure if he can think of you forgivingly, it is more than I can do for a while, or Lucy either," said Anthony, sullenly, refusing to be coaxed over, and determined to feel injured. Had he not a right to be seriously displeased when he was disappointed in this, the only thing he had ever wished his sister to do? Men of Anthony's stamp are apt to forget the innumerable requirements they make from their friends and dependents, and to bring forward every fresh demand as if it were the first claim that had been presented in return for years of kindness.

When Amy escaped from her brother and Lucy, and found her old place by Olivia's sofa, she was met by another description of persuasion.

"Papa has told me a sad tale to-day. He is so grieved. I wonder if it is because I am in the way?" said Lady Olivia.

"Oh! no," said Amy, kissing her.

"Don't think that I would object to so young a mamma. Not at all; I should love and obey you just as if you were as old—as old as aunty; and I don't think that I shall trouble any one long.

Papa says that my poor brother Boulton cannot live many months, and I know that my life will not be much longer than his. You have made me very happy, Amy. Cannot you do the same by papa? I know, of course, that it is a good deal to ask, and he knows the same; but I never can think of papa as anything but young, he is so young in all his ways. And how happy we might be all together! Have you seen him to-day?"

"No, not to-day."

"I don't think he likes to vex you by the sight of his grieved face. I never saw papa so overcome. I thought nothing could have moved him; but he must love you very very much."

"I am so sorry, Olivia. But tell me, dear, were you not very much surprised? *You* did not expect that this was to come?"

"I did not expect it; but I was not very much surprised. I thought at first that you had said yes, and I was so delighted."

"Oh! I wish I had some place to go to, not Stanmore," said Amy, pressing her hand on her head.

"I see you have a headache, Miss Staunton," said Miss Pennithorne, who entered the room at this moment.

"Yes, it does ache rather badly," said Amy.

"Come into my room and I will bathe it for you, as I do Olivia's when it distresses her. You look far from well."

And aunt Sophy led her gently from the trying company of Lady Olivia, and bathed her head tenderly and skilfully, without seeming to notice the tears that fell slowly from her eyes, until she seemed a little soothed. Then Miss Pennithorne took her in her arms and gave her a good hug and a hearty kiss.

"Now don't mind what Lord Darlington says or how he looks, or what your brother may say or threaten. Don't care for what Olivia says; she thinks that her father should have everything he asks for, and of course she naturally thinks he deserves whatever he may set his heart on. But you are not to allow them to persuade you out of your own judgment and feelings. It is not natural or right for a girl of nineteen to marry a man of fifty-three, and that is his age, as everybody knows; and, besides, though he is very pleasant with you, and behaves very nicely to Olivia just now, he is a man of the world, and only cares for people when they are able to give him pleasure or do him service. My dear girl, you choose a husband for sickness or health, for joy or sorrow, for wealth or poverty. It is not a fair-weather summer friendship that can stand

all that you are likely to meet with in married life, and although you may have a deal of trouble and worry from your brother and that scheming worldly girl, Miss Evans, you have done *right* and you will never repent of it. Only don't tell Olivia that I have said this, for she can keep nothing from her father, and if he knew that I had gone against him or thwarted him in anything he would take Olivia from me, and it would break my heart. But bear up; the storm will blow over. I never loved you half so much as I do to-day."

Amy needed Miss Pennithorne's encouragement. Her confident assertion that her refusal of the earl had been right and must be maintained, helped her through the miserable day. She was now as eager to go away from Darlington Castle as she had been to go to it. Anthony and Lucy were annoyed that their visit was shortened; but it was made evident that the earl did not wish for their company if he had not Miss Staunton's, and that he would drop their acquaintance altogether unless Amy changed her mind. Lucy went to London to meet her mother, to see about some preparations for the approaching great event of her life; and Anthony and Amy returned to Stanmore in very bad spirits. Edith Derrick and her aunt had determined to set up housekeeping for

themselves, they could not bear to live at Stanmore when Anthony had been so very foolish and had made himself so very disagreeable. Amy had half hoped that if she had offended her brother, she might have pleased her sister, but Edith was nearly as much aggrieved at Amy's refusing so very eligible an offer as she had been at her brother's contracting so disadvantageous and ineligible an alliance with Amy's penniless and insolent cousin.

She was determined to break off entirely with both, and to go with her aunt Anne to visit her aunt, Mrs. Chaloner, pending the arrangements for forming a separate establishment. She wrote an indignant letter to Amy, and a formal one to Anthony announcing her determination, and took no notice of the letter of explanation which Amy penned with all the pains and study she could bestow on it. It was a dreary prospect to go to Stanmore with Anthony, who was so seriously displeased with her. His anger took the form for a time of silent neglect. He did not trouble himself to find fault with her or to lay any command on her except one, that she should not go to Millmount to visit Mrs. Copeland until he gave her permission. Amy did not try with her old anxiety to please her brother. In one sense this was a relief, but then there appeared to be nothing

to live for. She had been so anxious to please, so hungry for love and for approval, and now it seemed that she had no one to care for. She could not help missing the attentions, the delicate flattery, the ready acquiescence which Lord Darlington had bestowed on her for so many months. What she read now she could not speak of, what she saw she had no one to see with her, and what she imagined there was no one to tell it to.

Anthony had asked Lord Darlington and the Beresfords and a few other friends to join him at Stanmore, where the preserves were good, though not equal to those on the earl's own estate; but they all seemed to have other engagements, and did not come forward as he expected. Of course he could account for Lord Darlington's recusancy; he doubted his professions of still loving Amy as the days passed away and he did not appear; but Mr. Derrick could not explain the tardiness of the other guests, and he thought also that the neighbours at Stanmore were not so attentive to himself as they used to be, and that he had lost something in public estimation. His suspicions were rather directed to Amy's conduct to Lord Darlington, or Lord Darlington's to her, as a cause of this neglect, than to the more natural reason that he, as an engaged man, and engaged to one out of the neighbourhood, and beneath

him in rank, was not a person of so much consequence as he had been in the county society.

Of all the invited guests, the one who had most cause to be offended was the first to appear at Stanmore. Lord Darlington was not going to leave the field clear to others, and as his theory was that opportunity, resolution, and perseverance could thaw the coldest woman living, let Anthony only give him the first, he would provide the other two requisites. As for his age, does not Balzac say that the time of life when a man is most dangerous to the other sex is at fifty-one, not much less than the earl's age; and ought not Balzac to know? Probably Balzac meant that men of that age were dangerous to the peace of women between twenty-five and forty, who are floating in the circle of Parisian society—and that one must fix the date a little earlier to win an English girl of nineteen—but still it is a great thing to have the tact and discretion of a wide experience and the careful temper of years to keep such a business well in hand.

He had not gone into society with the sad dispirited look which had so pained Amy. No, his air was hopeful and cheerful. When Lady Gower questioned him with authority as to the cause of his rejection, of which she had heard an indignant account from Anthony, the earl had

answered that it was only a matter of time, that the young lady only wanted to know her own mind, and that it was very absurd in Mr. Derrick to be either angry for the present or apprehensive as to the result, for these feelings Lord Darlington himself did not share. He paid none of that general attention which he had been accustomed to do to his lady acquaintances, he had the air and manner of a man whose affections were engaged. He spoke constantly of Miss Staunton, selected books and music for her, quoted her opinions, compared and contrasted her with other young beauties, always to her advantage; and appeared to be, as he really was, perfectly confident of success.

It was a cheerful sight for Anthony to see Lord Darlington drive up to Stanmore, smiling and courteous as usual, and making the kindest enquiries after Miss Evans. It was not altogether a painful event to Amy, his attentions were so unobtrusive and quiet that at first she hoped that he had given up his love suit and meant to be contented with the friendship she felt dying to regain. But it was not so; Anthony's elation and Anthony's direct words disclosed to her that the earl did not relinquish his suit, and that he had come expressly to prosecute it.

It was in vain for Amy to be cold and shy; he

was determined to be pleased with all she said and all she did not say. She refused the books and the music which the earl brought to her, but he did not seem to care. It was enough that he had had the pleasure of thinking of her when they were bought. She might use them or not just as she pleased. When Anthony frowned at her short speeches and her discouraging silence, her lover seemed perfectly satisfied, and always contrived to shield her from her brother's censure and ill-humour.

CHAPTER V.

LORD DARLINGTON'S INTEREST IN AMY'S FRIEND.

"I HAVE the greatest desire," said Lord Darlington one day to Anthony, "to see Amy's Australian friend. Suppose we turn in that direction accidentally when we take our morning ride with your sister to-morrow."

"I think we had better not," said Anthony. "I have prohibited Amy's visits there for some time, because I have a sort of suspicion, at least Lucy thought so, that some sort of childish attachment on Amy's part to a brother of this Mrs. George Copeland has made her so very absurd and headstrong."

"*N'importe*," said the earl. "I have a curiosity to see the lady, and you shall see that our visit can do no harm."

Anthony reluctantly acquiesced, as he did in many of the earl's arrangements. Whether it

was his title or his age or his voice or his manner, or all these things combined, the influence which he exercised over Anthony was great. Amy had an unwillingness to ride out with the lover whom she wished to discourage, but as her brother always accompanied her, and would have been very angry if she refused, she yielded with the best grace she could muster.

And yet she enjoyed the rides, for the earl had tact enough to divert her mind from himself personally to those things in which they could agree to admire together. The leaves were falling fast, and in all the varying tints which are displayed in an English autumnal wood they were seen hanging on the trees or swept over the sward by the wind.

"There is nothing like this in Australia?" said Lord Darlington.

"No, except where they have planted exotic trees. The native trees are not deciduous, and there is a greater sameness, both in form and in foliage. The leaves are much smaller as a rule, and the appearance of the trees changes little with the varying seasons. There are some fine old trees in Australia, however. I should like to see a full-sized gum-tree amongst these oaks and elms and limes and chestnuts," said Amy.

"I suppose it is more tropical in Australia?"

"Not what is generally accounted tropical. There is not the abundant moisture combined with heat to produce the luxuriant vegetation that is to be seen in Indian and American tropical countries. The tangled jungle, the enormous trees, and the magnificent flowers of Brazil have no counterpart in dry Australia. But yet these falling leaves make me feel melancholy, beautiful as they are."

"They have no such effect on me," said the earl. "They must fall to be succeeded by fresher and brighter, and besides they are exceedingly beautiful in themselves. It is always the autumnal tints which artists prefer."

"Is not that conventional?" said Amy. "Surely the freshness of spring and the glory of summer are as worthy of being represented on canvas."

"No; I think not, for they are raw, and the eye is fatigued with the vividness of the unvarying green. And even in reality I admire autumn most."

"So do I," said Anthony, "and, as it is the sporting and the hunting season, it is the time when one sees most of the country. During the spring and summer all the world is in London."

"It is a pity," said Amy, "that the season is so unnaturally divided."

"Well, I don't think so, for London is really more enjoyable in fine weather than it is at other times. But is not this Millmount?' said the earl. "I wish very much to see your Australian friend, Miss Staunton, so will you be good enough to take me with you, and introduce me to her?"

Amy looked at Anthony for his sanction to this unexpected request.

"If Lord Darlington wishes it, I am sure I don't care," said he.

"I thought you would like to see your old friend, so just take me as an encumbrance," whispered Lord Darlington in Amy's ear, as he helped her to alight.

It was very long since Jessie had seen her friend; she thought that she had been somewhat spoiled by the great society to which she had been introduced, and she was a little stiffer and colder in her greeting to the squire's sister than usual. Although Lord Darlington had ostensibly planned this visit on Amy's account, he contrived that she should have no opportunity of saying a quiet word to her friend. He took the lion's share of the talk, and astonished all the party, and Anthony most of all, by his knowledge of Australian matters, and the lively interest he seemed to take in

them. He enquired kindly after Mr. Lindsay and Mrs. Lindsay, and seemed to know that the former was a little deaf, and the latter subject to rheumatism. He asked after Mrs. George Copeland's clever brother and her pretty sisters; looked at the photographs of the family at Branxholm, and the views of the surrounding country with interest; spoke of the progress of Australian discovery, and asked if they had seen the two most recently published works on the subject. When Jessie replied in the negative—

"Miss Staunton, I am sure, will be very happy to give you a reading of them; she has just got them from London."

"Oh! my lord," said Amy, "they are not mine to lend; you know that they are yours."

"You don't suppose I got them for myself," said the earl, smiling. "They are yours; I don't mean to take them from Stanmore—at least not yet. I think they may interest Olivia by-and-bye. You know how delighted she always was with anything you told her of your Australian experience; and your reading to her was always a great enjoyment to my poor girl."

"I have not seen you, Amy, since you went

to London, and you have not written often to me, so that I don't know how you have been getting on. We saw about your going to court in the papers; but I am more anxious to know how you got on in the country with your father's friends," said Jessie.

"I can assure you," said Lord Darlington, "that her career both in the bustle of London and in the quiet of the country was quite a success. I don't know how many conquests Miss Staunton made in the great world, but I can tell you of two that she made at Belton. My daughter Olivia was the first, and the second was a young fellow—an old neighbour of yours in Australia—a Mr. Louis Hammond."

"Oh! you wrote that you had seen the Hammonds, but you did not write *that*, Amy. And they have settled in England for good," said Jessie.

"They live very near my aunt's now; but you must not pay any attention to what Lord Darlington says."

"Oh! I am perfectly correct in my information, Mrs. George. I never saw a young man so far gone in my life," and the earl laughed good-humouredly and complacently. "And as for Olivia, her case was desperate."

"Can't I see your baby, Jessie?" said Amy, whom all this sprightly talk only depressed.

"She is asleep, and Harry is out with his grandfather; he cannot bear to stay in the house, but follows grandfather almost wherever he goes. But I daresay Jeanie will wake up soon."

"Can't I see her asleep?" said Amy, desperately.

"No, Miss Staunton, not to-day, I fear," said the earl, taking out his watch. "We must be home for luncheon, and we have sat chatting here pleasantly so long that we have scarcely left ourselves time to canter across to Stanmore. Among other excellent things that Miss Staunton picked up at the antipodes, Mrs. George, there is a habit of punctuality, which is very refreshing and agreeable. I think there are few things more trying, Mr. Derrick, than the dilatory and careless habits of many modern young ladies with regard to appointments, but Miss Staunton is a model of promptitude and punctuality. I am sorry not to find the gentlemen at home, but I shall hope for better fortune next time I call. We must now wish you good morning," and Lord Darlington withdrew the party as dexterously as he had introduced it.

Mr. Derrick did not clearly understand the earl's meaning, and though inclined to defer to him in most things, he never liked being made a secondary person with his own tenants and dependents. Besides, Lord Darlington's overflowing courtesy made the squire himself appear stiff and churlish. Still, again, his ease of manner, his confidence, and the insinuations as to his relations with Amy, which Mrs. George Copeland was not too stupid to observe, and which must corroborate the popular rumour that there was certainly something between them, were all gratifying, and on the whole the pleasure predominated in Anthony's impression of the visit. But Amy, as usual, was ungrateful for any kindness shown to her. This was a kind thought of Lord Darlington's to let her see her old friend without displeasing him (Anthony), and yet she had never appeared so much out of humour in her life.

For the first time she was really angry with her friend Lord Darlington, and he perceived it, and feared lest he had pushed his advantages too far; and retarded instead of advancing his suit. He kept close by Anthony—he did not care for any private talk with Amy until she had calmed down. Amy did not appear at luncheon, complaining of feeling unwell. After luncheon

the earl played billiards with Anthony, and allowed himself to be beaten. It had come on to rain heavily, and both gentlemen felt dull, like the weather. But towards evening it cleared up, and the earl took a solitary stroll with a cigar in his mouth, while Anthony cheered himself by writing to Lucy. There was a slight figure making its way along the avenue; it was Amy, and she was evidently going to Millmount. It cost him some trouble to overtake her light, swift steps, which she hastened a little when she saw that she was followed, but he at last came up with her.

"You feel better, I hope, Miss Staunton."

"Yes, I do feel rather better, and I thought the air would refresh me."

"It is pleasant after the rain, but rather damp," said the earl, knocking out the ashes of his cigar, and then throwing it away. "Will you take my arm?"

"No; I thank you, I should rather not."

"In these days of crinoline walking arm-in-arm has gone rather out of fashion, and yet it was a good fashion. I thought as you did not feel very strong you might be glad of a little support."

"I am quite well, I do not need it," said

Amy, bluntly; "and you know I am angry with you."

"Angry, Miss Staunton, surely not angry?"

"But I am. Why insult me with the mockery of a visit to my old friend? Why sit and smile and say things that would make any one believe that—that—we were more to each other than we ever can be. I never could have thought you could be so ungenerous, Lord Darlington."

"My dear Miss Staunton, you misunderstand me altogether. I do not say that my feelings towards you have changed, for that would be false. I do not believe that they ever can change. But I think you are catching a little of Mr. Derrick's sensitive jealousy if you fancy that my idle thoughtless talk to-day could lead any one to suppose that we are anything more to each other than very good friends—and that we are still, I hope. I always comfort myself with the thought that, however presumptuous I may have been, Amy is at heart still my very good friend. Perhaps I was a little heedless, but my only wish was to be agreeable to a friend of yours, who in herself interested me much. I don't call her at all handsome, but she has a fine expression, and has such steady, open blue eyes. Is the baby at all like her?"

"Harry is a little like her, but the baby is more like her father," said Amy, somewhat mollified.

"I think that it is your own consciousness of what I was once rash enough to say to you that makes you so easily alarmed. Forget it; forget everything that would offend or annoy you. Use me as a friend if you can, as a convenience if you cannot. You know that your life here is but a sad one; but until you find some one whom you can love better than you love me—one who loves you better you can never find—you are dependent on Mr. Derrick for comfort and happiness. If I can keep him pleased and in good humour, so that your life at Stanmore may be smoother and easier, it is enough for me. Only don't think me ungenerous, Amy; that is what I cannot bear, and what I do not deserve from you. And to show you that I mean what I say, I shall contrive that, without offending your brother, you shall go to Millmount to-morrow to spend the day. Take the books or not as you please, and explain to Mrs. George Copeland anything which you fancy she has misunderstood—my presumption and your refusal; and see the baby both asleep and awake."

"Oh! thank you, my lord, you are too good."

"I am not then so very ungenerous, Amy?"

"No; forgive me, but I am not happy. Life seems so difficult."

"It would make me happy to make it all easy for you, but if that cannot be I must try to smooth over a few little snags. Now we are friends again. It is falling very chill now, you had better get home before you catch cold; and do play me something this evening in token of amity."

Amy could not refuse to return with her friend, and she felt so softened by his gentleness and forbearance that Anthony was delighted with her manner. It was surprising that, in spite of her anger and her petulance, the earl had so much patience with her, and, although it was provoking, it was very flattering that he was so constant and so devoted to her, notwithstanding her resolute discouragement. His generous offer to retire in favour of a more fortunate rival she took for a great deal more than it was worth, and her spirits rose after the explanation she had had in the avenue. She had read often of such things; novels and poems were full of instances in which men had wooed a woman long and patiently without success, and then had given up with noble grace when they discovered that her heart was elsewhere bestowed, and a life-long

and tender friendship substituted. This sacrifice might be hard, but it was natural to a noble nature, and Amy believed that the earl had a noble nature.

"The Beresfords are coming to-morrow, and the Trevyllians," said Anthony to the earl, when Amy had retired for the night.

"So I suppose; and the Harcourts before the end of the week. You will have your house well filled."

"Amy seems in better humour to-night. I hope she will do the honours decently. I thought she was very much put out this morning, but you have had some explanation, I suppose?"

"Yes, a very satisfactory one. We are getting on very well indeed."

"I did not augur any good from your going to Copeland's. You know it was against my will that we took Amy there."

"That was a very unsatisfactory affair. I fancy I mismanaged it. I should have taken your advice and not gone with Amy. But she wishes to pay an independent visit to her friend, and I think she should do it; suppose she goes to-morrow. We are to go to the meet at Brocklehurst, you know."

"I thought I told you that I disliked her

visiting my tenants in the way she does; and besides I have a reason which affects you more than me."

"My dear Derrick, it does not affect me at all. I am not jealous of any rival in England, and certainly have no apprehension with regard to any Australian clodpoll of your sister's acquaintance. Your scruples with regard to your tenants I can understand, but don't be uneasy about me. I think restrictions are always unwise things, and to tell a woman that she must not go to any particular house makes it only the more attractive to her. It is evident, however, that your sister had been obedient to you, from Mrs. George's manner. I scarcely expect her to be so submissive to myself. I think she will always be able to turn me round her finger, and will fill my house with her friends rather than my own."

"I am sure Amy ought to feel proud of your constancy," said Anthony.

"I think she is, a little. Then I suppose she shall go to-morrow?"

"She must return in time for my guests; they are to come by the half-past five train."

"Oh! certainly; shall I tell her your wishes, or will you communicate them yourself to your sister?"

"Do it if you please," said Anthony.

"It is very kind of you to make me the bearer of a pleasant message," said the earl. "Then it is settled."

CHAPTER VI.

A MORE SATISFACTORY VISIT.

WHEN Anthony, forgetting that he had promised Lord Darlington that he should make the communication, told his sister Amy on the morning after her very unsatisfactory visit to Millmount that she might go to see her Australian friends instead of accompanying the earl and himself to the meet of the hounds at Brocklehurst, provided she returned home to receive his expected guests, Amy felt too grateful for Lord Darlington's kind offices to indulge in the offended feelings which had distressed him on the preceding day. She thanked her brother in words as if the thought was his own, but she looked at the earl, and showed him that he was forgiven.

Jessie was surprised and delighted with her friend's early visit, and yet curiously anxious as to whether she did not come to communicate bad news. Amy was so softened by Lord Darling-

ton's kindness that she did not rush in with the disclaimer that she had been prepared with when he had intercepted her evening walk. It would be ungenerous to take advantage of his generosity, and proclaim to Jessie that he had made a ridiculous proposal and had been refused, and yet that was what Mrs. George Copeland was very desirous of knowing.

Jessie hovered on the borders of the subject for a long time, asked all the particulars of the squire's engagement to Amy's cousin, which had now become public property as a piece of news, and wondered over it greatly; asked about the Hammonds, and Mr. Louis in particular, and what sort of style they lived in, and what kind of horses they rode; then enquired about Lord Darlington's daughter, Lady Olivia, who she heard was greatly afflicted, and his son too in another way, then returned to Mr. Louis and what like he had grown up, and in the midst of these enquiries suddenly burst forth with—

"But you're not going to marry that old man, are you, Amy?"

"Oh! no, don't fancy such a thing," said Amy, blushing, however, in spite of herself.

"It is not right, you know, and not natural."

"No, Jessie, it is not right.

"But everybody says it is to be."

"Everybody may be wrong."

"And he looks as if he thought it was to be."

"He knows a great deal better than that; he is my cousin, and has been very friendly."

"Very friendly indeed, and he wants folk to believe that he is more than friendly."

"I am sure you should have known me better than to think I ever could do such a thing. I suppose he cannot help his manner; he does not really mean anything by it."

"But it is scarcely fair in him to mislead other people, and what between what George hears from the Hall and what I heard and saw for myself yesterday, I'll be bound that you might be a countess if you liked; but, oh! Amy, you must not like."

"No, Jessie, I must *not* like."

"It is not only for Allan's sake I say it, though, poor fellow, it would go near to break his heart." She looked appealingly at Amy, who held down her head. "I know there is a great difference in conditions between you and our people now, though my father cannot be brought to see it, and you are in no way bound to Allan, and it is likely your brother would not hear of such a thing, but there is a greater real difference between you and that old cousin of yours, and a difference that years will make worse, for worldly

means may improve and a young man may learn the ways that please you, but a husband that is too old for you when you are nineteen will be older still when you are nine-and-twenty—at least that's my view of the matter, and it is George's too. But it is not to be, I am glad of that. I may tell George and satisfy him on that point."

"You may tell George certainly."

"But, Amy, keep as clear of him as you can. I fancy Mr. Derrick asks him here at this time when there is such a work with the pheasants and partridges, and you have no right or power to gainsay it. I'm sure Australia was a blessed place compared to this, where you have horsemen and dogs breaking down your fences and trampling over your fields without saying by your leave, and no one dares to complain, though you're overrun with hares and rabbits and all sort of vermin, besides the partridges that you have no leave to destroy; but, as I said, the squire, your brother, will have his own way, and ask this grand cousin to the house, but take care what you are about, Amy, my dear."

"Oh! I am very careful."

"I saw that you would not take the books he brought for you, that was right of you. But it was very civil in him to offer us the lend of them,

and though I say it that should not say it, and to the girl I should not say it to, he has a pleasanter tongue in his head to them that are below him in condition than the squire has himself. Mrs. Copeland was quite taken up with him, and I had no patience to hear her when I thought of you and him ever coming together, for I think in this old country folk think a very great deal about estates and titles and what they call position. You may laugh at it in the like of us, but George's sisters are just as sore about George having worked for wages for my father, and as keen to have it forgotten, as your brother could be at your giving lessons at Branxholm, and being paid for it honestly, as was my father's custom. Oh! Amy, I do weary to see my father's face again, but they are all set on getting a long lease of Millmount, and that will tie George and me to the place. The squire has given leases to the Harrisons and the Cliffs, and our holding from year to year is not comfortable for laying out capital on the land, which it needs. Mrs. Copeland was saying that a good word from you might get us the lease that Dixon the agent is rather stiff about. He objects to the farm being back-rented, and when one's laying out every penny on the land it is fair we should have the rent to lie by for the first two or three years."

"I have not much influence with Anthony," said Amy. "I fear my interference would do you no good. The earl has a great deal more influence than I have, Mrs. Copeland should apply to him," said Amy, sadly.

"That's influence I don't want you to ask for us; but every one says you are the favourite sister, and that Miss Derrick is so angry at the squire for marrying your cousin, so that you would have things all your own way."

"Every one is mistaken in that instance too."

"Well, I am sorry for that, but the other mistake I am glad to have set right. And the daughter is sickly, and the son little better than a natural; it is hard on the old man too, but why in the name of wonder does he not pick out a nice sponsible middle-aged woman of about thirty-five to make him comfortable and take care of his children, instead of turning to a bit lassie like you, years younger than his own daughter? But there's one thing to be glad of, it cannot be hard to say nay to such a wooer, for if he has the face to make up to a fine young lady like yourself he must expect to meet with a rebuff. Whereas a young man is full of hope, and it is grievous to disappoint him. Although I fear you are forgetting Allan among all your grand friends and your conquests, as my lord calls them, he will be

glad to hear that you would not take an old man for houses, and land, and grandeur. I am sure," continued Jessie, looking at Amy's morning dress —the most elegant and tasteful and freshest toilet possible — "you have finery enough at Stanmore. If money or anything that money can buy could make you happy, you have no lack of that. The squire is very generous to you in that way."

"Yes, in that way he is. I am to be magnificent at the wedding that is now approaching, for Anthony himself is to choose my dress and ornaments. So you like my dress. You see how nicely it is caught up for walking, so that it can be let down in a moment. It was so pleasant walking here this morning between the hedgerows. My brother wished me to ride, but I prefer walking this short distance, and I brought Cartwright with me to carry my parcel—a frock and hat for little Harry that I bought in London. I wonder what Cartwright would have thought if he had seen me carrying the basket to the wheatfield with bread and cheese and cake, and a bottle of wine for the reapers, on that important day that changed my fate for me. Young ladies may walk, you know, Jessie; it is quite fashionable for them to walk a great deal, but they must not carry anything, not even a Bible or Prayer-book

to church. I should have brought my little present before, but I had no opportunity, for our visit yesterday was accidental. But I am going to spend the day with you to-day, so I shall see George and get acquainted with the baby, and go over your poultry-yard and dairy."

Perhaps Lord Darlington thought that a day spent in this homely farmhouse, where his quick eye had observed many deficiencies, might convince Amy that she would not like to go down in the world. Amy, too, had observed these deficiencies when she knew that the critical eyes of her brother and the earl were upon them, but now that she was alone she was determined to see nothing but what was pleasant. She looked like the Amy Staunton of Branxholm, as she followed Jessie about in her household avocations, and admired the poultry, and insisted on feeding the young chickens.

Then came dinner—a solid substantial meal washed down with excellent home-brewed ale. It was long since Amy had eaten such a dinner, at such an hour, without any one watching behind her chair to carry away her plate. The appointments at Belton Rectory, which her aunt had apologised so profusely for, were much more elaborate and formal than what accompanied this simple meal at Millmount. Still she enjoyed her

dinner and the talk with George, who stayed at home for the rest of the day, in order to see more of her. Baby showed up very well, and Harry sat at table and behaved tolerably, considering that his grandfather, who had been somewhat of a martinet with his own children, encouraged all his mischievous tricks by undisguised laughter and applause.

Amy felt she had not been spoiled by her worldly prosperity after all, for she was so happy; and the idea of acting hostess to the fashionable party of guests who were to stay at Stanmore, was rather terrible to her, although it must certainly make it easier for her to avoid Lord Darlington.

The visit, although the longest she had ever been allowed to make at Millmount, came too soon to an end, and she returned to her duties and her cares at the Hall.

Lord Darlington and Mr. Derrick both watched with interest the manner in which Amy did the honours of the house to strangers. Anthony knew that Lucy would have more confidence and more readiness, and have more to say; but on the whole Amy was pleasanter and prettier and more pliant than his aunt or Edith. The earl was in love, and he was satisfied; the diffidence would wear off, the grace and the charm

would remain. By common consent Lord Darlington was allowed to sit always by her side. He was the most important person in the house, and he had his rightful place by the hostess, not only at table, but everywhere else within doors or without, and as he was cautious and circumspect, simply saving her from everything that might be disagreeable or fatiguing, and above all keeping Anthony amused and in good humour, she could not help feeling obliged to him. It was impossible that he could continue his suit with so little encouragement. The feeling he had fostered so injudiciously would subside into quiet friendship as he had hinted it would; surely at his age it was impossible for him to be so deeply or so desperately in love as a young man might be. How Allan would receive her dismissal was a question she often put to herself. She had gone to the wrong party for advice, and had not the advice been wrong? Would there be any harm in her writing a few lines to say that she hoped he did not think her very unkind, or would that be taken for too much? She was not going to marry Allan simply to get quit of Lord Darlington; there was much weight in what he had said, and it might really be better for Allan if she never crossed his path again. The last letter she had received from him had not been

so confident as that which had alarmed her, for it had been written in answer to the long account she had given of her successful entry into the fashionable world. She had described her London relations—Lady Gower, the Beresfords, and especially Lord Darlington—and the spirit and vividness of her sketches had struck sadly on Allan's hopes. He complained that there was less of herself and her thoughts in this letter than usual. He was evidently dissatisfied and unhappy. Even his thanks for her present from the opticians did not appear to be hearty. Lord Darlington was right; he would never like her to speak of her English friends or her English life. How curiously penetrating the earl was!

CHAPTER VII.

MISS PENNITHORNE MAKES A SECOND APPEAL TO MRS. HAMMOND.

LADY OLIVIA was very tired by the time she reached Thrush Grove again, after her glance at life in other places. It had been a tedious journey, taken by what were called easy stages, but which appeared to be very far from easy stages to the invalid. The excitement was over which had kept her up in London and at Darlington Castle, and she settled herself on her old sofa with a feeling of languor and weariness and disappointment, which none of aunt Sophy's cares could divert. She had had some vague hopes of permanent improvement which were now dissipated, and the rupture between her father and her friend, which she believed to be final, would deprive her of both for a long time, perhaps for ever.

It was only due to Lady Olivia, as a relative of

dear Mr. Derrick's, that Mrs. Evans and Lucy should come to enquire how she had stood the journey on the earliest opportunity.

Lucy was the first to call; she came with her air of high health and spirits and success, and asked a few direct questions and offered a little unmitigated pity and condolence to the invalid's sufferings, which were as unpalatable as the most nauseous medicine could have been, and then spoke of her shopping campaign in London, and discussed the fashions, and what was most suitable for a bride, and what was most becoming to Lucy's own complexion, and what most pleasing to Mr. Derrick's taste, and, fancying that she had soothed and cheered Lady Olivia, went home to tell how well she had done it.

Mrs. Evans was little better, for her whole head and heart were full of her daughter's engagement and the preparations for the marriage. She spoke feelingly of the presents Lucy had received from Mr. Derrick; the compliments Lord Darlington had paid her; the perfect satisfaction of Mr. Evans; the astonishment of Mr. Nash and of the Misses Smart, when they heard the great piece of news; and the despair of Fred Hammond, who had been flirting with Juliet for consolation. She did not see that the interest of her listener (who had been rather bored by Lucy's

love affairs personally), was far from being equal to her own, but meandered back and forward in the narrow channel of her own pre-occupied mind.

Miss Pennithorne's next visitors were Mrs. Hammond and her eldest daughter, and, although they too were engrossed a good deal with their own affairs, there was some interest felt by Lady Olivia, and still more by her aunt in the state of Louis Hammond's health. Mrs. Evans had mentioned in a very cursory manner that the young gentleman was not very well, but even Miss Pennithorne's curiosity on the subject could not keep her to it in the face of other more delightful topics. But the mother's heart was full of it, not that she was very anxious, she would not allow herself to be alarmed. Louis had never liked the English climate, and often neglected the precautions which were necessary for Australians-born to take. The first winter he had had a seasoning cold, nothing more than could have been expected; the second winter he had a cough, but that was owing to over-heating himself pulling a boat, and sitting out in the evening air with insufficient clothing; the following winter he had been quite well, but now a cold he had taken in autumn seemed to hang about him, and Mrs. Hammond felt a little uncomfortable

about such a bad beginning to an English winter, and had determined that he should travel with his father to the south of France to see what a month or six weeks in a warmer climate could do for his restoration. The boy had always wished to see the vine countries of France and Spain, and his mother persuaded him, and tried to persuade herself that it was a journey of pleasure and nothing more; but the questions she put to Miss Pennithorne, who was considered very skilful in nursing, although her experience was not particularly wide as to coughs and colds and loss of appetite and loss of strength, showed that she was really uneasy about her son.

Miss Pennithorne, who was carrying on a double train of thought in her own mind, could only say that she thought Olivia had benefited from the change even to a less mild climate; and she had no doubt that this southward journey would remove the slight illness which Mrs. Hammond confessed that her son suffered from. Clara Hammond, who had no feeling of uneasiness or alarm, could only tell Olivia how much she should miss her brother and her father too; and then asked her about Mr. Derrick and Miss Evans, and if the great relations of the Derrick family were pleased by the marriage that was so satisfactory to the rector and his household. This

was as poor a marriage as his father's might have been if he had married Miss Hope, but Mrs. Hammond now had nearer objects of interest than this parallel case could arouse. Her son filled her thoughts to the exclusion of minor affairs.

As Mrs. Hammond rose to go Miss Pennithorne touched her softly on the arm and said,

"I should like to say a few words to you if Miss Hammond will remain for a few minutes with Olivia. Will you step into the garden with me?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Hammond, and she followed Miss Pennithorne into the little flower garden in front of the house.

"You recollect, I daresay, our having a little conversation a few weeks ago on the subject of Miss Staunton, Mrs. Hammond?"

"Yes, I recollect it perfectly," said Mrs. Hammond, coldly.

"You said then that you thought she was of the world, worldly; and that she was intent then on making the best marriage, in a worldly point of view, that was within her reach, and I doubted it. Well, I was not mistaken in my view of her character. She has refused Lord Darlington—positively refused him. I think you ought to know, and that Mr. Louis ought to know, so I tell you, although I may offend the earl."

"You are very obliging certainly, Miss Pennithorne, but it does not concern me much how Miss Staunton manages her love affairs."

"It concerns your son nearly," and Miss Pennithorne looked earnestly into the mother's face.

"But how did you come to know it, Miss Pennithorne? Did the young lady boast of her triumph to all of her friends?"

"No, indeed; the earl made no secret of it. He told Olivia and Olivia told me. Mr. Derrick and Miss Evans were exceedingly angry and my darling was greatly disappointed, and as for Lord Darlington himself, he had been so secure that he must have been terribly mortified."

"Yes, for the young lady gave him sufficient encouragement. I saw with my own eyes how she led him on."

"My dear Mrs. Hammond, she had not the least idea of what the earl meant; and I think she was nearly as much disappointed at losing her friend as he was at losing the beautiful young wife he had been so long wooing. And every one was against her but me, and I could do nothing to help her except to tell her that she was right, and to tell this to you, for Mr. Louis ought to know."

"Yes, perhaps he ought," said Mrs. Hammond,

thoughtfully. "At all events, I feel obliged to you for telling me this. It is very disinterested in you. Louis ought to feel very grateful for your kind concern in his behalf."

As Mrs. Hammond walked away from Thrush Grove she felt this unpalatable piece of news must be told; and pictured to herself how Louis's face would kindle at Amy's justification. On second thoughts, however, she determined to call round by the rectory, and if possible learn it from another source, so as not to compromise the well-meaning old maid who was a second time so officious. So she sent Clara home by herself, and went alone to ascertain the feelings of the rectory family about it.

Mr. and Mrs. Evans were not at home, nor was Lucy, and she did not feel called on to speak on Amy's affairs to any of the other younger members of the family. She walked slowly home, feeling that she had got a reprieve, and found that in her absence Mr. Hammond, who also had grown uneasy about Louis, had determined to hasten their foreign trip; and thought they might set off on the morrow if Mrs. Hammond would give her mind to the packing and the preparations. Louis looked decidedly better and brighter than he had done for the last month. After all it was only a little cold, and such

prompt measures as had been taken were certain to be successful. He asked his mother where she had been, and whom she had seen, and what news she had heard, but, except the news that Mrs. Evans and Lucy had gone to London again on business connected with the approaching marriage, Mrs. Hammond gave none. Everything was to be got ready for the start, and Mrs. Hammond busied herself to see that nothing should be forgotten. Louis was full of talk as to what he meant to see in France and Spain which might be of any value to him afterwards in Australia; he seemed to be quite himself again—why awake hopes which had been put to sleep? Why revive a love that had only been a care and a torment to her poor boy? Even if Lord Darlington had been refused, did that make his chance a good or even a fair one? There were others who might find her charming, and whom her brother might be satisfied to see her marry.

So Mrs. Hammond kept Miss Pennithorne's information to herself, and allowed her son and her husband to start on the continental tour without saying a word about Amy Staunton. If the news was confirmed by Mrs. Evans she might write.

But when Mrs. Evans and Lucy returned from their second campaign in London Mrs. Hammond

gathered from them that the refusal, although provoking enough, was by no means so decided as Miss Pennithorne had given her to understand. Lord Darlington did not take it as a refusal; he was at the present time at Stanmore, and had carried down to Amy all sorts of presents. She had not returned the presents she had received from him before he made his declaration; and he had told Mr. Derrick that he was perfectly satisfied with Amy's reception of him. He was not a man to persevere without good hope of success; and Amy in her heart was very fond of him, every one could see that.

There certainly was no great reason given to her to write to Mr. Hammond or Louis in the rectory accounts; but still, although she liked to have discredit thrown on Miss Pennithorne's information, the worldly tone of Mrs. Evans and her daughter jarred on Mrs. Hammond's feelings.

Louis and his father wrote cheerfully from the continent; the cough had quite gone, and they were enjoying the trip even more than they had anticipated. They talked of lengthening their journey; and Mrs. Hammond thought that any hint as to Amy Staunton's refusal of her noble suitor might do Louis a great deal of harm, and could scarcely do him any good.

Mr. Derrick came to the rectory in his new

and delightful character of a lover not very long after Lucy's return from London. He found that even daily letters were not sufficient food for his love; and, although he had sometimes thought he had been rash and precipitate with regard to his generous offer to Amy, he never for one moment repented of his proposal to Lucy. The more he knew of her the more he found out her merits and her talents; her beauty improved in his eyes, and her wit never palled on him.

He was eager to remove her from her present obscure position to that of the head of his household; and, as he did everything *en grand seigneur*, Mr. and Mrs. Evans and Lucy herself could only try to meet his wishes as soon as possible.

CHAPTER VIII.

AMY FEARS SHE WILL BE DRIVEN TO HATE OR TO LOVE HER SUITOR.

Amy did not accompany her brother, she was otherwise disposed of at Lady Gower's country house. Her aunt was kind to her, and on the whole life was easier to her there than at Stanmore; but still Lady Gower kept a vigilant eye on the detrimentals, and took care that Miss Staunton should be considered booked for Darlington Castle for life. A little passing attention she did receive, but as the earl established himself at his kinswoman's and was always at Amy's service, there was no opportunity for any one to proceed further. She never expressed a wish or a fancy that he was not ready to gratify—not eagerly or officiously, but by a sort of quiet intuition. All his experience with women of every different kind was brought to bear on the girl he had determined to win. He could

be gay and he could be grave; he could be talkative and he could be silent; he could use her brother's or her aunt's authority whenever it suited his purposes; and he could override both if there was any chance of giving any pleasure that could call forth her gratitude. Thus a subtle net was thrown round her by a skilful hand, and, although Amy told herself several times a day that she was perfectly free, Lord Darlington was counting the days that would elapse before he should call her his own.

As none of the gentlemen whom she met at Lady Gower's had fallen in love with her, they did not see (as Louis Hammond had done) the great sacrifice of such a marriage. True, Miss Staunton was young and pretty; but she had been brought up in great poverty, and was altogether dependent on her brother's goodwill, and he was not always pleasant. Besides he was going to be married, and it was quite possible that Stanmore would not be so comfortable for her then. If Darlington was old, he was certainly very devoted, he had an easy manner and a fair temper; the hopeless state of his only son made the prospects of the second wife more brilliant, and certainly the manner in which he carried this affair in hand deserved some reward. The game he played was an interesting one but at

the same time a fatiguing one. Not only had he to keep all his good qualities full in view, but he had to repress much that was natural and habitual to him when in Amy's company—and in Amy's company he elected to be for most hours of the day. Whether his valet or his groom ever suffered for the strain he put upon himself we cannot exactly say, but it is likely that they did, and that they wished this unnatural state of things to come to an end, and that the girl whom he now studied, and bore with, and dressed for, and thought for, might be transformed into the wife who must take her share with others and learn to bear with him a little.

Her greatest trouble at this time was from the tone of the letters she received from Anthony and Lucy. Being so happy in themselves, they might have spared a little of their sunshine for her; but there was a hardness and an egotism in all they wrote that fell chilly upon her heart. She could not help telling Lord Darlington how hurt and disappointed she felt. He smiled as he answered,

"You must not expect your brother and his *fiancée* to be above the common weaknesses of humanity. Successful love is not apt to make people more affectionate or forbearing with others, whatever unsuccessful love may do," said Lord

Darlington, with a little sigh. "You should have known ere this how tiresome lovers are."

"I do not mind their being tiresome; but they both write as if I had given them some fresh cause to be offended, now I have tried to please Anthony as much as I could. I should have gone with him to Belton if he had wished it, but he chose that I should come to Gower's Court. And Lucy says something about my not being open, which I am sure I do not deserve from her."

"I fear you will find the future Mrs. Derrick very trying to live with. Is there no possibility of breaking this affair off?"

"Oh! no, nor would I really wish it. They really like each other, and, as you say, they suit each other. But neither of them care about me, and it seems terrible to live in a house with people who do not love me, and to whom I can be of no use whatever. That is one misfortune of people being rich. There is nothing that I can do for Anthony that can reconcile him to my opposing him in one thing that he set his heart on. I fear that he will grow to dislike and even to hate me if we are to live always together; and Lucy thinks as he thinks and feels as he feels. In this country there is no one on whom I have any claim. My sister and her aunt never looked on me as belong-

ing to them, and if I were to break with Anthony I fear Lady Gower too would cast me off. So I am trying to cultivate myself a little at odd hours, and then I can tell Anthony that I mean to take a situation so that I can be independent. That is to say if he will continue so constantly to harp on this jarring string. I speak to you, my lord, because though it is about you my brother feels so much offended with me, and although you have far more reason to be displeased than he has, you are more reasonable—you are too generous to add to my perplexities. You know that if I could rightly be to you what you wish, I should consent, but it would be a hollow and cruel gift with my present feelings. If Anthony saw that I was determined, and that I would go out as a governess if he did not give up persecuting me, he would surely yield. I have yielded to him in many things, and it has done me no good, and I must make a stand now. I owe something to myself as well as to him."

And Amy drew herself up, and never looked more beautiful; and the earl never felt less inclined to give her up. This was a very desperate step that she threatened, for Derrick in his pique and anger at such a proposal was as likely to pay her passage back to Australia as to give in, and then she was lost to him for ever. But Anthony

Derrick would never allow his sister to take a situation in England, and Lord Darlington could not endure the idea of it himself.

"We surely can do better for you than that as a threat for Mr. Derrick, because he will never believe that you are in earnest."

"I will make him believe that I am in earnest," said Amy, impetuously. "As for being a governess, I have been one already, and it is nothing so very dreadful."

"Not at the antipodes, perhaps, where all your homely employers looked on you as their superior. It is not likely that an English family will find out that a salaried dependent is not an inferior."

"And am not I a salaried dependent with Anthony? Is there anything that he has given me—an ornament, or a book, or a quarterly allowance out of his wealth—that he does not think should chain me down to see with his eyes, to think with his thoughts, to acknowledge no will but his? Oh! let me get twenty pounds a year and feel that I have fairly earned it, and that I am not a slave! Mamma was persuaded to do what was wrong because she did not know of anything else to do. Now I can see my duty, and I am thankful for what you call my adversities because they have opened my eyes."

Lord Darlington had never been seriously alarmed before. She was quite capable now that she was in this mood of taking a situation or of writing to Allan Lindsay, which would be worse. Anthony would never dream of his blundering sulkiness driving her so far, and the idea of Lucy Evans, who really owed her great fortune to Amy and to the earl, showing such airs of superiority and imperiousness to her cousin roused his hot indignation.

Had these things worked favourably for his suit, the earl might have forgiven them, but they did quite the contrary at present, and were therefore intolerable.

"I am sure," said he, "that if your brother were to be seriously displeased with you that your sister Miss Derrick's heart would warm to you."

"It would not be because she loves me, but because she is piqued at Anthony; and I am tired of homes without love. Oh! if I could only get back to that old home in —— street with papa and mamma, and to old days."

"But that, alas! you cannot do; you must make the best of your present opportunities; and I must own that I do not think Mr. Derrick could believe in this governess scheme, and I do not like it."

"But, my lord, could you not go away and not stay always where I am so constantly, making people think that you care for me?"

"*Think* that I care for you!" echoed the earl.

"Can you not go to Anthony and say to him what you have said to me, that you will not prosecute a suit that makes me unhappy, but that you will always be friendly with the family, for that is what Anthony and Lucy think most of. Offer him Darlington Castle for his honeymoon, I know you are not going there at Christmas, so you can do that without any sacrifice. Take a run to Paris or to Rome and try to forget that you ever had such thoughts about me, because, though I try so hard—so very hard—to recollect how good and kind you are and how much I owe you, I fear if I am pressed so cruelly by my brother and Lucy that I shall grow to hate you. It cannot give you much pleasure to be always about me that you should risk that," said Amy, weeping. "I never thought that I could hate anybody, but now I believe that I am growing very unjust and very cruel."

The earl was relieved by the sight of her tears; it was better she should weep than be so determined. As for her threat of hating him, that was only a figure of speech.

"By-the-by, Amy," said he, after she had calmed down a little, "did you have any letters from Australia this month?"

"No, I did not, which surprises me, as Mrs. George Copeland says they are all well, and her impression is that there were letters for me."

"Perhaps they were too late for the mail," suggested Lord Darlington.

"That is not likely," said Amy. "Colonial people don't often make that mistake."

"Your letters are sent on here, I suppose?"

"I have so few letters that I do not know. I have missed no others."

"You have not yet got into the voluminous correspondence which young ladies in England generally keep up; a terrible waste of time it often is."

"But, my lord, I am in earnest about what I said," said Amy, who saw that the earl meant to turn her mind to general topics.

"Very well, I understand my part. I shall go away at once to Belton and see your brother, and offer him Darlington Castle, and then go to Paris and try to forget you. That is my lesson, and you are only to promise not to hate me any more than you do at this moment."

This Amy promised with some self-reproach;

she did not feel that she hated him at all, indeed she was sometimes almost frightened to think how much she liked her friend.

The bitterness of the letters from Anthony and Lucy had been occasioned by a circumstance which neither of them had alluded to.

Mr. Derrick had left orders that all letters for the Hall should be sent on to Belton, as it was possible Miss Staunton might not continue to stay at Gower's Court, but might visit other friends, and he could send them on. When the Australian letter came into his hands his curiosity was strongly awakened. Lucy, too, had an intense desire to know what relations Amy held with her antipodean correspondent, and she had always maintained, since Lord Darlington had had his answer, that Allan Lindsay must be a lover. If the letter had given way in their hands it would have been a good thing, but the envelope was strong and well-gummed. Still they handled the letter a good deal, and at last worked each other up to a feeling that it was very wrong in Amy having a correspondence with one of the opposite sex which she kept from her brother, her rightful guardian; and, as a matter of painful but solemn duty, Anthony at last opened the letter.

The event they considered justified the step they took, for they discovered that Allan Lindsay had hopes, though not such strong hopes as he had expressed in the letter on which Amy had taken Lord Darlington's advice. The familiarity of his tone towards Amy, and the minute details which he gave of all the people and things about Branxholm aroused their scorn and indignation. They assured each other that they had done rightly in opening this letter and discovering how the land lay; but they did not forward it to its proper owner or allude to its having come into their possession. Anthony wrote what Lucy thought a very spirited letter to Allan as if he had learned his presumption from Amy herself. And although they were very hard on Amy for her want of openness, they took good care to conceal the source of the present accusation. Mr. Derrick and Lucy were puzzled as to whether their discovery should be revealed to the earl, but feared it would make him abandon a suit that they were very desirous that he should continue.

While thus debating in the intervals of their lover's talk, the unexpected arrival of Lord Darlington with his smiling countenance, with his congratulations to all and sundry on the auspicious coming event, his offers of personal

service as groomsman at the marriage, and of Darlington Castle for the honeymoon, convinced them that all was well and that there was no need to mention Allan Lindsay's letter.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. HAMMOND'S FEELINGS UNDERGO A CHANGE.

"BY-THE-BY, Derrick," said Lord Darlington on the following day, "your sister tells me she had no letter from Australia by this month's mail."

"Had not she?" said Anthony. "So much the better, I think."

"It is rather singular, because there has never been a month missed before, and on this occasion she felt sure of an answer."

"Oh! something gone wrong with the mail, I suppose."

"No, Mr. Derrick, the mail is all right."

"Oh! then it is some blunder of Dixon's; he has not sent the letters on, I suppose," said Anthony, carelessly.

The earl could read Anthony Derrick like an open page of a printed book; he knew that he had possessed himself of the contents of this letter.

"I should not like such blunders to be made with any letters of mine. I am going to Paris, and if I write to Miss Staunton I expect that she will receive them in proper time," said Lord Darlington.

"Oh! of course; depend on it, there will be no mistake about *your* letters. I shall write to Dixon and give particular directions."

"I daresay your motives are good enough, but your method is bad, Mr. Derrick. You have this missing letter."

"I assure you I have not got it."

"Then Miss Evans has it, and that is all the same thing."

"Of what consequence is it to you to hunt it up, my lord? You seem much more interested in Australian matters than I am. If I did keep it back it was in your service. And as my sister's only protector and guardian I had a right to know what sort of letters she received. She has no right to keep up a correspondence of which I disapprove. And I suppose she sent you to recover it for her? a curious office for you to take on yourself certainly."

"No, Miss Staunton did not ask this service from me; I wish to recover her missing letter on my own account. I know all about this little affair. Amy took me into her confidence long

ago, and took my advice on the subject. This letter of course was written before young Lindsay received his dismissal from her, and I believe she has not written to him since."

Anthony opened his eyes in surprise. Had Amy done this proper thing without consulting him in the very least, and without confiding in him? He could scarcely believe it.

"There is really nothing in it," said the earl confidently.

"But there may be, I fear," said Anthony, and he went out of the room and got the letter from Lucy. "There, my lord, read for yourself, and see if I did not do a kind thing for you in keeping it back—that is to say, if you still think as you did about Amy."

Lord Darlington took the letter, enclosed it in an envelope, re-addressed it, and fixed it down.

"Now, Mr. Derrick, I have got what I came for, and I understand the reason of your harshness to my poor Amy. But this little matter gives me no uneasiness; I have perfect confidence in your sister, and she reposes perfect confidence in me. My feelings towards her are unchanged; if anything they are stronger than ever, but I wish to win her to accede to my wishes, and neither to alarm her nor to threaten her. You have always thought me slow and circumspect in

my wooing, and in my circumstances it is necessary. It is all very well for a young fellow like you 'to come, to see, and to conquer,' but as this is my own affair you must let me conduct it in my own way. It may be difficult for you to be cordial to your sister, but I must insist on your being civil to the future Countess of Darlington. I must insist on your being honourable, and allowing her the sole possession of letters addressed to herself. Of all the difficulties in my way the most unmanageable are your suspicious temper and your mean disposition."

The earl spoke with a concentrated bitterness which Anthony had never seen in him before, and which was perhaps rather unreasonable, for he had only been too glad of Anthony's temper sometimes when it made himself appear amiable. It was a relief to him to express for once his contempt for Anthony Derrick at a moment when Anthony felt vulnerable, for having opened a letter intended for another person's eyes was a palpable act of meanness which he could not defend. It was evident that without an alliance with Amy the Darlington interest and friendship was lost to him for ever. But if she did become countess, as the earl so confidently affirmed she should be, she would be able to turn her old husband round her thumb, and in that case, as the

cause of offence had ceased, Anthony would again be her dear brother, and he could talk her over at once. She had been always so submissive, so ready to apologize to him—his good opinion was of such value to her that he had no doubt they would resume their old relations to each other, and that his position in the world would be permanently improved through her means.

Had Lord Darlington himself no curiosity to read the letter he put into his pocket? Very little; Allan Lindsay's sentiments he knew or guessed at sufficiently for his purpose, and the letter would serve him better unread than read. He had paid a short unexpected visit to Olivia on his way to the rectory, and returned by Thrush Grove to bid her good-by before he took his departure for Paris. He seemed to be in good spirits, and promised to come again when Mr. Derrick was married, for he had been invited to take a prominent part in the pageant. In the meantime he was going to Paris: what could he get for Olivia there? He took down her commissions carefully in his note-book.

"You look a little dull, Olivia. I wish you could prevail on our friend Miss Staunton to stay with you while I am in Paris. She might be as much at her uncle's as she pleased, and see how all the marriage preparations are getting on.

Though she refuses to make *me* happy," said the earl, softly, "I should be glad if you can prevail on her to enliven *your* life a little while I am out of the way. It was not altogether selfishness on my part; I did wish to give you so affectionate a friend and companion for life, Olivia. But although that may not be, we shall try for a month of happiness for you; write a note by me, and I shall do what I can to persuade her."

Olivia wrote an earnest invitation to her friend; and Lord Darlington, with his two letters in his pocket, presented himself at Gower's Court. Amy was very grateful to him for her recovered letter, and for a somewhat penitent one she received from Anthony by post about the same time. The generosity and confidence the earl showed deserved a better reward than she felt she could pay to him.

"Now for obedience to the rest of your instructions, Amy," said the earl. "I shall now go to Paris till it is time for your brother's marriage, which is really drawing pretty close now. In the meantime will you remain with Lady Gower, or will you take poor Olivia's request into consideration? I know it is rather too much to ask, but at the same time, though it is dull, you are of so much use there."

"I shall go to Thrush Grove," said Amy, recollecting that Miss Pennithorne was the only person who had given her any strength or encouragement. "I like to be of use, as you say."

"Then it must be good-by, Amy," said the earl, smiling a little sadly. "I am to drive you out of my head with Parisian gaieties if I can, at least I shall try. When the next Australian mail arrives, if you do not get your letter apply to me, and if your brother makes himself disagreeable to you again, or Miss Evans shows any airs, they shall not have Darlington Castle for their honeymoon."

It was not a bad idea of Lord Darlington's to remove Amy from Lady Gower's, where she might attract attention, and to place her with his daughter, thereby lending countenance to the impression that was abroad of her engagement to him. He did not write to Amy herself from Paris, but he wrote to Olivia three times a week, and he knew that her friend saw or heard all his letters. Miss Pennithorne was now much fonder of her than she had been before Lord Darlington had awakened her fears, and felt flattered when Amy told her why she had decided to come to Thrush Grove.

When Mrs. Hammond and her daughter called after Amy's arrival, Miss Pennithorne looked

radiant, and asked kindly after the health of the family, and especially that of Mr. Louis.

"He was better, much better—indeed quite well; the change had done wonders for him," Mrs. Hammond said.

"We do feel it so dull without papa and Louis," said Clara Hammond, "in spite of all the gay doings at the rectory. And they will not be home again till the marriage is over. They have such interesting accounts to send us of all the curious places they see, and I have nothing so pleasant to send in return; for you know, Miss Staunton, that whatever interest young *ladies* take in *trousseaux* and bridal arrangements generally young gentlemen take none, unless they are immediately concerned, and then it is wonderful how they go into it. Your brother has talked over and over again about the order of the procession, and who is to sit by whom at breakfast, although it is so far off; and the curiosity he shows about every article of dress or ornament Miss Evans wears or purchases is far beyond what I had expected. Last night, when we were in the middle of a duet, a parcel arrived per railway, and Mr. Derrick rushed off to superintend the unpacking, to criticise, and generally to admire everything, leaving me in solitary state at the piano."

"It is very flattering to Miss Evans certainly," said Miss Pennithorne; "let us hope that your turn will come soon, Miss Hammond."

Mrs. Hammond remarked dryly that it must be very pleasant to Mrs. Evans to have a daughter so well and comfortably settled, though at some distance from her, no doubt.

"I have no cousins," said Miss Hammond. "If I had I should like very much if my brother married one of them; and Miss Evans being really no relation of Mr. Derrick's does away with the objection some people have to cousins' marriages. But I was rather surprised to see you here. I thought you would have gone to the rectory. Miss Evans must want to consult your taste and judgment now and then."

"But I want her always," said Lady Olivia, "and more than she can be wanted at the rectory, I am sure; besides, she sees her brother every day, I think. It was such a good thought of papa's to have Amy here when he was at Paris."

"Oh! I daresay it was an excellent arrangement," said Clara, "but I was surprised at first." Mrs. Hammond gave her daughter a look which checked her, and she took refuge in the safe subject of the weather, about which Miss Pennithorne was always eloquent, for she watched the

thermometer and the barometer on Olivia's account, who was very sensitive to all changes of temperature.

It might look strange in the world's eyes, but Amy felt happier and safer with Miss Pennithorne than at the rectory. Although Lord Darlington had insisted on civility being shown towards his future wife, he had not required cordiality; and it was not likely that Anthony's love or affection for Amy could be increased by the humiliating result of the conversation between her lover and her brother. It was gall and wormwood to him that he had been forced to confess to a dishonourable action, in which Lucy had been implicated, without any consideration having been shown to the temptation and the provocation; and that Lord Darlington had, in point of fact, bullied and insulted him without his having been able to retaliate. He was glad that his sister was at Thrush Grove, and not at the rectory; he was civil to her when they met, but her opinion was never asked or her taste consulted as to any of the arrangements which he and Lucy delighted to expatiate upon.

Mrs. Evans took it upon herself to give her niece some good advice on the subject of her headstrong opposition to her brother's fond wishes on her behalf, and even the rector himself was so dazzled

by the thought of the great alliance which she might make that he spoke to her of the obligations which she lay under to her brother, and cautioned her against allowing girlish fancies and caprices to interfere with her duty to him. Anthony tried to believe that his sister's going to stay with Lady Olivia committed her to the acceptance of the earl's offers, and the absence of the frequent censure and the constant watching was a relief to Amy. If she could only have forgotten that this could not last, and that her home for the future must be with her brother and his wife, she would have felt happy. Olivia's love was perhaps a little exacting, but it was neither jealous nor capricious, and aunt Sophy's affection and regard was something for Amy to rest in and rejoice over continually. The homely little woman grew quite pretty in Amy's eyes; she seemed to have lost all her nervous fidgety ways, and to have grown more kindly to all the world from having her affections divided between two instead of being engrossed by one.

Often in the evenings, after Lady Olivia had gone to bed, Miss Pennithorne would sit with Amy over the fire and talk of old times—of her cousin Elizabeth; of her good old uncle and aunt; of the appearance of Mr. Herbert Darlington in the quiet city household; of how she

had heard he was intended for Lady Eveline, but how Elizabeth had won him; of her being taken quite away; of her poor children, Frederick Lord Boulton, whom Miss Pennithorne had never seen, and Lady Olivia; of the great fortune which Elizabeth first and last had brought to the earl; of the competence which her uncle and aunt had left to herself; of the solitude in which she lived until Lord Darlington had trusted her with Olivia; of her fear lest her treasure should be taken from her; and her chronic awe of her noble relative or rather connection.

All this discourse naturally and freely given out, without any apparent motive except the wish to relieve her own mind by talking on subjects which could scarcely be told to Olivia, gave Amy Staunton a much less favourable impression of Lord Darlington than his own words and manner. There seemed to be a hardness about him, different indeed from Anthony's, but still egotistic and self-centred. Satisfied with himself and his position, which Anthony was not thoroughly, he seemed to expect everybody and everything to bend to him, and in a general way they did. Amy knew how great his power and influence was over herself, over her brother, over Miss Pennithorne, and over Lady Gower.

"I am surprised, Amy, my dear," said Miss Pennithorne one night, when they had talked a long time on these subjects, "that Lord Darlington has taken your refusal so well, and been altogether so kind and generous about it, as you say; because I have always considered him a man whom it is dangerous to thwart; and, that he should take this more quietly than your brother, who has not half his pride and determination, puzzles me. It is all very well that he stands between you and Mr. Derrick, but unless he goes off at a tangent, and marries some one else at Paris or elsewhere, I cannot believe that you have come to the end of it. And it is strange that the only person to whom I could trust my darling should be the person who, for her own sake, I should least wish to see take the place of her mother. And now, though the end of it may be that some worldly scheming woman may be chosen instead, I shall always be glad that I have helped you just a little to be firm. But dear me; who is that driving up at this time of night, and stopping at the gate. It must be Lord Darlington—it can be no one else."

But it was not Lord Darlington, it was Mrs. Hammond, looking pale and agitated.

"I am on my way to the Grand Junction Station; I think I can catch the night express,

and so save some hours to cross over to France," and Mrs. Hammond could say no more.

"What bad news have you heard?" asked Miss Pennithorne.

"Louis has taken an epidemic fever, and the case is very critical. Not hopeless, thank God, but very serious. I have been telegraphed for. I called round, as I thought I had time, because I want my warm shawl that I lent to Miss Staunton on Thursday night. I shall want it to sit up in, if it please God I am in time to be needed to sit up."

"Let me fetch the shawl," said Amy, "I'll get it in a minute."

"Are you quite sure," said Mrs. Hammond, when Amy was out of the room, "in spite of all the talk I hear from the Evanses, that Miss Staunton has refused Lord Darlington?"

"I told you so as plainly as possible, and her mind is made up on the subject; we were just talking about it when you stopped us."

"Then why is she here?" asked Mrs. Hammond.

"Because we both like her very much, and she likes us, and she says I am the only person who gives her any strength or comfort, for when every one said she was cruel and ungrateful I said she was *right*," said Miss Pennithorne,

feeling the importance of her position. "But hush! here she is with the shawl."

Amy gave the shawl into the hands of its owner, and for the first time in her life Mrs. Hammond felt the beauty of the girl's face, voice, and manner. She had steeled herself against all her charms before, but now she saw that the eyes were lovely that turned to her full of tender concern; and the faltering voice was sweet that said kindly, "Let us hope for the best, Mrs. Hammond; no doubt you have heard the very worst account of Mr. Louis's illness." She took Amy's hand with something very different from the cold mechanical touch necessary in society to those you meet, but for whom you care nothing or less than nothing, and wrung it warmly.

"Thank you, Miss Staunton, I shall be the better for the shawl; yes, I hope I shall be the better for *this*." Amy and Miss Pennithorne saw her into the carriage and heard her tell the coachman to drive as fast as possible to the station.

"She really had no time to spare," said Miss Pennithorne, consulting Bradshaw, "and this was a good mile out of her direct way."

"Strange, to lose time about an old shawl," said Amy, "and she so rich, and with a great

many shawls surely not too good to sit up to watch a dear son's sick bed in. But perhaps the visit was a little relief to her excitement."

"Very likely it was, poor woman; she is so wrapped up in her son, and she cannot reach him in less than thirty-six hours, with all the speed she can make."

"It is a great comfort he is not alone, that his father is with him," said Amy. "The girls will be very anxious till they hear from her, for they are all so fond of Louis."

"He is a good lad, too, and deserves to be cared for," said Miss Pennithorne.

"A very good lad," said Amy. "We all liked Louis very much when he used to ride over to Branxholm. I think he cannot be so very ill after all; Mr. Hammond is just the sort of man to be alarmed when he is away from his wife, and to use the strongest expressions in the telegram. They will telegraph to the girls as soon as Mrs. Hammond can see and judge for herself; and I shall go over to Thornton House as soon as they can have received it."

"I don't think this climate ever suited Mr. Louis, poor fellow," said Miss Pennithorne.

"Mrs. Hammond will be forced to let him have his own way and let him go back to Aralewin," said Amy.

"There is a great deal of property there, I suppose?"

"Yes; Mr. Lindsay used to say that Mr. Hammond was made a rich man against his will—at least he was forced into buying land—and it has become a very valuable estate."

"More valuable than Mr. Lindsay's?"

"Oh! the Branxholm property cannot compare with it as to extent. I should think Mr. Hammond must have fifty thousand acres of land of his own at the least—and as poor Mr. Louis used to say, it was worth looking after."

Miss Pennithorne could not tell how Amy was affected to Louis Hammond; she expressed her concern and her apprehension; she went over daily to Thornton House to get the daily bulletin which his mother sent to the family; and she grew friendly with Clara, who felt the sincerity of her sympathy. All these symptoms were of fair promise, if the poor lad recovered; if Providence ordered otherwise, it was, perhaps, well that Amy was not yet deeply implicated. But Miss Pennithorne was satisfied with the determination Amy expressed that no persuasion could make her marry the earl, and heard her idea about going out as a governess in case her brother continued to press it, with approval.

At present there appeared to be a lull, a space for Amy to gather up her strength in; the constant dropping that wears away the stone had almost ceased, and the earl's letters, although they kept him in view, were not written to herself.

It was, indeed, thirty-six hours before Mrs. Hammond reached her son's sick-bed, to find him certainly dangerously, but not by any means hopelessly ill. He did not know her when she came in, although he retained a dim recognition of his father, who had never left him since he was first seized. His mind wandered very much to Australian scenes and Australian life; to sheep and cattle, dogs and horses, stockmen and shepherds. He was taking long journeys on horseback, his horse was knocked up or had gone astray, and he was wearily pursuing his way on foot. He was lost in the bush and perishing of thirst—every draught of water which was offered to his fevered lips was exclaimed against as being too salt or bitter to drink, or looked upon as the very last drop in their store, and that there could not be another drop obtained till he had perished. Then he had got a sunstroke, his head was so bad and so confused; but still in the midst of his wanderings Mrs. Hammond, as she sat up night after night in the shawl which Amy had restored

to her, felt relieved to think that he had not once mentioned her name, nor any of the later scenes of his life in which he had suffered so much from love and jealousy. She knew she could not have borne that well, and was thankful that she was spared it, and that the fitful treacherous memory of fever went back so many years.

She asked Mr. Hammond, on an early opportunity, if he thought Louis had got over his disappointment with regard to Miss Staunton, and if he was really as cheerful as his letters had given out that he seemed to be. Mr. Hammond scarcely thought so. He had taken the whole affair much more to heart than was at all reasonable. When he had heard that Amy had gone to Miss Pennithorne's to live, instead of staying at her aunt's, and how strange Clara thought it looked, although of course there were reasons for all things, he had been low and moody. He had expected that the two marriages would take place on the same day, and had read the letters curiously, always with a sense of relief at the thing not being announced, and yet still with a desire to hear the last and the worst of it. When the medical man had asked about the constitution and habits of the young man, his father had told in his imperfect French to the best of his power all he knew, and the doctor had shaken

his head significantly when he seemed to apprehend his meaning as to Louis's disappointment in love, as if he thought that might have something to do with the fever.

But the father augured well from his silence on the subject in his delirious wanderings; he had read somewhere that a good sharp fever cures love in many cases, and he hoped Louis might recover from both distempers at once. If he had been excessively alarmed before Mrs. Hammond's arrival, he was now disposed to be extravagantly hopeful. He had such overweening confidence in her powers of nursing and in all her general capabilities. Perhaps husband and wife never loved each other more than they did now. Mrs. Hammond's heart smote her that she had accepted this kind, upright, generous man, as a sort of *pis aller* long ago, and had looked on herself as his superior, whereas in many cases his instincts had been wiser than her prejudices. She felt now that she would not have been so happy a woman as John Derrick's wife as she had been as George Hammond's. The conduct of the former had received from her a new reading lately, for, although Anthony was not in all respects like his father, there was sufficient resemblance between them to show her much that she had been blind to when she was Clarissa Hope. Lord Dar-

lington could not despise Anthony Derrick more heartily than Mrs. Hammond did now, and when she looked at her good husband, who was so anxious she should not be over-fatigued or over-taxed, who brought her all the food she could take, and watched anxiously while she ate it, and thought of the affectionate loving family whom they had been blessed with, she felt that she never had been half grateful enough for all the bounty God had showed her. There were Anthony, Edith, and Amy, all at variance—quarrels, piques, and differences separating three whom nature had meant to be joined in the strong family bond of love.

How shadowy and unreal a thing seemed now that old love to a man whose character she had mistaken!—and for that shadowy memory she had been unjust and prejudiced against an innocent child. If Louis were only spared to her, and if he still retained his affection to Amy Staunton, she should act very differently for the future; but she was not so hopeful as his father was, she had not the confidence in her own powers of arresting disease that Mr. Hammond had for her. Still youth and a naturally good constitution—for she thought the better for his constitution on account of his taking this fever

—might bring him safely through in answer to her many prayers.

She did not allow herself to hope till the crisis was past, and Louis turned on her an intelligent look and fully recognised her. All her pent-up feelings gave way at once, and she wept tears that relieved her.

"Mother, where am I?" said Louis. "Surely I am not home?" and he looked round on the unfamiliar French apartment.

"No, my boy; you have been travelling on the continent with your father, and you have had a little attack of fever, but you are better now."

"Weak, however," said Louis, raising one languid arm, and letting it fall suddenly as if it was too much of an effort to keep it up.

"Yes, very weak, of course; but we shall soon get you over that now that you will be allowed to eat something," and Mrs. Hammond hastened to get the food prescribed after the crisis had been turned, and administered it carefully to him.

"I suppose I have been a long while here in this queer state, and you beside me? Where is my father?"

"He has gone out for half-an-hour's walk; he got so anxious I made him go, but he will be in presently. Oh! Louis, what a good father you have got."

"So he is, so he is. Mr. Derrick is married by this time, I suppose?"

"Yes, Louis, he is."

"Lord Darlington, is he married too?" asked Louis, wistfully. It was not the case that the love had gone with the fever.

"No, Louis, Lord Darlington is *not* married."

"Not yet, mamma."

"Not yet, nor at all likely to be, so far as I know."

"Not likely to be," said Louis, raising himself a little in bed, and then falling back. "I thought—"

"Don't think anything at all about the matter, just now, Louis, my dear boy," said his mother, "until you are stronger, but when you are well enough I will tell you all I know. I shall not oppose you any more, but help you all I can, and so will your father, so forgive me if I have appeared unreasonable."

"Dear, good mother," said Louis, kissing her face, which was bent over his. "I have nothing to forgive you; and you will really help me in this?"

"Not unless you keep quiet, you delay everything by rash, foolish impatience. Here is your father! will he not be delighted to see you taking food again? but you must be quiet.

Every liberty you take will delay our return to England a day or a week."

In spite of Louis's youth, it was some weeks before he gained strength enough to undertake the journey home. He was naturally a little impatient and hard to induce to be sufficiently careful. The news from his sisters was not so interesting as it had been when he was ill. The wedding at the rectory was over; Mr. and Mrs. Derrick had gone to Darlington Castle for the honeymoon; Amy Staunton had left Miss Pennithorne's shortly after the marriage, and had gone to Stanmore, where she was quite alone. Miss Edith Derrick had not been at the marriage, she had not been invited and would not have gone if she had been asked; but she and her aunt, the elder Miss Derrick, had set up housekeeping together, and never meant to have anything to do with Mr. or Mrs. Derrick. It must be very solitary for Miss Staunton to be at Stanmore by herself, Clara Hammond thought, and she seemed to feel leaving her friends at Belton very much.

It was not for some time after his mother's communication, not, indeed, till they were about to start on their homeward journey, that Louis, after appearing very thoughtful for a while, asked her how she came to know that Lord Darlington was not likely to marry Miss Staunton?

"Because he asked her, and she refused him, very much to her brother's disappointment."

"And how did you learn that, mamma?"

"Miss Pennithorne told me, Louis."

"And how did Miss Pennithorne know?" asked Louis, with that curious sensitiveness as to the manner in which these things became public which is natural to a lover who means to make a proposal and is not quite confident of success. "Did Miss Staunton tell her?"

"I believe Miss Pennithorne had it from the best authority. His Lordship made no secret of it; and I suppose wished his daughter to use a little influence with her friend."

"What a curious idea! Lady Olivia might be ten years older than Amy. But when did you learn this yourself, mother?"

"Miss Pennithorne told me of it some time ago, indeed, just before you started for the continent."

"And you did not tell me, mother," said Louis, looking not angry, but deeply grieved.

"It cannot make much difference, Louis. There is very little time lost, and you are really a pair of children to think of being married."

"It is not our being married, mother, that may be as far off as ever; but when I thought she was selling herself for money and rank, I felt

distrustful of everybody and everything. You should have told me that she was not so base as that as soon as you knew it. It might have altered our plans, I might not have gone on the continent if I had thought she was free, and then I might not have had this illness. But I have been thinking over this affair, and I cannot help seeing that you have had a dislike to Miss Staunton always. You said when I first came to myself that you would oppose me no longer, but would try to further my wishes, which was very kind of you; but now that I am quite well and likely to live, do you feel the old dislike? It would be very hard for poor Amy that if I should be so happy as to win her love she must displease all her family and not be received cordially into mine. It would be very selfish and presumptuous to ask such a thing. And yet, mother, I love her more I think than ever, for if she has had the courage to withstand all the temptations and the pressure which must have been put upon her, she is a noble girl. But I should have been told this, I really should have been told it before."

It was not Mrs. Hammond's custom, as her husband had said to Louis, to acknowledge herself to have been in the wrong, but on this occasion she did it handsomely. She did not tell

Louis the palliatives with which she had quieted her conscience; she said merely, that she had done wrong, and that she was very sorry for it, and that now she would make all the atonement possible to her by promising to receive Miss Staunton as a daughter if Louis could win her.

"I dislike her no longer, though I own I have done so. Indeed I feel really kindly to her, not only for your sake, but because I feel she deserves to be loved. You may rely on my loving her, Louis."

"That is satisfactory," said Louis, and he rested on the assurance for a few minutes. With his mother's help he felt stronger and safer. "And Clara has learned to like her too," said he. "But there is one thing I want you and my father clearly to understand. I don't think that there is any chance of a fortune with Miss Staunton; for, although her brother is so wealthy, she is altogether dependent on him, and he dislikes me, and will not consent to her marrying me."

"Never mind," said Mrs. Hammond, "we shall run that risk. Your father naturally looked to your doing well in a worldly point of view, and, of course, if Mr. Derrick is not very unreasonable, Miss Staunton ought to have quite as much as you have any right to expect. I do not think highly of Mr. Derrick; but after inviting his sis-

ter to leave Australia, he can scarcely for shame refuse her a modest dowry when she makes a marriage that is respectable and suitable, to say the least of it."

"Do not build on that, mamma. It is a family in which quarrels and piques are strong and lasting. See how Mr. Derrick's own sister has turned against him on account of a marriage that he considers respectable and suitable; and he was his own master. Now Mr. Derrick has always claimed great power over Amy, and the power of the purse is one that he is welcome to use for me. I know that the poor girl is not happy with him, and that makes me the more anxious that I can promise that she shall be happy with me."

"I think you may, Louis. Money or no money, I think I can promise that your father and I will welcome her to our hearts if she loves you."

"Then that is all right," said Louis, and he resumed the train of his hopes and fears and difficulties very much in the manner usual to him before Lord Darlington crossed his path at Belton, thought of letters he might write, speeches he might make, circumstances that might happen, opportunities that ought to offer themselves to favour his cause, and then rushed off to pack his portmanteau in a hurry, and did it in such a

hurry that his mother had to take everything out, and repack it, so as to make it hold the miscellaneous articles which he had omitted. On the following day they turned their steps homeward, and meeting with no disaster or delay, they reached Thornton House in health and safety.

CHAPTER X.

MR. DERRICK'S MARRIAGE-DAY.

It was not till the occasion of her brother's marriage that Amy Staunton fully woke up to feel the peculiarity and the awkwardness of her situation with Lord Darlington. The earl had come forward in the handsomest manner, as Mrs. Evans said. Perhaps Lucy thought he put himself forward a little too much, but the number and the magnificence of his presents to herself made her forgive him for disturbing the arrangements which had been made by Mr. Derrick and herself. Lucy had set her heart on Lord Darlington's giving her away at the altar, as her own father intended to perform the marriage ceremony; but the earl was not willing to act as a parent, or to bestow a bride on Anthony, from whom he expected soon to receive one. Lord Darlington suggested that a High Church dignitary, who was under obligations to himself,

might relieve Mr. Evans from his priestly duties, and allow him to discharge his parental obligations.

For himself, Lord Darlington elected the post of groomsman, and, although Lucy told her lover that it was strange and incongruous that a widower should act in that capacity, and that it might be supposed to cast a gloom over the whole proceedings, the earl's determination to go as groomsman, or not at all, carried his point. It was true, as Anthony said to Lucy, that the earl's widowhood had never been of the disconsolate order; that it had been of very long standing, and was probably very near its close; and that small objections should bow to great people, particularly as Lord Darlington's appearance and manner were anything but gloomy; and his relationship at present and his intention of making that relationship still closer, made his presence at the marriage, even on his own terms, indispensable. Lucy felt that the Bishop's presence was a positive advantage, and had just begun to reconcile herself to the earl's acting as groomsman as the very best arrangement possible when he stipulated in addition that he should be the only groomsman, and made it a *sine qua non* that Miss Staunton should be the only bridesmaid.

"As many young ladies as you please," he

wrote to Miss Evans, "but let them not be bridesmaids. It is a mere mockery to say that you elect six bridesmaids when there is only need for one, and all this stream of youthful beauty in uniform can only have the effect of making the bridegroom look insignificant. Besides, you can choose one bridesmaid without its being at all invidious. There is no one who stands to you and Mr. Derrick in the same position as Miss Staunton, there is no one perhaps of your acquaintance who could be placed in juxtaposition with myself pleasantly and suitably, whereas if you choose six of your friends, there are probably six others who think they too might have had the honour."

It was evident to Lucy that if Lord Darlington did not have things arranged as he pleased he would not come at all; and, as that would never do, Lucy and Anthony gave in, and tried to persuade themselves that a small select party was infinitely better than a crowd. The earl had offered them Darlington Castle for a month or six weeks, or indeed as long as they liked, and no concession appeared too great to gratify him, especially as the Beresfords and Lady Gower were disposed to be a little shy of the obscure person whom Anthony had chosen to share his fortunes. Lord Darlington's final present to the bride on her wedding morning was a set of

sapphires that eclipsed even her husband's lavish gifts. She wore as many of her ornaments as she possibly could on the great occasion, because, as they were all presents, she thought it right, she said. But she enjoyed her own magnificence to the full; and though she showed the proper amount of emotion and behaved beautifully—as her mother expressed it—crying at the right time, and smiling at the right time, and blushing at the right time, it was more the sense of her own importance, and the consciousness of the position she took in the world on that day, than any sense of her responsibility or her duties that overcame her. She liked Anthony as much as she could like anybody, and he looked very happy, although he was more nervous and less graceful in his happiness than she was.

Next to her daughter's appearance and admirable behaviour, and the impressive manner in which the Bishop performed the important ceremony, Mrs. Evans was especially delighted with Lord Darlington's conduct on that important day. He was the life of the party; he made small jokes at the church door, was most happy in his congratulatory remarks after the ceremony had taken place, and made the most brilliant speeches at the wedding breakfast, and he was particularly attentive, as was to be expected, to his young

cousin the bridesmaid. When the carriage had rolled off, bearing the happy pair to the station where they were to start on their way to Darlington Castle, the earl became livelier than ever, and all the guests, many of whom had never before seen a nobleman in private life, were most favourably impressed with this representative of the British aristocracy. Lord Darlington had had in his youth his full share of the family good looks, and even now was very handsome for his time of life. He never dressed too youthfully, but with perfect taste and good judgment; and, but for the correct register kept in the peerage of Great Britain and Ireland, and the grown-up sickly daughter whom every one knew, he might have been supposed to be ten years younger than he really was. But wedding breakfasts come to an end at last, although they are usually prolonged a full hour after people are tired of them. The earl was the last to take leave.

"You return with me to Miss Pennithorne's, I suppose, Miss Staunton?"

"No, my lord; I thought you understood that I am to stay here with my aunt till I return to Stanmore. That is the arrangement which Anthony and my uncle here have made for me," said Amy, quietly and firmly.

"Indeed; I am sorry to hear it, for Olivia has

not at all reconciled herself to the idea of losing you so soon. But I am sure you do not know what to do with yourself this long afternoon. I always feel as if a breakfast party was the most preposterous thing in the world. You seem to have ended the day before it has rightly begun. Olivia and Miss Pennithorne will be most anxious to hear your account of the ceremony, and your description of the dresses, so come with me to talk it over—that will get rid of an hour or two for both of us."

"You are quite competent, Lord Darlington, to tell everything about it yourself," said Amy.

"I appeal to Mrs. Evans to tell me candidly if I have not been too busily engaged in talking to have had any time for observing?"

"Indeed, my lord, you have been delightful company. Mr. Evans and I feel greatly obliged to you for exerting yourself so much."

"Whereas Amy has been as quiet as a mouse, and I know she has taken notes of everything for Olivia. Don't you think that she had better go to Thrush Grove and give the freshest intelligence of this most interesting day, Mrs. Evans? And, somehow, I feel as if Miss Staunton belonged to me for the day. After our arduous duties, so admirably performed this morning in concert, I think our partnership should not be dissolved at

once, but might continue in force at least till evening. Don't you think so, Mrs. Evans?"

"Oh! yes; you are quite right, my lord, and I am sure Amy will be very glad to go. Only I suppose she should change her dress."

"That would be a pity when Olivia wishes to see her exactly as she looked; but as you would not like to walk to Thrush Grove in this attire, Amy, I shall order Barnes to bring round the carriage. You can change your dress at Miss Pennithorne's."

Lord Darlington's private carriage, conveyed to Belton to grace the occasion, was soon brought round, and Amy stepped into it, not sure whether she was right or wrong, but following the natural instinct she had to do what was expected of her. The earl proposed, as the afternoon was lovely, to take a drive before going to Thrush Grove, and so to get quit of a little more superfluous time, and he was about to give orders to drive round by Thornton House and Hollingford when Amy stopped him. "I should prefer to go straight to Miss Pennithorne's," said she.

"Just as you please," said the earl, as he stepped into the carriage, saying the words: "Thrush Grove," and sat down beside her. She looked grave, almost sad; the emotions, the doubts, the fears which Lucy had not felt for her-

self Amy had felt for her; and besides that, her own fate was pressing itself upon her hardly now.

"Now, my dear little cousin," said the earl, "now that we are away from all those tiresome fools," and he passed his handkerchief over his forehead with a sense of relief, "now that we have uttered all the insincere twaddle appropriate to the occasion, and made proper congratulations, and paid hollow compliments, let me just say that I condole with you. This new sister will not add to your happiness. There is a dangerous flash in her eye, an imperiousness that will sway your brother in the direction which appears to her small mind to be most advantageous or agreeable to herself—to Mrs. Derrick, of Stanmore Park—who is now the centre of the universe."

How true this was; but why had Lord Darlington gone through so much insincerity before hand; and, with his ready flattery and his happily-turned phrases, made Amy appear cold and unfeeling?

"How has Mr. Derrick behaved to you lately, since he has been so much under this influence?" asked the earl gently.

"He is colder to me than he used to be, but he does not find so much fault with me."

"For that I must take some credit. Did you get your letter all right by the mail this month?"

"Yes, all right," said Amy. "I wish, Lord Darlington — I wish — that I had never left Australia."

"Oh! you must not say that. 'Whatever is, is right, that truth is clear,' as Pope says."

"It may be true," said Amy, "but I am sure it is not at all clear."

"A very correct criticism, Miss Staunton; but I see the truth clearer as I grow older. Yes, I repeat it, *as I grow older*. Strange that I should not be sensitive as to my age," said the earl, smiling and bowing, "even in this company. You see that we of the aristocracy cannot possibly conceal our age, so we do better, we laugh at it. I was, however, younger than your brother when I was married. I suppose you know that it was intended that I should be married to your mother long ago."

Poor Amy felt inclined to come out with "I wish you had," but she thought better of it, and said she had heard that there had been some such family arrangement.

"Yes, it was talked of, and at one time I was very much inclined to go in for it, but your respected grandfather was altogether too dictatorial for me. I was heir to the title and to what re-

mained of the estates—that was clear enough. Your mother was then a very lovely girl, but I did not feel sufficient interest in her or affection for her to make me submit to the old earl's caprices and bad temper, so I preferred pleasing myself and being independent. Of course the old earl never forgave me; he had a very hard unforgiving temper. They say that your brother is a Derrick, and not a Darlington; but, though I cannot trace the family features, I can trace the Darlington temper. You have the family beauty, but, as is proper for a young lady, you have not that little spice of the devil in you that all the Darlingtons are said to possess, at least it has not made its appearance yet."

"All," said Amy; "not mamma, surely?"

"Oh! yes—I beg your pardon—mamma too; at least when she married your father in such a hurry the world said that it was a little of the old leaven cropping out. As for myself, I do not pretend to have escaped the taint altogether. You look often at me gravely and reproachfully because you fancy I say things that I do not think. As a man of the world, I cannot wear my heart on my sleeve, and tell my likes and dislikes, my loves and my contempts, to those with whom I come in contact. To you I have always

been sincere, and I hope I may always continue to be so."

"I have no right to reproach you, my lord, I did not mean to do so."

"You cannot help telling your thoughts in your countenance, at least to one who studies it as I do. But although I put in no claim to being faultless, and although I am aware that the world may criticise my character, I only stipulate that whatever they say *of* me they shall say nothing disagreeable or offensive *to* me, and I act on the same principle to the world. I wished a long talk with you, but here we are at Thrush Grove. I shall send away the carriage, for if you will go back to the rectory, I shall see you home. Now, lady fair, let Olivia see you looking your best."

Lady Olivia Darlington admired her friend as much as the earl expected, but she was evidently satisfied with the sight of the groomsman and bridesmaid, for instead of the conversation turning, as Mrs. Evans had supposed, on the marriage and the dresses and the arrangements and the speeches, after one or two languid enquiries were answered, the friends chatted on more congenial and interesting subjects. Tennyson's new poems, which Lord Darlington had brought out with him, were intrusted to Amy to read aloud.

She sat in her white robes on her old low seat at Olivia's side, and, in the exquisite melody of her voice, the deep poetical feeling which she threw into the words, and the little pauses she made at every passage of peculiar beauty, the marriage and Anthony and Lucy were forgotten. They were all apparently in fairy land; even Miss Pennithorne, who fancied that she was the most prosaic of mortals, paid the tribute of her tears to what she called Amy's wonderful reading.

"I cannot understand why Amy cannot sing," said Lady Olivia; "her talking and reading voice is so sweet, so flexible, and so varied. Miss Hammond's, on the contrary, is rather unpleasant to me except when she sings."

"Amy could sing a few things very sweetly if she tried, but her voice has not strength or compass enough to master the fashionable songs which Mr. Derrick thought the only things worth learning," said the earl. "Don't you recollect singing a little song your father wrote the words of to me once under that elm at Darlington Castle? I think you could always sing to please me."

"And me, too," said Lady Olivia; "but Amy would never allow to me that she could sing a note. I shall be jealous if you sing to papa and not to me, Amy."

"It was only once," said Amy. "It was because the song was about mamma that I did it; but I know what I can do and what I cannot, and I agree with Anthony as to the singing. I prefer to do what I can do tolerably well."

"Now you are tired," said the earl, "we must have some compassion; let me read a little to relieve you, although I know I cannot do the poet so much justice;" and he took the book and read for half-an-hour with an articulation distinct enough, but somewhat too like prose even for his own taste.

"Now," said Amy, "I must go home."

"I hate the sound of those words," said Lady Olivia. "I think it is very cross of Amy to go to the Evanses, who do not care the hundredth part for her that I do."

"But it is settled that I should go there," said Amy.

"There is a note I got from your brother on this subject, which he desired me to give to you," said Lord Darlington.

It was as follows:—

"DEAR AMY,

"If you prefer staying at Miss Pennithorne's to going to the rectory, you are quite welcome to do so. There is no occasion why you

should leave Lady Olivia till you join Lucy and myself at Stanmore Park, and you can see your aunt and cousins when you please.

"Yours affectionately,

"A. DERRICK."

"Olivia wrote Mr. Derrick a petition this morning which he could scarcely refuse on such a happy day, so there need be no separation of friends. I believe Mrs. Evans also understands the arrangement," said Lord Darlington.

"Then you can stay, Amy," said Olivia.

"I think not," said Amy, shaking her head. "I shall come to see you as often as I can, but I ought to stay at my aunt's."

"It looks so odd to stay here while your brother was at the rectory, and then to go as soon as he leaves."

"Perhaps it does look odd. I daresay much that I do for the best does look odd. But they may suppose the rectory was crowded before, and that now there is room for me. If I don't come to see you to-morrow I shall write to you, Olivia, but I must bid you good-by now. I really do not need any escort, Lord Darlington. I should prefer going home alone."

"I cannot allow that;—Mrs. Evans would not forgive me such neglect as that," said the earl.

The hand shook a little that touched his arm lightly. It was evident that the poetry was forgotten, and that Amy was living her own life again, and finding it hard.

"This day has been rather too much for you, Amy," said he, softly.

"Yes, it has," and Amy paused a few seconds; "but I wish to come to some explanation with you before it ends."

"So do I, Amy; I cannot bear the shadow of a coolness to come between you and myself. You seem to be displeased with me, I know not why?"

"Because, my lord, you are hemming me in; because I feel that between you and Anthony and Lucy and Olivia and my aunt at Gower's Court and my aunt here I am getting into an entanglement that I cannot see my way out of. You get your own way with them all, and I cannot get any indulgence except through you. You said that you were going to try to forget your old foolish thoughts about me when you were in Paris, but I do not think you have."

"How can I change my feelings towards you, Amy? Are you less lovely, less amiable, less bewitching than you were? Have you conquered poor aunt Sophy; and do you think I can set myself free because I wish it? Wherever you go you win all hearts."

"I have not won a single friend who is of any use to me," said Amy, bitterly. "I want somebody to protect me—from you."

"From me! I think you judge me harshly. Are my attentions to you so painful or so obtrusive that you wish them warded off? Protect yourself, Amy; tell me when and where I offend you, and depend upon it, I shall take care not to repeat the offence."

"But your attentions are never obtrusive, they are only constant and insidious; and although you are so gentle and so considerate when we are alone that I sometimes feel as if I could almost love you, when we are in company you are so cheerful, so confident, so confidential that I know everybody thinks ——" and here Amy stopped.

"Thinks me a much happier man than I really am. Well, I suppose they do. Whatever I may feel, the outer world shall not know it, unless you particularly wish it. In that case I shall obey you, and tell how much love I have lavished without the prospect of a return."

"No, not that exactly; but you know you should not look so very happy as you did to-day; —and then I feel that you order me to do this and to do that, and it is always easy and pleasant to obey you."

"Because what I wish is always reasonable."

"Perhaps so, but then other people fancy that I am bound to obey you."

"That you can never be. But I *was* happy to-day. In spite of my want of sympathy with bride and bridegroom and bridal party, you were near me for the first time for weeks, and I could not help wishing, almost hoping, that from your exacting brother and his selfish wife you would turn to one for refuge who has always been your friend, and may be more."

"Or less," said Amy.

"Recollect also in excuse for me that when I am in company or society with you I feel all the advantages of my position. Undoubtedly I may have been a good deal spoiled by worldly prosperity; but I am greatly mistaken if even in your eyes there was any one as agreeable as myself in the party this morning. I feel the position I could give to you if you would only accept it, and I also feel that your present relations with your brother are false and uncomfortable. But when we are alone together, as we are now, I feel that I ask and hope for too much. Can you forgive me?"

"I can—I do. I wish I *could* love you."

"Then you would find repose, Amy," and the earl took her hand quietly.

"I am not unreasonable with any one but you;

I wonder that you think me amiable at all. Why do you not hate me?" said Amy.

"Because I cannot; because so long as there is the thousandth part of a chance of winning you I cannot relinquish the hope, and there is more than that, I think," said Lord Darlington, laying a slight but still a perceptible stress on the word *more*, which made Amy feel how true it was.

There was indeed much more than that. It is hard for a woman to be displeased at a man's finding it difficult or impossible to give up loving her. Although Amy had been greatly embarrassed by Lord Darlington's addresses, and persecuted by her brother for her rejection of them, she could not help admiring his constancy and perseverance. She hesitated. She had been angry, but he always managed to get the better of her in any little quarrel. Three several efforts she had made, and at the end of each struggle he had strengthened his position with her. Supposing he was really to abandon his suit and try to hate her, would not Anthony and his wife be embittered against her beyond forgiveness? She began to think again about taking a situation, and again about Allan Lindsay, and how he would reply to the cruel letter she had written to him.

"You expect rather an interesting letter from

Australia," said Lord Darlington, who seemed to have some wonderful key to her thoughts. "I have often regretted that you chose me for an adviser. But if I had really been disinterested —if you had been no more to me than Miss Evans or Miss Hammond—I should still have given you the same advice. You may sometimes regret that you ever entered the charmed circle of fashion and culture and refinement, although it is your natural atmosphere; but there can be no doubt that it has unfitted you for making that worthy young man happy. I know, too, that your liking for him never amounted to love, although it might have grown to it by habit and by your gratitude for kind offices done to you. I know the signs of the real passion, and you were no more in love with Allan Lindsay than you were with me on the day you consulted me. And as I would not have you marry me to escape from your brother's importunities, I cannot think it right that you should marry this young man to escape from mine. But, Amy, my dearest life, forgive me for calling you so, with me you would find repose; there is not a friend you have who would not rejoice in our union; all the conflicting difficulties with your brother would disappear, and you could teach his wife her proper place. I do not say marry me whether you love me or not,

but I believe that you really love me quite well enough to make it right. I do not think you know how dear I am to you, and perhaps you never can until you allow me to be open with you. You would be happier if our fates were united than if I went away and you never saw me more."

"You can try that," said Amy, "it is not irrevocable like marriage. Indeed you have tried it. I was very happy while you were in Paris."

"You heard of me three times a week and you knew I was to be here now. You were interested in my letters; you were glad to see me again; and, although I have come in for a severe scolding, I have been forgiven."

"You mean to make some stay at Thrush Grove?" said Amy, abruptly.

"Yes, Olivia wishes it, and I have promised to remain."

"Then I shall go to Stanmore Park."

"What! alone?"

"So much the better. You *cannot* go to visit me there because I shall be quite alone."

"But you will be so uncomfortable."

"Mrs. Harrison will take good care of me. I must have a little quiet to study in, for if the worst comes to the worst, I shall take a situation. I also wish to receive Allan's letter and to know

how he took my dismissal. You need not question me, I am not disposed to conceal anything from you; I have not written to him since that letter that you know so well about. I have written to his sister, but not to him."

"I do not think Mr. Derrick would allow of such a thing as your going to live by yourself at Stanmore. There is your aunt Lady Gower's house open to you."

"Yes, a house where you are a privileged visitor, as you are at the rectory. My aunt Lady Gower does not scold me as Anthony does, or lecture me as my aunt Evans does; but when I try to make her understand my feelings she only laughs at me, and says I don't know what I am talking about. I can get no help whatever from her. You are not to drive me up into a corner, my lord. You can do what you like with Anthony; obtain this concession for me, that I may stay at Stanmore till he returns to it."

"You try my influence with your brother very hard, for it is always to be used against myself; but to please you I would do anything. And I am not to see you?"

"You cannot, you will not dare go to Stanmore contrary to my express wish. I don't want you to write to me, or to come to me, or to speak to my aunts or to Anthony about me. Don't make

matters so terribly difficult for me by constantly hovering about me; take back the presents you sent me this morning which I cannot accept; if I am to be won it is not by such means. If any one speaks about me to you tell the truth, at least don't let it be thought that I am compromised."

"Well," said the earl with a sigh, "your terms are hard, but I accept them; only I must plead for one thing—let me write to you sometimes; answer me or not as you please, but let me write a note now and then. It shall be a very discreet one."

"Then you agree to everything else; and you will arrange that Anthony will not object to my staying at Stanmore. It is very hard that I must apply to you. Oh! if Lucy had been different she might have helped me in my perplexities, whereas she only adds to them. And Edith, although she objects to everything else Anthony has done, agrees with him entirely as to how I should be disposed of, so that even if she would receive me she would not protect me."

Amy spoke in such a forlorn way that her lover felt for her; he half wished she was not so desolate, but it was only a half wish. But he expressed the partial feeling as strongly as if it had fully possessed his mind; a species of hypo-

crisy not at all uncommon in the world, even amongst very worthy people.

It cost him some trouble and diplomacy to gain the favour that Amy wished, but he succeeded at last. Her aunt and cousins were very much surprised at her determination; she said she did not wish to see Lord Darlington, and that was her reason. The earl himself made excuses for her, and, as he had gone in for success on this point, he began to think that it was really desirable. Solitude and seclusion might help his cause as well as solicitation and opportunity. She would weary for his letters, she would miss his attentions, she would look forward to her brother's return with apprehension, and by the time Derrick and his bride appeared at Stanmore Park, when he too might present himself, her heart would be softened towards him, and she would confess that she would be happy with him.

He was often astonished at his own steadiness and perseverance, and his friends were also surprised at it. He had had many slight love passages in his long widowhood; but he had been inconstant, fastidious, and unwilling to sacrifice time and ease for sake of any one woman. Now he felt that if he were to marry at all it must be done soon. His next heir, failing his imbecile son, who had hitherto given him little or no

trouble, had grown somewhat presumptuous on his presumptive inheritance, and had been exceeding the allowance which the earl had made him. Lord Darlington had decreed that he ought to make choice of a partner for life about the time when Amy came out, and her beauty and confiding manner had charmed him into a love that taught him patience and submission and insight and courage. His conscience was not altogether asleep; he had had some premonitory signs that he was growing an old man, if not in appearance, at least in constitution; but his love made him more careful, and he had not been so well or felt so young for years as he did when he was at Amy Staunton's side. No, he was good for twenty years' life yet, and perhaps for more, he said to himself; he did not mean to leave her a young widow to make a second choice; he would live a regular quiet life, and she would take good care of him, for, once married to him, he knew that he could depend upon her. All her conscientious hesitation, both about Allan Lindsay and himself, showed that she meant to give a great deal of love to the man she married.

The only thing he dreaded at present was the letter from her Australian lover. Passionate appeals even from the other side of the world, to

old friendship and old tenderness might undo the work he had so carefully elaborated for so many months. And to fail now, when all the world knew that he had gone in so heavily for this girl —to have her snatched from him by an Australian boor, who could not half admire or comprehend her—would place him in a position at once humiliating and ridiculous. Besides he more than half believed that Amy did not really like Allan so much as she liked himself, and that if she married him it would be because her brother was unreasonable and unkind, rather than because Allan Lindsay was loved.

CHAPTER XI.

SOLITUDE AND DISAPPOINTMENT.

LORD DARLINGTON had guessed pretty correctly; it was the case that Amy did feel lonely. Her studies did not interest her as she had expected, for it was a preoccupied and anxious mind that she brought to bear upon them. She was angry at herself for the pleasant excitement that Lord Darlington's letters brought to her. At first they were short, but they became gradually longer and more frequent. They were discreet so far; but the pleasant gossiping with regard to himself, to Olivia and Miss Pennithorne and the Evans family; the notes about books, the remarks about people, kept him always favourably before her. She felt always after reading them as if she should like to answer them, and it cost her an effort to refrain from doing so.

Anthony and Lucy were so much engrossed

with themselves that they did not write much to Amy, so that she was left very much to the contemplation of Lord Darlington's letters. The Australian mail had met with some accident, and when it did arrive there was no letter for Amy, not a line. Allan, then, had accepted her rejection without a protest — without an appeal; how different from the earl, who hoped against hope, and who persevered in spite of repeated refusals. Was it out of sight, out of mind? Amy forgot how hardly she had written, and only recollected how tenderly she had felt towards Allan. He could not let her go so easily if he cared much about her. After an hour or two's suffering from the disappointment and mortification she felt on this score she put on her hat and cloak, and walked to Millmount. Allan might have enclosed a letter to his sister, to be forwarded to Amy's address; but Jessie had had no letter either, and was in a state of wonder and consternation at the unprecedented occurrence.

"Since we are all disappointed," said Amy, cheering up a little, "it is clear that there has been some mistake about posting the letters."

"I am always afraid that something may have happened to my father," said Jessie, "and, strangely enough, I never open a letter without a dim sort of fear and a sense of relief when I

find all is well; but getting no letter at all is far worse."

"Bad news is sure to come, Jessie," said Amy, "and to come soon. I recollect how provoked they all were at Branxholm, because the mail that brought my brother's letter came in two days before it was due; and I fancied as this mail was so late there must be good news in it. Not but that I feel as much disappointed as yourself, that there is no letter at all."

"It's very hard not to hear a word about any of them," said Jessie. "But when is your brother, the squire, coming back with his lady?"

"I don't know; not for some time, I think."

"It must be very dull for you to be all by yourself. Come oftener to see us, Amy, my dear. George would be delighted if you would come."

"Jessie," said Amy, "supposing I were in trouble again, and wanted a home as I did on that terrible day you recollect so well, would I be as welcome at Millmount as you made me at Branxholm?"

"No doubt, Amy, no doubt of it."

"Even if my brother, the squire, were displeased with me?"

"Yes, even then," said Jessie, eagerly.

"I don't know that I'll call on you for help,"

said Amy, wearily, "but it is very good of you to offer it."

"Then you don't look to get on well with the new wife, although she is your cousin," said Jessie. "If she is like her mother she can scarcely be a girl you can care for. I suppose she thought it was a great marriage."

"She is really very fond of Anthony and Anthony of her; it is a love marriage on both sides. And when you see her you will acknowledge how handsome she is, only I was surprised at it at first, and she rather felt disappointed at my reception of the news."

"I suppose the wedding was a very grand affair," said Mrs. Copeland, who just at this moment came into the room and joined the friends, "at least the account in the papers was a fine one; but we had very gay doings on the estate here too."

"Oh! I believe it was considered a quiet marriage for one in my brother's position," said Amy.

"We want very much to know when Mr. Derrick comes home," said Mrs. Copeland, "for we can get no assurance about the lease from Mr. Dixon, who says these matters must all be referred to the squire himself, and Mr. Copeland is very anxious about it indeed, because he would alter his arrangements for the crops if we were

sure of it. I don't think we are favourites with Mr. Dixon, at least he gives us very short answers, and I think he wishes Millmount for a nephew of his own, so that we depend very much on the squire's goodwill."

"Oh! Mrs. Copeland," said Jessie, "I think that if we can afford to give the rent that is the main thing, and I am sure that we can outbid such as young Staples."

"The rent is not everything, Jessie; has not Tallboys got Brocklehurst over old Mr. Healey's head, and pays seventy-five pounds a year less for it. It is the goodwill of the agent and the squire that does it. And we have been thinking that Mr. Derrick being newly married would be disposed to be in good-humour and to consider old tenants. My husband would take it very hard to leave Millmount."

Jessie felt very sorry that Mrs. Copeland brought forward her reasons for wishing to stand well at this particular time with the squire. Amy felt even this slender plank, by which she might have escaped, giving way under her, like everything else.

"I am sure if I had any influence with my brother I should exert it in your favour," said Amy, "but I think I have already told you I have none in these matters."

"And you would not like to ask his wife, who may be supposed to have some, and she your own cousin too," said Mrs. Copeland.

"Perhaps I could," said Amy, languidly. The idea passed through her mind that Lord Darlington could do it, perhaps; and if fate went against her, as it appeared likely it would do, she might ask for that one substantial benefit for the Copelands as part of the price of her compliance.

"Or Lord Darlington could speak a word for us," said the old lady. "He was very polite and kind when he was here, and I hear that all the farmers on his estate have leases. If the squires knew their own interests and the interest of the land, they would not boggle about giving leases."

"Oh! don't ask Miss Staunton for Lord Darlington's interest. How can you do such a thing?" said Jessie, indignantly. It was the first time that she had ever shown any temper to her mother-in-law, and the old lady was surprised at it.

"Oh! it does not signify, Jessie," said Amy. "But I am disappointed about the letters; I must go home now."

"Cannot you stop and see George when he comes in?" said Jessie.

"No, not to-day," said Amy, "I think I had better go home."

Jessie followed her to the door.

"Never mind what Mrs. Copeland says, Amy, if you really are in trouble, come to us just as if we were at Branxholm."

"It is very good of you, but I must not injure you all, Jessie. It is very likely I may not need any refuge. Perhaps I may be sorry that I ever said such a thing to you; but sometimes my heart is heavy, and I speak without thinking," and Amy sighed.

"You are not going to marry that old lord surely," said Jessie, eagerly.

"I think not; indeed, I would say I am sure, only that things seem to be taken out of our own hands sometimes. Perhaps I might make him a good enough wife after all."

"Oh! Amy, my dear, do not even yourself to such a thing, he's nearly three times as old as you. It would be no marriage of God's making, and you could not expect His blessing. It was an evil day when Mr. Derrick first came to Millmount, after George and I had settled here, and saw those unlucky photographs and asked all about you, if it is to come to this. Oh! Amy, have you forgotten poor Allan?"

"He seems to have forgotten me," said Amy, doggedly. "It is evident that that was not to be, only I wish that I was not so dependent on Anthony."

Amy walked home, dull and dispirited, to receive a pleasant gossiping letter from her old lover and a few cold lines from her brother, to look at books without reading them, and to play mechanically music that she scarcely heard herself.

"I don't think I was meant to stand alone," she said to herself, contemptuously. "I have made a great mistake in coming to Stanmore for quiet and serious thought. I wonder if Lord Darlington had any idea of the effect it would have on me when he consented. He is very clever and seems to understand me better than I do myself. I seem to be drifting, drifting, in the direction which he wishes, and cannot turn round to stem the current."

On the following day she felt strengthened by a letter from Miss Pennithorne, telling her that the earl had tired of Thrush Grove, and had gone to London suddenly; and expressing her confidence that all would go well yet with Amy, for God would never desert her when she kept so clearly in the right path. He would make some way of escape for her, and surely with such talents and accomplishments as Amy possessed, she could earn her own livelihood, and might hold out against her brother. She asked about the studies and the practice which Amy had gone into, and

hoped that she might soon receive an account of all she had done and was doing.

It was the element of human interest thrown into her present life and pursuits; Miss Pennithorne's enquiries must be answered, and her recommendations attended to; and Amy resumed her avocations with more spirit, and looked forward to her brother's return with a little more philosophy.

CHAPTER XII.

DRIFTING.

It was earlier than Amy expected when Mr. and Mrs. Derrick returned to their ancestral halls of Stanmore. They did not spend the whole of their honeymoon at Darlington Castle, still less did they take advantage of the earl's permission to extend their stay to six weeks or longer. Darlington Castle was all very well in its way, at least they liked the *éclat* of being there; but after all there were attractions at Stanmore, which was their own, which no borrowed house, however splendid, could possess. Besides, although they were very happy in each other's company, they would be still happier if they could show to the world how very happy they were. Lucy had not yet seen Stanmore, and her husband was eager to reveal it to her enthusiastic admiration. She was in ecstacies with everything, and Anthony was careful that she should miss no point,

however trifling, that showed his wealth, his taste, or his cleverness. Amy thought that the pair were almost childish in their complacency and enthusiasm over their own possessions; but then Amy was at this time cynically disposed, and as she did not go into raptures with everything that appeared to the newly-married pair to be Elysium, she was looked on as a sort of wet blanket, and the old complaint of her want of sympathy was revived with variations.

It was soon known that the Derricks were at home and willing to receive visitors, and as the neighbours were rather curious to see the obscure and penniless bride whom he had promoted, they came forward very readily, and Lucy thought this about the best part of the whole business. In a pause between the relays of callers, on the first day of reception, Anthony said to his sister Amy,

"I suppose you know that Lord Darlington will be here to-night."

"Indeed I did not know," said Amy.

"Does he not write to you? he gave me to understand that he kept up a very close correspondence with you."

"Yes, he does write very frequently; but he has not mentioned his intention of coming to Stanmore. I thought the understanding was

that he was not to come without letting me know."

"He has let me know," said Anthony, "and as it happens to be my house I should fancy that to be sufficient."

"He has done more than that," said Mrs. Derrick, "for he has written to me also on the subject."

"I suppose he wishes to bring the affair between himself and you to a point, Amy, and I thoroughly agree with him," said Anthony. "It has been hanging off and on a great deal too long, and I must say, Amy, that if you refuse so excellent an offer on such frivolous grounds as you have given, I shall wash my hands of you. I have done everything in my power for you, and you have constantly thwarted and disobliged me. That Darlington has continued his suit in spite of your airs, has always astonished me; no man could have been more patient, more solicitous, more indulgent to your every whim and fancy, than he has been. I think, indeed, he has spoiled you by so much adulation, at least, I think you are less amenable to my control since he made such a goddess of you; but I have only this to say, that if you do not choose to accept him, you may find a home for yourself. Lucy quite agrees with me in this opinion, for I am

sure, after being at Darlington Castle and seeing what you might have, and what you might be, if you were only reasonable and decently grateful, we cannot think it right to encourage your absurd objections. Here come the Claridges; what a pair of horses they drive, to be sure! I should be ashamed of such a turn out; is not that very different from our spanking greys, Lucy?"

Amy rose to go out; she did not feel equal to seeing strangers after Anthony's cruel speech.

"Don't go out, Amy," said her brother; "I choose that you should stay and assist Lucy in the reception of her visitors, whom you know, and she does not."

As if Lucy needed any relief or any assistance! she was in the full plenitude of her power, at the very acme of happiness. She was tasting the sweetest draught that had ever been presented to her lips even by Anthony. To sit magnificently dressed in a superb drawing-room, looking out on a prospect which so far as she could see belonged to the Stanmore estate, and to receive real county people in company with the husband of her choice, was to be in a state of bliss and exaltation which she had scarcely dreamed of as a girl. She had none of the graceful diffidence of a youthful bride, to whom these things were new and unaccustomed. As Anthony saw with

satisfaction, she fell into her place at once, and had an amount of self-possession that showed the wisdom of his choice.

Instead of showing by her manner the timidity that Amy had displayed when she first came to Stanmore, Lucy rather patronised her visitors, and endeavoured by graceful condescension to set them at their ease. She sent her callers away in high indignation at the airs which the portionless curate's daughter (as they called her) gave herself, but of this Anthony was as unconscious as Lucy herself; he admired her ease and her skill, and her grace, and felt that every one must congratulate him on his good fortune. As each party departed, the bride and bridegroom quizzed them to their heart's content; Amy had blushed for them and had timidly tried to soften a little her sister-in-law's manner, until she heard the fatal news from Anthony of the earl's threatened arrival and his own determination. After that she went through the necessary formalities like one in a dream. What was she to do? Where was she to go? How was she to escape?

When her brother spoke so harshly and cruelly to her it was far from having the effect he intended. He thought it would make her glad to accept of Lord Darlington, whereas, her heart, which had been rather softening in her lover's

absence, rose up against the coarse threats which Anthony held out. She would take no husband on compulsion.

"I shall appeal to his generosity before Anthony," said she to herself. "I will make him let me go. But he will not come without my leave —surely he will not come."

Anthony was right, however. The earl appeared that night, and on the next morning she determined to make her appeal.

Lord Darlington opened the subject in his very blandest tones.

"It is perhaps premature in me after our arrangement to come here again on the old errand, but your brother seems to think I am trifling with you and does not like my continued absence. Besides, as you never wrote to me, I could not tell exactly how you felt."

"Will you ask Anthony to come here and hear what I have got to say to you?" said Amy.

"I did not think a third party at all necessary or agreeable in these cases," said the earl, hesitatingly.

"I must speak to you both together," said Amy, in a strange, hoarse, unnatural voice.

"If you really wish it, let it be so. I shall bring Mr. Derrick."

Anthony came in looking sheepish enough; he

was always a good deal overborne by Lord Darlington.

"Well, Amy, and what is all this about?" said he.

"Anthony," said Amy with difficulty, "Lord Darlington is not trifling with me, I wish to God that he were less in earnest than he is, but as I have said often to you and to him, I do not think I ought to marry him. I know what I forfeit, but I have earned my own living before this time, and I can do it again. I have to thank you for the advantages you have given me, and if this is the condition on which alone I am to be considered as your sister, I shall burden you no more."

"What absurd nonsense are you talking?" said Anthony, to whom the threat of her taking a situation was a strong one.

"My Lord Darlington, you would not have a girl to marry you because her brother threatened to turn her out of doors if she refused?"

"No, certainly not," said Lord Darlington, with an expression of horror; "but because you love me a little."

"Of course she does," said Anthony. "Any one can see that she does. She and you will settle things in an amicable way. I was only joking when I spoke yesterday, Amy, as you are

to-day about earning your own living. Darlington Castle and a governess's situation in some dismal school-room is a contrast indeed!"

"I honour Miss Staunton for her scruples," said the earl. "When I attain her consent, I know that her heart will go with her hand. I have always trusted her, always believed in her. I have disguised nothing of my character from her, and I do not believe that there is such a radical difference between friendship and love, that a disengaged heart like hers would not allow one to merge into the other."

"Of course it will; Lucy says she could see how anxious Amy was for your arrival last night. Lucy understands these things."

"Oh! yes, in the light of recent events Mrs. Derrick ought to understand them. But, Mr. Derrick, I must beg that no threats are held out to Miss Staunton. As I have always said, I have no desire to hurry her."

"You have not much time to lose," said Anthony, in an undertone, but it was audible to Amy, and it incensed the earl.

"If you would only allow me to conduct my own affairs in my own way, and not thrust in your oar, I should be very much obliged to you."

"Then why did you bring me here?" said Anthony, not unreasonably.

"It was an idea of your sister's, but I fancy she has had enough of it. I suppose you will excuse Mr. Derrick now, Amy?"

It was no matter how Amy began her tactics; Lord Darlington always got the better of her. His coolness, his watchfulness and his determination, baffled her at all points. So that now she consented to let Anthony go away without saying half of what she had intended to say to the earl in his presence. Now she felt rather relieved when he went out and she was left with the earl, who did not speak to her for a few minutes, evidently wishing her to collect herself.

"You are not looking very well, Amy," he said at last. "It was rather cruel in you not to give me a hint about how you were getting on. I am afraid you have been ill?"

"No, my lord, I have been quite well, as well as usual."

"Only dull then, I suppose?"

"Not very dull either."

"Solitude is rather trying to a young creature like you. I must say that I myself do not like it."

"Oh! solitude is far more bearable than this is," said Amy.

"I am sure I wish you had a pleasanter

brother and sister-in-law, Amy. I really think if I were an angel Derrick's advocacy would prejudice any one against me; and his threats are as coarse as his soul. Forget what he says altogether, and speak openly to me, as you used to do."

"There is one thing I want to tell you without being questioned. I have had no letter from Australia."

"Then the poor fellow has accepted your dismissal without remonstrance or appeal," said the earl, with a slight accent of contempt. "I had scarcely expected that you had made so faint an impression on his heart, although, I daresay he has good sense enough to see the reasonableness of the thing. I know how gently and kindly you can say even painful things," and the earl paused a minute.

"But there is no letter from any of the family; there may be some mistake," said Amy.

"Do you think it likely that if the poor fellow had written there would be a mistake about his letter being forwarded? I have some confidence in the General Post-Office, and had so much faith in your friend that when a letter was missing before, I asked your brother for it and got it. People in earnest do not make mistakes

at critical periods, Amy. Fancy me forgetting or neglecting to post a letter to you!"

All the methodical, careful habits of Allan Lindsay came back to Amy; it really was very unlikely that if he had written at all, she should not receive the letter when she was alone at home to get it.

"Do you know how the world fancies you were employed when you were alone at Stanmore? It is supposed that you are writing a book, but whether it is to be in poetry or prose no one can rightly determine. You have some literary antecedents, and have seen a good deal of the world. I let it be said, for it looked very possible."

"I have not really seen much of the world, although poor Olivia fancied I have. As to the fashionable world of England my experience has been very small, for more than a year was occupied with school-work, and after the short season every one has taken care that I should not see too much of any body but——," and she stopped.

"But me. I believe it is the case," said the earl, laughing. "I wish we could come to a comfortable arrangement, for in that case you could see the world to your heart's content. When I see how enchanted your cousin Lucy is with all the glory and importance and gratification

which her marriage has brought to her, and imagine how much I could open to you, I do feel chafed at her manner to one so immeasurably her superior. But you did not tell me if you had not thoughts of writing something."

"I wish I could, but it did not occur to me, and besides, I am sure I could not write what was worth reading. I wonder if Anthony would be pleased with me if I took the world by storm and was a successful author."

"I fear there is only one thing you can do that will please Derrick. I fear neither poetry nor prose will soften him."

"But success might."

"Not every kind of success. You observed how irritated he was about the picture, although yours would have been pronounced the loveliest portrait of the season. By-the-by, it is finished, and I have got it now at Darlington Castle. You can have it when you ask for it. Mr. Hubbard was disappointed and mortified at its not being for exhibition, for he is so much satisfied with it."

"That was a foolish thing I did, and I thought so at the time, but I cannot help it now. Are you going to stay here then on my brother's invitation?"

"Yes, because I see how he can make you

suffer. I must stay to teach him and his wife reasonable courtesy to one whom I have a regard for."

"And for how long will you stay?"

"As long as you need my services, if Mr. Derrick will allow me to avail myself of his hospitality."

"And how long may that be? Oh! my lord, cannot you say to Anthony that you give me up. I am not really worth all the trouble and patience you take with me. I am not suited to you, not fit for the station you offer me. Why cannot you give me up?"

"I have no intention of giving you up, Amy. I do not imitate the pusillanimity of your friend at the antipodes, who withdraws his claims at the first discouraging word. I have withstood a few refusals, and I mean to go in for the prescribed number of nineteen, which I do not think we have reached yet."

"I suppose I cannot send you away, the house is not mine."

"I look on it as yours; but I am sure that if you ordered me away Mr. Derrick's temper would not make it a pleasant home for you. How did your brother and his bride like Darlington Castle in winter?"

"Very much indeed, I think."

"I had those trees cut down that shut out the lovely view to the east, shortly after you left. You recollect our agreeing that it would be an improvement. I hope, however, that Mr. and Mrs. Derrick found the weather too cold and boisterous to admit of their going much out of doors in our walks, and especially I hope they never sat under *our* elm; it seems too sacred a spot for their honeymooning in."

"They have not said much to me of what they did or did not do. I gather more of their experience from their talk with each other than from their conversation with me, and much of that I cannot understand. I think lovers and very intimate friends," said Amy, trying to shake off her oppressed feeling and to speak as she had been used to do, "are often rather rude in general society, because they constantly allude to things that other people are not in the secret of, and, while they appear to be quite open and communicative, they in reality tell the company nothing at all."

"Oh yes, they are very tiresome, as I have very often said to you. No one could possibly mistake us for lovers, for we are so invariably well-bred and attentive to other people, and all our explanations and hints we get over in private. Now you are looking more like your

old self, Amy, I feel in good-humour with everybody, even with your brother, so I shall challenge him to a game of billiards and he shall win."

And the earl was as good as his word. Lucy looked on and admired her husband's play, and then asked to be taught the game. She was as clever at billiards as she had been at croquet, and in a short time excelled Amy.

Day succeeded day and week succeeded week, and the possibilities of escape for Amy became smaller and smaller. And yet Amy did not like Lord Darlington so much as she had done on her first acquaintance. She felt the hardness which Miss Pennithorne had indicated to her, although it was disguised beneath the most polished and courtly manner. In all that related to herself he appeared to be so pliant and so forbearing that she was ashamed of herself for trying him so much, but yet she felt that he did not lose an inch of ground. He often carried his management of Lucy and Anthony beyond the fair bounds of dissimulation to the verge of downright hypocrisy. Amy knew his real opinion of them, and she shrank from the fair words which she heard. To his inferiors, he was distant, or loftily condescending unless he had a purpose to serve; of those who waited on him he appeared

to be sublimely unconscious. He exacted deference; he was surprised if it was not paid. The strain upon him had been somewhat hard, and now he was becoming so sure of success that he now and then relaxed the check he had kept on his worse self. There were cynical remarks that fell from him on many subjects that showed that in political matters he considered that every man has his price, and in other matters every woman has hers. An approaching general election brought out singularly low views of thought, not only in Anthony Derrick, but in the man she had considered so greatly his superior. The manner in which they both talked of the legitimate influence of wealth in the abstract, and of their own influence in particular, struck Amy strangely.

And there was an absolute absence in Lord Darlington of anything at all like religion, a secularism which could give no response to her natural feelings of devotion. He admired—half pityingly, half envyingly—her freshness and enthusiasm, but he could not look back to a time when he had been otherwise than a man very wise after the fashion of this world, who picked as many of its roses and was pricked by as few of the thorns as possible.

Never in his life had he taken as much trouble

to win a woman, and he valued Amy Staunton very much at the price she had cost him. Her youth and beauty might perhaps have been matched elsewhere, but it was her simplicity of character, her original ideas, and her charmingly clinging and dependent manner that especially fascinated him at first. But now every weary hour he spent with Mr. Derrick, every civil speech he made to Lucy, every alleviation of Amy's uncomfortable situation which his influence procured, was set down to the credit side of his account; and he felt that he deserved all and more than all Miss Staunton could give him, especially as the world would only ridicule his failure. A young man disappointed may be pitied and respected—an old man thwarted is only laughed at.

He, however, was determined not to be thwarted. The constant dropping which wears away stone had had its effect. Amy did not seem to avoid him or to fear him now; they had long interviews together, and they seemed to have arrived at a thoroughly good understanding. True the earl did not press the point, but then neither did he relinquish it. Amy knew his wishes, and negatively encouraged them.

"When do you think *you* are going to be turned off?" said Anthony Derrick to the earl

one day, when he had observed that things were going well.

"In about six weeks, I should say. All things on my side are ready, and I should like to have it over before the London season comes on. I have not put it to Amy, but I think there is no doubt she will agree. She was rather cheated out of last season, and I should like no curtailment of this. I wish to show you the settlements I can make on your sister. I think they are sufficiently handsome, but if you suggest anything it will be attended to."

"I am afraid that my modest dowry will appear scarcely worth a countess's acceptance," said Anthony.

"I do not wish to have a portionless bride," said the earl.

"You are not used to that sort of thing," said Anthony, with an almost imperceptible sneer.

"It is not that I care about it or need it, but that Amy will feel that the world will know that she does not marry for money, which is perfectly true if she brings me a portion suitable to your fortune, and your affection for her. Of course her fortune is to be settled on herself, and on her second son, if we are blessed with two." The earl really thought he ought to have some money

with his wife, and enjoyed getting as large a sum from Anthony as possible.

"Oh! that seems fair enough, but Lucy thought you would despise it, as I did the sum that was hers by right."

"And very properly too, for there were several brothers and sisters who would benefit by the sacrifice, but in your case you would be the only gainer by my relinquishing what would justify your sister's motives to the world."

"Then I wish you would settle all this between you. I am going to take Lucy for a run up to London, we will be back in two days at furthest. There are some things we ought to see to in the house in —— Square. We leave Amy and you to arrange your own affairs, and I hope you will have the day fixed by the time we come back. I suppose I may show these papers to my own family solicitor?"

CHAPTER XIII.

ESCAPE.

AMY thought it very strange and very unkind in her brother and his wife going to London without her; but up to the last moment she fancied that the earl was going with them, for he spoke of business in town. He certainly went with them to the railway station, but to her astonishment he returned in time for luncheon, and said he had never intended to go to London at that time.

Amy's alarmed look at his re-appearance made Lord Darlington delay what he had to say till the following day. He asked her to read to him and to play to him, and evidently felt the simple absence of Mr. and Mrs. Derrick so great a relief that he cared for nothing further. But Amy turned over her position in her own mind, and felt that all things were against her, and that she must give in sooner or later.

Aid, however, came to her from a most unexpected quarter. On the following morning she received a letter bearing the Belton postmark, but addressed in an unfamiliar hand. Anything new was interesting and hopeful, for she knew no old correspondent had the power and the will to help her, so she took the letter into her own room before it was seen either by Lord Darlington or her maid Parkes, who she knew was strong in his interests, and she believed was deep in his pay.

The letter was from Mrs. Hammond, and ran thus:—

"My Dear Miss Staunton,

"I have just returned from the continent with Mr. Hammond and my son, and took the earliest opportunity of calling on Miss Pennithorne. I learn from her that you are now being subjected to the most unjustifiable pressure in order to induce you to accept of what to Miss Pennithorne and to me, and probably also to yourself, appears a most unsuitable alliance; that all your friends are so resolved on the marriage that you have no place to go to; and that even your very proper proposal to take a situation has been frustrated by your knowing no one who would recommend you, or who would be likely

to receive you when your brother seriously objects to such a step. Miss Pennithorne is so dependent on Lord Darlington's good will, through her attachment to Lady Olivia, that she can give you no available help in this crisis; and I learn from her that your old friend (Miss Lindsay that was) is so bound to your brother, through her father-in-law being his tenant, that you cannot go to her; besides that she lives too near to Stanmore. Although you may think that I have been cold and unkind to you, and I believe I have given you some cause to think so, I cannot bear to see an innocent young girl sacrificed to an old man of the world, however rich he may be and however great his position may be. It is what I could not wish for my own daughters, so I write to you to offer you a home and any advice and encouragement you may need.

"Come at once, without hesitation. If you can come openly, do so; if not, come without letting it be known. Even if you have not quite made up your mind, you can do so more freely here, relieved from the surveillance and the influence that are all so favourable to Lord Darlington's pretensions. We are not millionaires like your brother, but we are in such circumstances that we do not need to care for his displeasure, or the earl's either, when we are satisfied

that we are doing right. Mr. Hammond unites with me cordially in this invitation, and sympathises with me in all I say.

"Do not hesitate to avail yourself of this offer, which comes from the heart of yours, very sincerely,

"CLARISSA HAMMOND."

Amy's astonishment at this letter was so great, that she was glad there was no witness of her agitation; she had locked her door so that no one could intrude on her, and she now gave free vent to her feelings of relief and thankfulness.

"I can go, I shall go," she said to herself; "how kind, how very good of Mrs. Hammond. She will help me to obtain a situation, or perhaps to make Anthony reasonable with me. Perhaps if this idea were fairly driven out of Anthony's head he might learn to love me a little. I am sure that Lord Darlington's presence and sway must be oppressive to him as it is to me. I should not wonder that he wishes to hand me over to Lord Darlington in order to get quit of him as much as to get quit of me. And now that I know I can escape, I am sure that I do not like the earl at all. As for going openly, I don't think it can be done; Lord Darlington seems able to persuade me out of my own judgment, and

would have fifty excellent reasons to give why I should not accept of this kind offer; and Anthony, who has so cruelly left me alone with him as if to drive me into acquiescence with his wishes, has no right to be consulted. I must make a secret flight of it, and how? It is not easy; but still, in these days of post-offices and railways, no one can be kept in a house against her will if she has anywhere to go to and money for the expenses necessary. It seems such a strange thing to be eloping alone, but it can be done, and it must be done before Anthony's return, because I have less chance of being observed, and I have good cause for my flight. I have no time to appoint with Mr. Hammond to meet me anywhere, but Mrs. Hammond will excuse that, I think. Who would have dreamt of such kindness coming from her?"

Amy took out her purse and counted the crisp bank-notes and the yellow sovereigns with a satisfaction which money had never given her before. There could be no difficulty in that direction. She was a little remorseful about using Anthony's money to enable her to escape from him, but she would take little or nothing besides. All the ornaments and jewels he had presented her with should be left for Lucy, and only a small portmanteau, with a few necessary

articles of dress, should accompany her in her flight.

She went out of the house by a side door, and, walking towards the stables, she saw a good-natured soft-hearted-looking under-groom, whom her brother had often been impatient with because he thought him slow and stupid. He touched his hat to the young lady, and looked at her awaiting orders.

"Knowles," she said, "I want to ask you a great favour."

"Name it, Miss, and I'll be obliged to you."

"I want you to keep it a secret, but I *must* get to London before Mr. Derrick comes back to Stanmore."

"By yourself, Miss?"

"Yes, by myself. I cannot stay here any more. I am going to a friend, a lady who writes to me that she will give me a home. Mr. and Mrs. Derrick have left me here unprotected. Do, Knowles, help me to get away; if you do not, I must walk to the station somehow."

"You shan't walk, Miss, if I can help it. But when do you mean to go?"

"At a time when I cannot be seen or watched. I cannot put any trust in Parkes, for I know that she would betray me to Lord Darlington."

"Then it ain't with your own will that you

was going to marry Lord Darlington, Miss, as everybody says you are?"

"No, not with my own will at all."

"Well, so much the better; I never thought no great shakes of Lord Darlington or his groom neither. You know that there's nobody up in the hall when the parliamentary train passes the station close by here, but you might be seen by some of the work-people, and them parliamentaries are so slow that the express would catch it up before you got as far as London. It's the night train as is the thing for you, and, though the P—— Station is fifteen miles off, we could do that in a couple of hours in the dark. I ain't very quick, but I'm safe; and you will have a good start before they can work the telegraph; you will be safe in London before the earl has come down to breakfast. And once in London a body is lost, as one may say."

"My room is very near the small side-door," said Amy, "but I don't want you to drive close up, nor even you yourself to come to the door. I'll meet you at the end of the avenue rather, lest the sound of the wheels should awake any one. I think the earl is a light sleeper."

"But how about your luggage, Miss? That's always the difficulty with ladies travelling; there is always no end of boxes."

"I shall have only a small portmanteau that I can carry myself, and I shall get out so quietly that no one can hear me. In case of accidents, allow two hours and a half or even more for the fifteen miles, and I shall be ready at the end of the avenue."

"Depend upon me, Miss."

"I hope you will not get into trouble about it, but I am so much in want of a friend, that I am forced to risk that."

"Never mind if I do lose my place. I'd do as much to help any woman in trouble, and twice as much for you, Miss."

This matter being settled, Amy returned to the breakfast-room where Lord Darlington was still lingering over his chocolate and the morning papers.

"You have not got that new set of waltzes that every one is raving about," said the earl. "I never doubted that it was in the last packet of music, but I looked it over last night and it is not there. How very careless of your music-seller. All that he has sent appears to be trash."

"So I think too, but if one orders all the new music, a large proportion must be trash."

"But not the whole, certainly. You should

have commissioned Mr. Derrick to fetch that particular piece out."

"I wonder you do not offer to set off for it yourself, since it appears so indispensable that I should have it," said Amy.

"If there were no other means of procuring it I might be tempted, but I shall telegraph for it to be sent by post immediately, and that will be even more rapid. We will have it before your brother's return, and astonish him by my promptitude."

"I think it was very unkind of Anthony and Lucy to leave me here," said Amy.

"Certainly it was, particularly as they are intending to make purchases in which your correct taste might assist them. The secondary place which they give you is very absurd. You can turn the tables on them by-and-by."

"It is not their not taking me to town, but their leaving me alone with you that I feel so unkind."

"You could not be left in better care," said the earl kindly. "For my part, you cannot conceive the relief I felt when I returned to the hall yesterday, and found only my little mouse sitting quietly by herself. It is so easy to converse with you, so easy to sit quiet with you; you make none of those severe claims on my polite-

ness or my sincerity that Mr. and Mrs. Derrick constantly do. I must own that the past fortnight has been immensely fatiguing."

"I daresay Anthony and Lucy are quite as glad to get quit of you," said Amy.

"I daresay they are," said the earl, laughing. "I have no doubt I am a trial to them. Tit for tat. Do you recollect how wearisome they were to us at Darlington Castle? I wonder if every little incident of that visit is fixed in your memory as it is in mine."

"My memory is a pretty fair one. I never forget any kindness or any unkindness," said Amy, "and this conduct of my brother's I consider very unkind."

"But, my dear Amy, on the footing in which we stand, and the general opinion which the world holds as to our relation to each other, there is a peculiar fitness in my being left in charge of the young lady beside me."

"Is there?" said Amy. "I don't think so. Even if we were engaged, which we are not, I don't think it at all a common or a proper thing."

"Which we are not," said the earl; "perhaps not precisely in words, but I think you must feel that you cannot draw back now. You know that rightly you belong to me. Have not I been a

faithful and a patient lover? and have you any fault to find with me except my age, which I do not think you mind very much now? I wish I could be younger for your sake, but at all events I shall be all the more indulgent to your every wish from my consciousness of that drawback. I do not deny that your brother expects all this to be arranged, and that he left us for that very purpose. I have told him what settlements I can make on you, and he is perfectly satisfied. On his part he gives you a fortune little less than that of your sister Edith. I mention this because you may be satisfied that the world will know that you marry me from real regard. No one with such a dowry could be suspected of marrying me for any other reason. And you know, my dearest Amy, that I have never once tried to dazzle you with my fortune or my rank. Only I have loved you, that is all."

Amy looked strangely at her lover. A curious mixture of feelings overpowered her. This man really loved her very much, and he had strange influence over her.

"I see, my dear Amy, that you understand me. I am not exacting, I do not require you to state in words what would please me so much. But Mr. Derrick thinks, and I think too, that about six weeks at furthest might terminate my

long probation. I should not like you to lose the height of the season this year, and as I shall have no alteration made in either town or country-house without your special sanction, there need be no delay."

Why was Amy silent? She felt she ought to speak, but yet it would be better to throw the earl off his guard. This settled plan that her brother had made with him, this studied compromise of herself, made her feel resolute that she must escape, but all the more convinced that it must be secretly done.

"As for *trousseaux*, and all that sort of thing, let as much of it be done as other people can do for you, but do not waste your precious time over all that nonsensical shopping. I think I have heard you say that girls when they get married, buy clothes as if they never expected their husbands to get them any more; very absurd that would be in your case. My taste is different from your brother's; I only require elegance and simplicity, and tolerable fashion. And I am always satisfied with your appearance when you are dressed to please yourself, as you are this morning. Now, dear, you have been shy long enough. I really think you owe me a smile and a kind word now."

"My lord," said Amy.

"Don't you think you could learn to call me by my Christian name. It is so long since I heard it. I suppose your mother always talked of me as Herbert."

"Yes, she did; but do be good enough in Anthony's absence to let me feel that you are a protector—a friend, and not a lover. When he returns you may settle matters as you may then see best."

"Then shall I telegraph for the music? I like to do things at once."

"As you please."

"Say 'if you please, Herbert,' that is all I ask for the present."

"Then 'if you please, Herbert,' if that will satisfy you," said Amy, so full of remorse and pity that the accents sounded as affectionate as her lover could wish.

Lord Darlington sent off his telegram for the music, and also one for Anthony—"All right; six weeks agreed to; better return to-morrow as soon as possible to make arrangements, as your absence is felt awkward."

The day passed away slowly for Amy; she took a long ride with the earl, she played to him and read to him as she had done before, but with her heart full of the new life that was before her. When the time came for bidding him good-

night she showed an agitation that the earl mistook, and was flattered by. In all probability they never would meet again; if they did it would be as strangers. She had a remorse for her treachery, but yet it was necessary that the parting should be friendly. It was more than friendly, he took her in his arms and kissed her passionately, and she wept to think how he misunderstood her emotion. She could not be so deceitful, even though she had been so cruelly trapped she must say something.

"My lord, I thought you were to be generous and spare me. If I ever become your wife it is the result of circumstances and not of inclination. If I let you speak out without checking you, it was because I felt I was in your power. I must not deceive you, I dare not. Let me take a situation. I might learn to love you there."

"Cannot you learn to love me here?" said Lord Darlington, laying her head again on his breast. "Trust me, it is the better place for the lesson. I know the cause of your annoyance; I telegraphed to your brother to return as soon as possible, and I have more than half expected him this evening, but anything is of more importance to him and to Mrs. Derrick than your comfort. At all events they will be here early to-morrow. I feel assured that if it had not been for the

feeling that you had been a little drawn in you would have accepted your new position with me pleasantly. I have seen little lights and shadows playing over your face as if you were not altogether dissatisfied with your resolution. Now, my dear love, good-night."

"Good-night, and may God bless you, Lord Darlington, and forgive us both if we are wrong." She took his hand and kissed it; a strange return for the kisses she had received, but yet she felt this was the last time they should stand together as friends. It was the first willing caress she had given to him since his declaration, and was it surprising that her lover should prize it?

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. LUFTON'S NEWS.

ALLAN LINDSAY had worked very hard at the new station. It had been rather an adventurous undertaking for Hugh Lindsay, and if it had not been for the thorough reliance he had on his eldest son, he might have called himself rash. But the old man was satisfied that it was going to pay well, and when he went to Billabong he used to rub his hands and congratulate himself on the speculation.

"And where would you like your house to stand, Allan, supposing our bonnie bird comes from across the sea in the three years' time. It's time ye fixed on the stance of it, I'm thinking," said the father on one occasion when he was particularly pleased with matters at Billabong.

"Oh! I would never wish her to live here, father, even if she were to come. I would rather have a house near Branxholm, and I could

come and go as I had business at Billabong as I have done hitherto. But I'll not trouble about the house till I feel more confidence. It is a wild thing of me to look for such a one as her, and all the news I hear of her being among great people and visiting here and there makes me more doubtful."

"Never fear, Allan; does she ever miss writing to you? As long as she keeps doing that I think you are safe enough, and we'll make as fine a place at Branxholm as she can see on any summer day in England if you are no inclined to settle at Billabong, and I'd like the bit lassie near us no doubt. It is queer, isn't it, that she should have met with Louis Hammond in London?"

"And did you not notice that she said her brother was far from civil to him, and thinks all Australians must be beneath his notice?"

"No doubt he may, for Louis Hammond is a poor shilpit thing, not to be compared to you."

"I don't suppose it is his looks that Mr. Derrick means, but his position, and that you know is better than mine."

"I'm not so sure of that, Allan. No, for Louis has been of the spending kind, and you, Allan, have been always helpful and hard-working. You'll be the richer man, if you're both spared

to live as long as I have been. It is the master's eye that makes the beasts fat, and the crops thrive, and that you are always ready to give."

"Well, I wish I was as well satisfied with myself as you are with me, or rather I wish I could please Amy as well," said Allan.

Shortly after this conversation took place, Allan received the letter that had been written according to Lord Darlington's views. It was, of course, more distressing to Allan than to any other member of the family, but his father was disappointed and angry to find that things had gone so differently from what he had planned. He indeed thought Allan had been ill-used, for after writing so constantly, it was very shameful to turn round now and say that everything was to be at an end. Allan saw that there were great difficulties that Amy had to contend with, that fought against his suit—her brother, her sister, her great relations; and he did not know if he really was worth her quarrelling with everybody for his sake. Still there was a tenderness in the dismissal, an eager wish for his happiness, a diffidence in her powers to make him happy now she had been spoiled so much, that showed she still had a regard for him. If he could only see her and speak to her once, to know if these were real feelings, or only her kind way of doing pain-

ful things, it would be a comfort; but even his prosperity made it impossible for him to get away for so long a time. All he could do would be to write a strong appeal, and to beg her to reconsider her verdict.

He was carrying on this train of thoughts in his head, while busied in his ordinary avocations, when Mrs. Lufton called with her husband one day, brimful of news.

"My dear Mrs. Lindsay, so there is great news of poor Mr. Lufton's old flame, Miss Staunton. You know I always told you she would marry a title."

"A title," said Mrs. Lindsay.

"Yes, she is going to be a countess—no less. The earl is old, no doubt, but he is a fine man, and the most devoted lover that ever was seen."

"You don't mean Lord Darlington?" said Allan.

"Yes; her own cousin, Lord Darlington."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Lindsay. "Amy has not written that she was going to marry him to *you* surely?"

She was angry at the news, and angry at the idea that Amy had told a mere acquaintance like Mrs. Lufton what she had said nothing of to any of the Lindsays.

"No, Amy has not written about it herself,

but I have a long letter from Clara Hammond, and she tells me all about it. You know the Hammonds have bought a nice property that happens to be in the parish where Amy's uncle is rector, and Louis was very desperate about Miss Staunton, but this earl came down upon him, and cut him completely out. Louis had not the least chance with her against such a great man as this Lord Darlington."

"You don't mean to say this is a settled thing?" said Mrs. Lindsay.

"Well, I think it must be, for Amy was staying at Darlington House, the earl's town house, you know, in London, when Clara wrote, and was going from there to Darlington Castle, and that is his principal country seat, along with the earl's sickly daughter."

"She's very fond of the daughter," said Mrs. Lindsay, "and that's the way stories get made up. I don't believe a word of it."

"Well, there is never smoke but there is some fire," said Mrs. Lufton, "and all I can say is that Clara tells me Louis is heart-broken because he thinks her brother is selling her, and her mother (Mrs. Hammond), who never liked the poor girl, thinks she is selling herself. Surely Louis Hammond would not be jealous of Amy being fond of the sickly daughter, and Mrs.

Hammond knows the world as well as most people."

"She was aye a cauld-hearted unfeeling woman with regard to Amy," said Mrs. Lindsay. "I'd no value her opinion high."

"Well," said Mrs. Lufton, "you have my news as I got it."

"And I hope you're satisfied now with the work ye did in helping to persuade the lassie to gang away, Mrs. Lufton," said Mrs. Lindsay, but her eyes did not seek Mrs. Lufton, but Hugh Lindsay himself, who had said nothing, but who had felt none the less.

Mrs. Lufton disclaimed any concern in the matter. "It must be rather a fine thing to be a countess, and Amy is free to please herself. I suppose it will be all over now, for at his age the earl has no time to lose. You have heard of this earl, surely, Mrs. Lindsay?"

"Yes, I'll no deny that Amy has written about him being an old friend of her mother's and a very good friend of hers, but not a word of anything else. Allan, it's not Darlington House that her last letter is dated from, surely?" said the mother anxiously.

"Yes, mother, that is the place, but she does not say anything about what takes her there," answered Allan.

"I dare say she is a little awkward about it, because after all she said about objecting to old fogies like my poor old man, it is humbling to announce an engagement to one so much older. But Clara says he is very well preserved and very clever; even Louis owns that he is amazingly clever. I'm very sorry for you, Allan," said Mrs. Lufton, who could not help seeing that Allan's interest in Amy was a very different thing from what Mr. Lufton's had been; "but you know I never thought you had any chance. She was so completely taken out of our sphere."

Allan's dignity was rather wounded by being thus publicly pitied by a well-meaning woman like Mrs. Lufton, but he bore it like a hero.

"Your news is both strange and painful to me, but I hope I may be permitted to doubt it until Miss Staunton herself announces it to her oldest friends here. I can only say that if it turns out to be true, I am sure neither Louis Hammond nor his mother is right. Amy is not being sold by herself or her brother. She has a great regard for her mother's old friend, and that alone may induce her to take such a step."

"Oh! of course, yes, that is understood, and then he is amazingly clever; that goes a long way with Gerald Staunton's daughter, I know. Clara is a first-rate musician now, and says that

Mr. Derrick is an excellent singer. That is where Amy Staunton fails, you know she cannot sing."

"I did not know that Miss Hammond corresponded with Mrs. Lufton, Mr. Lufton," said Allan.

"No, but she wrote a congratulatory letter on our marriage," said Mrs. Lufton, "and as she had so much news to give of an old friend, it was a particularly interesting letter."

"I'm sure I wish she had let it alone," said Mrs. Lindsay, who was impatient of the presence of strangers so much better informed than herself on so sacred a subject.

Mrs. Lufton, however, could not relinquish her position as the dispenser of news, and she discussed the subjects of Miss Hammond's letter over and over again. She had been accustomed to have a night's quarters at Branxholm, and Mrs. Lindsay's hospitable feelings were sorely tried to stretch them to a welcoming point, but the day and the evening came to an end at last, and Mr. and Mrs. Lufton were disposed of in bed. Allan sat alone in the best parlour, when the visitors had retired, with his head on the table and his hands pressed on his eyes. Isabel had not ventured to speak to him, and Hugh Lindsay had left the room before his guests.

"Allan, my son," said his mother, as she took his hand, "do you believe this news?"

"I don't know, mother, it may be true. At any rate, her letter to me rather confirms it than otherwise."

"But there's a deal of smoke with very little fire. It's like enough her brother would be glad to see her make such a grand marriage, for he's all for the world. But, Allan, the pen is an uncertain thing, as I said to your father when he said you could write every month. Wouldn't you like to go and to get speech with Amy, and if the thing is still open, to plead your own cause, and stand up for yoursel' against all the brothers and earls in England."

"Yes, if I could be spared; it is what I could not venture to ask my father to consent to, although it is what my heart is set on."

"You *maun* be spared for this, Allan. I'll see that your father will agree to it."

"It may be too late."

"So it may, but you will be none the worse for a trip to England, and I'll be bound you'll no gang there without learning something. You see, Allan, although you say boldly that Amy will no be sold, ye canna tell what straits she micht be driven to, for that brother and sister are hard to deal wi', and she has nae friends there to

help her; just think o' the bit lassie with nane to watch her or to help her but that brother an' sister, an' that English aunt that she's been visiting that would ane and a' be ready to loup out o' their skin wi' joy to see her a countess. As for the lord, he may be good or he may be bad, but Louis Hammond wouldna be disquieted about an old man like that, if he was not something particular in the way of courting Amy. But I am clear that you should go and see for yoursel'."

"I meant to write as strongly as I could; but if poor Amy is married, and perhaps not altogether with her own will, my letter would only vex her; whereas if I am too late I'll not cross her path or vex her with the sight of my face or the stroke of my pen. I did not think you could have made up your mind to send me away, mother; it is so good of you."

"I'll never repent of it, Allan. You've been a good and a dutiful son to your father an' me, an' the duty should na be a' on ae side. It was nae wish o' yours to be brocht into this world o' trouble, and after doing you sic a doubtful service as that, I think we hae nae right for our ain worldly ends to cross you in a thing that is dearer to you at this present time than life itsel'. I thought your father was wrang in the view he

took when Amy left us, and I'll make him see wi' my spectacles now. An' so set your mind at rest about that, for you behove to have your English visit like the lave o' the sheep-farmers. To hear *them* speaking o' having earned a holiday and *you* to have nane."

Hugh Lindsay was not at all so clear about Allan's going away. He depended so much on him that he did not see his way for the coming year without him, and why would not a letter do as well without such a loss of time and money? But Mrs. Lindsay very rarely exerted her power, and never did so without carrying her point; Allan should not only go, but his father should ask him as a personal favour to go. Every young man was the better for a change, and even if he did not succeed in his main object it would be a satisfaction to think that they had done all in their power to further it.

Hugh Lindsay gave way handsomely, and asked his son on the following day, what his views were about this visit to England. He spoke of stock and implements that Allan was to be sure to see, and to purchase if he approved of, as if it were on that account alone that he wished him to go, and gave him some Scotch addresses of old friends whom Allan was to seek out. The only point on which he stickled was

that he thought the overland route by the mail steamers was too costly, but Allan might sail before the mail in a clipper wool ship, and be in England nearly as soon, maybe quite as soon. If he could get ready to go in three days he might go. This was more than Allan had expected and he wrung his father's hand gratefully.

It was to be a surprise to Jessie, and the letters which would have been sent by the mail, were intrusted to Allan, so that she should have no inkling of his intention till he walked into her house. Hugh Lindsay pictured to himself the meeting, and sighed to think that it was not possible for him too to astonish Jessie.

The clipper wool ship sailed punctually to the day, but Allan was disappointed that there was such an immense difference between the length of her passage and that of the mail steamers. He had not written to Amy partly on principle and partly because he was terribly busy those three days, but during the fourteen weeks of the voyage, he often regretted that he had not enclosed a letter to Amy in one to his sister to be delivered at Jessie's discretion.

On the very night when Amy Staunton made her escape from Stanmore Park, Jessie Copeland was astonished to see her brother walk in.

"Allan," said she. "What has brought you

here? who could have dreamed of seeing you at Millmount?"

"Nobody less than myself four months ago."

"And I had no letters last mail."

"I have all your letters, but my father thought it would be a surprise to you and George."

"So it is, but it would have been better to have written."

"I want to know if I am not too late. Is Amy married."

"No, Allan, not yet."

"Is she likely to be married?"

"I misdoubt it greatly, Allan."

"And to her great cousin, Lord Darlington, is it not?"

"Yes, it's him she is always with, and everybody says it is to be soon, but oh! Allan, I don't think it is with her own free will. She looks pale and anxious, and she once said to me, would I take her in if she displeased her brother and everybody; and of course I said yes, but Mrs. Copeland, she said something about the lease they want for Millmount, and poor Amy looked sadly cast down. I have not seen her since; but they have it all for gospel that they are engaged, and there will be no end of settlements and pin-money and jewels, and all the rest of that glittering trash; but oh! Allan, I think poor Amy

is greatly to be pitied, and I have often mourned over the day when I put it into her brother's head to send for her. But how came you here at this time ?"

Allan then explained about his own unwelcome letter, and Mrs. Lufton's still more unwelcome news, and his mother's determination that he should go and judge for himself.

"So I am not altogether too late, I hope."

"Mr. and Mrs. Derrick (by-the-by you maybe don't know that Mr. Derrick married Amy's cousin, Miss Evans; she had not a penny, Allan, but he took a fancy to her and she to him, just as you and Amy might do), well Mr. and Mrs. Derrick are in London, and there will be more chance of getting a quiet word with Amy when they are away; but I know Lord Darlington is there, for he and Amy were out riding to-day; George saw them."

"Can I go to see Amy, now? I want to see that old earl too."

"It is too late, wait till the morning."

It was hard for Allan to keep quiet at his sister's that night, but still he was glad to think that he had not been too late.

CHAPTER XV.

MISSING.

AMY'S maid was the first to miss her, but as her young mistress had sometimes taken long morning walks during Mr. Derrick's absence at Darlington Castle, and as she missed nothing of any consequence, she concluded that Miss Staunton would appear in good time for Lord Darlington's late breakfast. But when his lordship came downstairs at his usual hour, and asked for her, Parkes could only say she supposed that Miss Staunton had taken a longer walk than usual, for she had not yet returned.

"It is quite possible that she has walked to Millmount, and is taking breakfast there, as Mr. and Mrs. Derrick are from home, and she has rather over-estimated my powers of lying in bed in the morning. I shall not wait for Miss Staunton, however, but I shall take breakfast and then go out to meet her."

Parkes lingered in the breakfast-room a few minutes, and saw that the earl was a little discomposed, and taking breakfast in a less leisurely way than usual.

"When did you go into Miss Staunton's room this morning, Parkes?"

"At my usual hour, a little before nine, but Miss Staunton often rises before I come in; she is very independent in her ways."

"But she said nothing to you last night about taking a morning walk."

"No, not a word, but the morning was fine, and I suppose it tempted her out."

"I have no doubt that she is at Millmount, but I wish she had said so last night. I hope at all events that she will return before Mr. and Mrs. Derrick come, and I expect them early. I think I shall go at once and fetch her home;" and Lord Darlington threw down the *Times* that he had tried to fix his attention on, and had just put on his boots, when a loud ring was heard at the hall-door. "She comes with a little noise at least to make up for my quiet breakfast," said he, with an expression of relief. But it was not Amy, but Allan Lindsay, who rung the bell.

A superb footman opened the door. Allan had had no experience of that description of animal, but stood his ground before him very fairly.

"Is Miss Staunton at home?" said he.

"I think not," said the footman, carelessly.

"When will she be at home?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"My business with Miss Staunton is urgent," said Allan. "I should be obliged to you if you would enquire as to when she is to be expected at home."

"Will you send up your card? and then Miss Staunton may be able to tell whether she will see you or not when she comes home."

Allan had never had a card in his life, and had never needed one, but he wrote his name and address on an envelope that he took out of his pocket-book. Dawson eyed the proceeding superciliously. It is not to be supposed that Amy's past history and future prospects were ignored in the servants' hall; Dawson believed her likely to be a countess in a month or two, but still there were many scrubs in London and elsewhere, who might claim acquaintance with the young lady, who were quite beneath his notice.

"That will do, I suppose," said Dawson, "for want of a better. You may go now, and call again when Miss Staunton is at home."

"I shall wait," said Allan, "till you enquire as to the time of Miss Staunton's probable return. If

she is at home, as is possible, she will scarcely refuse to receive me."

"Then you may wait outside," said Dawson, shutting the door in Allan's face, but the appearance of Lord Darlington, who had wondered at Amy's delay, caused him to open it for him. The earl's eyes, although not so young as they had been, were quick enough to observe the envelope in Dawson's hand, and to read the name of "Allan Lindsay, Branxholm," written on it.

He had also taken good note of a likeness of the young Australian in Mrs. George Copeland's possession, and he recognised at once the man whom he fancied to be twelve thousand miles off.

Amy had never done justice to the personal appearance of her lover; the earl could not help acknowledging that he was as handsome a young man as he had seen for many a day. Handsome in his own style, which was not that of fashionable society, but so far as good features, intelligent expression, and a powerful and well-formed bodily frame went, he was to the earl a noticeable man. It was for the footman to observe the cut of his clothes, and the size of his hands, and the want of *savoir-faire*, betokened by his having no card, and not saying that he had forgotten it to excuse the deficiency. Lord Darlington felt that

this visitor was a more alarming person than Dawson could imagine.

"Mr. Lindsay, I presume," said the earl, with a bow. "You have come to see Miss Staunton, I suppose, but I am sorry to say she is out this morning, and has not yet returned. I am on my way to Millmount to see if she is there."

"I have just come direct from Millmount, and Miss Staunton certainly is not there," said Allan.

"Indeed?" said the earl, "then she must have taken a longer round than usual in the other direction. I wonder at Amy going so far without me, for I am her usual escort, but I prefer my walks when the day is well aired. Amy learned a habit of early rising in Australia, which I admire, but cannot emulate."

"You are Lord Darlington, I suppose?" said Allan, bowing in his turn with as little real good will as had been bestowed on him by his rival, and with less courtly grace.

"Yes; it appears we need no introduction to each other. Amy did not send you my photograph, did she? I gave her a packet some months ago to do what she liked with, and I suppose some of them found their way to Australia. Amy has told me all about you, and of your great kindness to her when she needed

kindness so much, and I think you had some right to see what I am like."

"Indeed!" said Allan, "if such a thing was sent, it was after I left Australia. I only supposed you to be Lord Darlington, because my sister told me you were at Stanmore Hall."

"Yes; left in charge of the hall and of Mr. Derrick's sister, during his absence in town to see to some preliminary arrangements in which I am somewhat interested. You know, of course, that Mr. Derrick is married?"

"So my sister tells me," said Allan, "and to Miss Staunton's cousin."

"Amy's visit to her aunt produced results not at all anticipated by herself. She was rather reluctant to go, for we had been all enjoying London so much together; but I suppose all things are for the best. It was a great pleasure to my Olivia to make Amy's acquaintance. The only person who suffered much in the visit was poor young Hammond; you know him, don't you?"

"Yes, I knew him very well as a lad," said Allan.

"Well, the Hammonds had no claim on my consideration, for Amy tells me that they behaved very unkindly to her in Australia. Your excellent parents have, on the contrary, a right to my gratitude; for any service done to Amy is, in fact,

a service done to me," and the earl smiled condescendingly on the tall strong bushman, who would have liked to knock him down, and was quite able to do it.

"Let us walk together to Millmount," resumed Lord Darlington. "I wish to see your sister's dairy, which Amy tells me is something superb in its way. Amy's simple country tastes are very charming."

"My lord," said Allan, "you must excuse me. If you mean to go to Millmount you may go alone, but I mean to stay here until Miss Staunton comes back, for I wish to ask her if this letter," and he took out the last he had received from her, "was written from her heart. You must know, if you know anything at all about me, that Amy Staunton is dearer to me than my own life. If she really loves another man better, I will give her up and pray for her happiness, but I must have an answer from her own lips, and if you try to prevent me from having that you will repent it. I have come half round the world for the sake of asking a plain question, and receiving an honest answer. I have a right —the right of past services and of present friendship — for that even this letter does not deny, to see Amy once more. I am a strong man and a desperate one. If you do not let

me into the house, which, by-the-bye, is not yours, I shall stand here outside till Amy Staunton returns; let it be an hour hence or a week hence, but see her I shall and must."

"I do not think you know much about English laws and customs, Mr. Lindsay," said the earl, "if you think you can prowl about an English gentleman's house, and demand admittance."

"I believe I know this much, that I am neither thief nor vagrant, and have no dishonest purpose. I think I could satisfy any justice of the peace of my harmless intentions. But I laid Gerald Staunton in the grave, and I promised then to be a true friend to his daughter. And, notwithstanding all your wealth and grandeur, your young kinswoman might have perished of want in a strange land, if *our* doors had been closed against her. As you say, I may know little of English laws and customs, but I know what I came all this long way for, and what I am determined not to go away without. And if you, or Mr. Derrick, have any gratitude for past services, as you say you have——"

"Certainly we have, but neither Mr. Derrick nor myself like to be bullied on the strength of them. You speak as if I were refusing your reasonable request. I have never denied you admittance to this house, which you politely re-

mind me is not mine, I only say that hanging about the house is not to be allowed. Come in with me."

Lord Darlington expected that Allan would be struck with awe and admiration at the magnificence of the house and its appointments, as Amy had told him she had been when she first went to Stanmore, and he endeavoured to show him as much of it as he could without being suspected of a desire to make a display. He first took him to the breakfast room, where the display of silver and of Sevres china for two might strike his eye, on the ground of wanting the *Times*; then into the library, that Allan might see the array of books, which wealth felt itself bound to provide as a sort of furniture, if for no other purpose; then into the billiard-room, that he might observe how sumptuously its amusements were provided for; and, crossing the great hall, he landed Allan in the vast drawing-room, with the organ at one end, and the horizontal grand piano at the other, strewed with couches, lounges, easy-chairs and tables covered with knick-knacks, and hung round with costly mirrors and magnificently framed paintings and engravings. It was so large that the whole of the old house at Branxholm could have been put into it, and yet it was only one of the many apartments

of this great mansion. Perhaps Amy's letters had prepared Allan's mind for this magnificence;—at all events he would not flatter the earl by any expression of awe. He sat down on a luxurious chair, pointed out by Lord Darlington, as if he had been accustomed to such things from his childhood.

"This is a very good modern mansion," said Lord Darlington, "and tolerably well situated. Amy, however, greatly prefers Darlington Castle, for it is an ancient baronial hall with modern improvements, and the woods there are the growth of centuries."

"Has Amy then been there?" asked Allan.

"Oh! yes; she visited me with her brother last autumn, and indeed enjoyed her stay so much that I expect she will prefer it as a country residence to Boulton Park, which is more in this style. Of course her wishes will influence my movements, for when an old fellow like myself wins the heart of a lovely little girl like Amy the least he can do is to give her all her own way."

"Then you are positively engaged to Miss Staunton," said Allan.

"Positively engaged, the day all but fixed some six weeks hence. You can see the corroboration of the fact in my being left to take

care of Amy. I am very sorry to give you pain, my young friend, but as Amy has been perfectly frank with me, as it was with my knowledge and indeed concurrence that she wrote the letter that has disquieted you so much, I can only say that I regret your fruitless errand. If Amy had not been open with me, I might have been alarmed at seeing so determined a young fellow bent on an interview with her; but I have so long known the state of her heart—so long known that the kindly feelings which led to the conditional sort of engagement she entered into with you were understood in their true light by her—that, except for the disappointment to yourself, I cannot regret your journey. It may cost poor Amy considerable pain to think of your having travelled half round the world on so wild an idea, but it cannot make the least change in my position with my dear little girl. Have you seen the *Saturday Review*, Mr. Lindsay, or should you prefer the *Pall Mall Gazette?* I shall ring for them."

Allan was about to say that he did not come to Stanmore to read newspapers, but checked himself. The *Saturday Review* or the *Pall Mall Gazette* could not be so unpleasant as the earl's conversation, and under cover of a newspaper sheet he could speculate on the news he

had heard, and consider if it would be kind or wise to come forward to disturb Amy's mind with his apparently forgotten love.

The earl's ease, his confidence, his frankness, were not at all of a piece with Jessie's idea of its being an unwilling engagement on Amy's part; but in that case, if it was a voluntary thing, the single interview he asked for could give Amy little pain. He would not make any parade of his suffering, but simply state his doubts as to what she had meant and abide quietly by her decision. That satisfaction he was surely not ungenerous in seeking.

He sat silent for some time, and Lord Darlington's uneasiness increased. He walked across the drawing-room several times, and then looked at his watch. "I expect Mr. and Mrs. Derrick here every minute, Mr. Lindsay, and although you complained of my reception, I am quite certain that you will be still more unwelcome to Mr. Derrick, who is strongly prejudiced against everything that is Australian. I think if you would take advice from one whom you naturally feel somewhat suspicious of, it would be well for you to return to Millmount and write a few lines to Miss Staunton. If her answer does not satisfy you, you can see her at your sister's house. I feel for your disappointment, but

you could scarcely have hoped for any other result."

Allan rose slowly from his seat. "I think that I prefer to stay in the house until the master of it arrives. I am not aware of anything that I have done that should make me ashamed or afraid to meet Mr. Derrick; but if I am in your way here, I can sit alone in another room."

"Oh! no, not on my account, Mr. Lindsay, it is all the same to me, I only thought it might be unpleasant to yourself."

Dawson at this moment opened the door softly. "My lord, if you please, Parkes wants to speak to you about her young lady."

"She has returned then," said Lord Darlington, hastening to the door, followed closely by Allan Lindsay.

"No, my lord; Parkes thinks she has gone away."

"Gone away!" said the earl, hurrying to speak to the waiting-maid. "Is there any note or message left, Parkes?"

"No, my lord; but I see that there is a small portmanteau missing, and a few articles of dress."

"She must have gone to Clifton, to Miss Derrick's; Miss Staunton told me yesterday that she wished for a talk with her sister, and I

daresay I shall have a note in the course of the day."

"She must have taken an early train, for she was gone before nine to my certain knowledge, and no one about the Hall or on the grounds saw Miss Staunton go," said Parkes, dubiously, and lowering her voice to a whisper. "She cannot have eloped with any one, my lord."

"There is no one to elope with that I know of," said the earl. "I know how it is, Parkes, Miss Staunton was a little piqued at Mr. and Mrs. Derrick going to London without her, and I suppose she has gone off to show what a poor guardian I am, and to astonish us all. But I am sure we shall find some note explaining the matter. Well, Mr. Lindsay," continued Lord Darlington, turning to Allan, "it appears that you cannot see Miss Staunton at Stanmore Park to-day. When I hear from her as to her whereabouts, I shall let you know and you can see her."

"My lord," said Allan, "I believe she has fled from this house rather than marry you, and for all your smooth words you believe it too. Thank God for that."

"Nothing of the kind," said Lord Darlington. "I daresay she is now sitting at Millmount, expecting to see you, and not fancying that you

would find my conversation so very interesting as to keep you here for an hour or more. But here come Mr. and Mrs. Derrick, I daresay she has come round by the railway station, and that she is now in the carriage with them. Parkes is a fool to fancy her young lady gone because she does not see an old portmanteau."

The carriage drove up, but the eager eyes of the old man and of the young man were not gratified by the sight of Amy—Anthony and Lucy sat alone in it. Mr. Derrick looked suspiciously on the stranger.

"Allow me to introduce you to Mr. Allan Lindsay, from Branxholm, is it not? in Australia. Mrs. Derrick, Mr. Derrick. Mr. Lindsay has called this morning somewhat early to pay his respects to Miss Staunton."

Mr. Derrick gave Allan one of his ugliest looks, and looked enquiringly at Lord Darlington.

"Mr. Lindsay has not seen Miss Staunton," said the earl.

"I think after the letter which I wrote to you, Mr. Lindsay, you might have known better than to intrude into my house."

"If you did me the honour of writing to me, Mr. Derrick, I had not received the letter when I left Australia," said Allan. "I have not been fortunate enough to see Miss Staunton, for the

best of reasons, because she is not in the house."

"Oh yes, of course, she is not at home," said Anthony.

"Not at home in real earnest, she has left Stanmore," said Allan.

"On a visit to her sister, Miss Edith Derrick," said Lord Darlington, "it is rather unlucky for poor Mr. Lindsay."

"Oh! certainly," said Anthony, "very unlucky. Then I must wish you good morning, Mr. Lindsay. If Miss Staunton is not at home, of course she cannot see you. Lucy, have you got Dawson to take out those packages carefully. You had better come in out of the cold air."

"If this were a mere shift or excuse to prevent me from seeing your sister," said Allan, "I should not leave the house till I did it; but it is a real fact, and Lord Darlington is more distressed and alarmed at Miss Staunton's flight than I am. Your sister has fled from your house, to which you invited her from my father's, where you have treated her with unkindness and suspicion, and where you would have disposed of her to suit your own worldly and ambitious ends. Thank God if she has escaped from such a fate, even, although she is as far away from me as ever."

"You shall not stay here to insult me on my own property, and alarm my wife," said Anthony. "Dawson, Palmer, Cartwright, Roberts, turn this fellow off my grounds."

Allan Lindsay coolly turned on his heel.

"I should like to see one of these fellows lay a finger on me," he said; and, indeed, they looked as if he would like it better than they would. "I am perfectly satisfied that Miss Staunton is not here, and so I have no further interest in the place, and I wish you all a very good morning."

Allan Lindsay walked deliberately down the avenue, and went home to Millmount to tell the surprising news to Jessie and George, and to consult as to the best mode to adopt to find Amy.

"If she had been lost in the bush, I could have tracked her. You recollect, Jessie, when Isabel and Phemie strayed in the scrub, and were lost for twenty-four hours, and Luath and I found them. Amy has not been gone long; the girl said she missed her at nine o'clock, and she might have been gone two or three hours before that, and it is not one o'clock in the day yet. People can go a long way in a short time in this country, however."

"She might have got off by the early train before they were up. She's well known at the

station, and we could hear there where she went to. But I would not wonder she took the night express that stops at P——, fifteen miles off, that is to say, if she was really flying for fear of that old earl," said Jessie. "George, go at once to the station and enquire."

"But what friends has she got to go to?" asked Allan.

"I wish mother had said nothing about the lease," said George, "for then she would have come here, as was natural and fitting, and we could have been a protection to her even against the squire, and you could have seen her at once."

"Well, but the names of other friends?" said Allan.

"There's her sister, that seems most natural, but they are not great friends; and Miss Edith was so angry at her brother, both because he made Amy such beautiful presents and at last because he married Amy's cousin, that she went away, and has not spoken to Amy or the squire since," said Jessie. "But it is not unlikely that she is there."

"I might believe that if the old man had not said she was there," said Allan.

"Then there's Lady Gower her great-aunt," said Jessie.

"It was at her house she met this earl, and it

was her that made Amy's mother marry her first husband. I scarcely think she would go there," said Allan.

"Then there's the Evanses; but they are Mrs. Derrick's father and mother, and would be sure to side with the squire. You recollect that aunt's letter, Allan," said Jessie.

"Yes, I recollect it very well; and I don't like Mrs. Derrick's looks, either. I scarcely think that Amy would go there."

"There's Miss Pennithorne, that I know Amy looks on as a true friend; but as she has got the care of the earl's daughter, it is an open house to him, and if Amy was fleeing from a marriage with that old man it would not be there that she could take refuge. Then there are the Hammonds; but although Lord Darlington joked Amy about Louis when he was here with us, I don't think it is likely she can go to them, because the poor lad is laid up with a bad fever somewhere in France, and Amy says that his mother was always very distant to her. No; I think her sister's is the place."

"What will they do to get her back?" asked Allan, "will they advertise her as lost or missing?"

"No; they will work the telegraph with all their acquaintances, but of course everybody will

be glad to give *them* information; but nobody will mind *our* enquiries. They will say it is no business of ours," said Jessie.

"It is my only business in England," said Allan. "Then I should go first to her sister's."

"And that's a hundred-and-twenty miles off," said Jessie; "but wait till George comes back before you start."

George Copeland returned with the news that Miss Staunton had not been seen at the station, and that Lord Darlington had been before him in making enquiries there. Allan only stopped to inform himself of the proper route for Miss Derrick's house, and went off to catch the train.

CHAPTER XVI.

ENQUIRIES AND PURSUIT.

LORD Darlington was in extremely bad humour with all the world, and especially with Anthony Derrick, for it had been his very unjustifiable conduct in leaving Amy that had made her take fright. On returning from the railway station he instituted enquiries in the stable-yard and discovered that one of the horses looked as if he had had a long journey. His keen eye sought out Knowles from among the grooms and helpers, because he was so officiously ready with his opinions and surmises; and a little judicious cross-questioning elicited that he knew something about Miss Staunton's flight.

It was now far on in the day, and Knowles felt sure that Miss Staunton must be safe with her friends by this time, so that if by confession he could save his place it might serve himself and do her no harm.

"Well, my lord, to tell the truth, and make a clean breast of it, I did drive Miss Staunton to P—— station, to take the night express for London. She said a friend had written to her—a lady she told me; I think the lady was ill, leastways Miss Staunton was very anxious to get to her."

"Was the lady in London, Knowles?" asked the earl.

"Why, it never came into my head to think of anything else, leastways, Miss Staunton took her ticket for King's Cross or Euston-square, I forget which, but it was one of the two. She did not mean to stay long, I suppose, for she had only a very small portmanteau. She carried it herself to the end of the avenue. There would be a letter no doubt, explaining it all. Had they not found any letter?"

"Not yet, but I don't think there has been any proper search made."

"Miss Staunton never told me to make no secret of it," said Knowles.

"Did she not mention the name of the friend she was going to?"

"Perhaps she did, but if-so-be as she did mention it, it has gone clear out of my head. I never could keep mind of names."

"It was not to Miss Derrick?"

"No, surely I could not forget that name, besides there was no use going to London to get to Miss Derrick's."

"Was it Hubbard?" asked the earl.

"No; I think I could take my oath it warn't Mother Hubbard."

"Was it Evans?"

"No; that is the squire's lady's name. I'd sure keep mind of that name."

"Was it Miss Pennithorne, or Lady Gower, or Lady Beresford?"

Knowles shook his head. "I don't think I heard her name one of them names, but I'd not swear to it."

"Was it Porter?" asked Anthony, who now joined the earl in his enquiries on hearing that there was some clue to Amy's flight.

"Well, it might be Mrs. Porter, that is one of the names I never can be sure of."

"Not Mrs. Porter, Miss Porter," said Anthony.

"Well, Mrs. or Miss; one is as likely as the other."

"It was not Hammond?" said the earl.

"No, it was more like Porter, I think," said Knowles.

Anthony drew Lord Darlington aside, satisfied with his own acuteness.

"She never would go to the Hammonds, for Mrs. Hammond could not bear her, and besides, it is so

close to Lucy's mother and your daughter, that, if she really wants to keep out of sight, it would be impossible there. No, the Porters with whom she sailed from Australia, are the most likely people, and they are living somewhere in London. I know Amy wanted to visit them, and I objected because she had so many Australian partialities, and she had one of her sulky fits on the head of it; but I cannot recollect where they lived. We must turn to the London Directory."

"Among so many Porters," said Lord Darlington, "we cannot expect to find the one we look for, especially as you are as ignorant of his Christian name as I am. Our best plan is to find out the name of an Australian merchant residing in London, and telegraph to him for the address of Mr. Porter, an eminent Sydney merchant, who came to England on a visit by th March mail of 186—."

"You are right," said Anthony. "I shall also telegraph to Edith and to my aunt; or stop, as I am on such bad terms with Edith, you had better do that for me; Lucy can communicate with her mother, and you with Miss Pennithorne. But my own idea is, that she is either with Mr. Hubbard or with the Porters, and most probably with the latter."

"Has not Louis Hammond returned?" said the

earl. "I can put that question to Miss Pennithorne."

In due time the answers returned. None of the people telegraphed to knew anything about Miss Staunton, but Miss Pennithorne gave the required information about her neighbours. Louis Hammond had returned with his father and mother a few days ago.

The Australian merchant telegraphed that Mr. Porter had lived for the last year at 17, York-terrace, Regent's Park, but that he was about to return to Australia very shortly. He might be gone by this time; at least this was about the time fixed.

Anthony Derrick was so convinced that this was the place where Amy had gone to, that he nearly convinced Lord Darlington as well.

Not long after Allan started for Clifton, they took out their tickets for London, and went direct to the house on York-terrace. But the house was empty, and on enquiry from the house agent they learned that the Porters had left the house when their year was out, and had been visiting among their friends lately. He supposed they had sailed by this time. It was none of his business.

What ships had sailed and what ships were sailing about this time was the next object of enquiry, for of course if the Porters had sailed

before Amy left Stanmore she could not have gone with them. They were obliged to wait till the following day to make enquiries from the Australian merchant. In the meantime they looked up Mr. Hubbard, and asked him if he had ever heard anything from Amy Staunton lately. He was surprised and shocked, but Lord Darlington exonerated him of any complicity in Amy's flight, although Anthony still had his suspicions.

It was intolerable for Lord Darlington to have no company but that of Anthony Derrick for the evening. He felt that it had been his conduct to his sister rather than his own pertinacity that had driven Amy to this rash step, and when he accompanied Anthony to his London house, and heard his complacent recital of what had been bought and planned by him and Lucy during their recent visit, in order that their first parties should go off with *éclat*, he proposed to go to the theatre or anywhere as an escape. It was certainly not to be expected that Amy should be there, but yet her lover's eyes looked for her in every crowd, and he had lately been so accustomed to her company that he missed her as much at the theatre as at —— square.

On the following day they called on the Australian merchant, who informed them that he had just learned that the Porters were sailing in

the Old England from Liverpool to Melbourne, that was advertised to leave on that very day. It was possible that if they went to Liverpool, they might see Mr. Porter before he sailed.

"We have been sent to London on a false scent," said Anthony to the earl. "Knowles was deceiving us. She has gone off to Australia with them. Let her go. I'll not trouble to whistle her back."

"No, do not be so sure," said the earl. "Let us ascertain by further enquiry before we conclude that she has gone to Australia. I think it impossible she could have arranged to take such a voyage; for her departure seemed to me to be a sudden freak, consequent on your rather unwarrantable conduct in leaving her at Stanmore with me, upon which, however, I put the best construction that I could. No, up to your departure for London I am satisfied that she had no purpose of flight. A departure for Australia was a desperate step certainly, but still it could not be taken at a moment's warning."

"She had enough money to pay her passage, for she received her quarter's allowance from me the other day, and she never was behind hand with her income. Australian people think very differently of such a voyage compared to English people, and take it on very short notice. Look at that young

fellow coming all this way for the mere chance of speaking to her. She is gone, and I only hope that she will marry some one else on the voyage or in Melbourne, so that his journey may be as fruitless as ours has been. I shall go back to Stanmore Park, and I advise you to do the same."

"Not just yet," said Lord Darlington. "I must go to Liverpool to enquire further, and I need your company. We must see the vessel if she has not gone, and at all events enquire at the agents if any young lady accompanied the Porters. If she is with them, which I greatly doubt, we may be in time to see her, and remonstrate with her, and I dare say to bring her back. I do not consider myself justified in giving her up because I have not found her in London. My own opinion is that she has taken a situation, for that is what she had talked of doing for months."

"I should never forgive her if she took a situation," said Anthony.

"But I should," said the earl; "and I have little doubt three months of a dependent life with strangers would wonderfully reconcile Amy to being a countess. I only wish I had yielded to her wishes and let her try it before, and been able to come in now. This Liverpool expedition I have no opinion of, but still if you believe she

has gone in that direction I shall accompany you there."

Anthony somewhat reluctantly agreed to go with the earl. The step his sister had taken was so underhand and so ungrateful after all the kindness he had showered upon her, that he considered himself absolved from all care for her future. It showed, too, such a resolute determination against the noble and advantageous marriage he had wished her to contract, that he was sure no coercion or persuasion would induce her to yield; and if she was not prepared to marry Lord Darlington, it was of no use trying to bring her back.

Still it would be a satisfaction to know that she was gone, and gone to Sydney with those Porters, to prove himself in the right with Lord Darlington, who was always so overbearing, and to disappoint Allan Lindsay of the opportunity of seeing Amy, for which he had travelled so far.

When they reached Liverpool they learned from the agent that the Old England was just about to sail, and that Mr. and Miss Porter, and a young lady who was going to Sydney under their charge, had taken their passage and were now on board.

"I told you so," said Anthony. "I knew it

was of no use making further enquiries, Lord Darlington."

"Will you be good enough to tell us the young lady's name?' said the earl.

"Miss Seymour," answered the agent.

"Of course she would take another name," said Anthony.

"Have you seen her?" asked the earl of the agent.

"I just had a glance of her as she called with Mr. and Miss Porter the morning when Mr. Porter settled for the passage money of the party."

"Could you tell us what the young lady was like? Was she young and slight and pretty?" said the earl.

"Rather pretty and lady-like, but I did not think her slender. She had a large shawl on, however."

"There is no doubt of its being her," said Anthony. "Is it worth our while to go on board to see her?'

"There is just a bare chance, if you lose no time," said the agent.

"But will she come back if we do see her?" said Anthony.

"The passage-money will be forfeited," said the agent.

"That is nothing," said Lord Darlington, "but

it is not our friend I am pretty sure. Your description does not agree with ours, and the name is different; and when was this young lady's passage taken out, Mr. Black."

"With the Porters', a fortnight ago."

"It is not Amy," said the earl, "it cannot be Amy. But we must go on board and satisfy you, Derrick."

They drove as rapidly as they could through the crowded streets of the busy commercial town, took a boat, and rowed for dear life to the Old England, which was just getting up her steam. They signalled for her to stop, for had she once fairly started, no boat rowed with human hands could make up with her. The captain was very little disposed to stop, for his passenger-list was full, and all were on board, and there was no policeman in the boat to threaten the abstraction of any of them. The two gentlemen might have some important business connected with the Old England. Lord Darlington handed the commander of the vessel the hurried note from the agent, empowering Mr. Derrick to see if his sister was on board.

"We have no one of that name," said the captain abruptly.

"My sister's name is not mine," said Anthony. "She is Miss Staunton."

"There is no one of that name either here."

"There is a young lady accompanying Mr. and Miss Porter under the name of Seymour, who I have reason to believe is my sister. She is under age, and goes on board without my consent. I have only to beg that I may see her for five minutes."

Mr. and Miss Porter and their friend were called on deck. Mr. Porter gave the stiffest of bows to Anthony Derrick, who had been barely civil to him when they had met at Southampton, and of whom he had seen and heard nothing since. Indeed both father and daughter had some reason to think Amy Staunton ungrateful for their kindness to her on board the P. and O. steamers.

"I beg your pardon," said Anthony, "for this interruption, Mr. Porter, but have you got my sister on board with you?"

"I know nothing whatever of your sister. I have not seen her since I gave her to your care at Southampton, and I don't think Leonora has had a line from her for twelve months back. Miss Seymour, are you supposed to be the lady? I think Mr. Derrick may be quite satisfied at a glance that you are not our old fellow passenger."

Miss Seymour was certainly not slender, and

could not be mistaken for Amy. Anthony, who thought her rather plain-looking, and quite thirty, was amazed at Mr. Black, the agent's, stupidity in describing her as he did.

"I hope you are satisfied," said the captain, "and that you will now allow the Old England to go off."

"I am quite satisfied," said Lord Darlington, but Anthony looked disappointed, both because he had been proved in the wrong, and because he had lost the chance of getting rid of Amy altogether, which was about the next best thing that could happen when she would not marry Lord Darlington.

"I think I shall give out that Amy has sailed for Australia," said Anthony to Lord Darlington as they returned to take the train from Liverpool. "I suppose you give her up now, my lord."

"Not yet," said the earl thoughtfully. "She has no doubt gone to take a situation, and although that is not altogether to be desired, I shall let her do so, and step in in the course of a month or two. But it is not a bad idea to give it out that she is on her way to Australia, for it will stop all enquiry on the part of others, and this Mr. Lindsay will probably take his departure without delay for his accustomed latitudes

when he hears it. As for Amy's retreat, I shall find that out ere long, and I have little doubt that I shall succeed better when I am not hampered by your clumsy aid, and that of Mrs. Derrick. Here we part; I go to London to make enquiries quietly, and you return as you wish to Stanmore Park. We have spent two days in enquiries very vainly, and, what is worse, we have made the matter rather too public, but I have gone into this affair a little too deeply to give it up yet."

And so they parted, without any liking on either side, but with a regret on Anthony's part that owing to his sister's perverseness and wilfulness, the friendship of the head of the house was lost to him. He felt out of humour with everything and with everybody; he felt even almost inclined to be out of humour with his wife.

He went round by Millmount as he drove home from the station, and found somewhat to his relief that Allan was not there, but as he had determined on the ingenious lie or subterfuge which he meant to give out to the world, he thought this was the first place in which to try its effect.

"Have you heard anything about Miss Amy?"

asked Jessie Copeland eagerly, for she could imagine no other cause for the visit.

"I made enquiries in London, and was there directed to Liverpool. I have had good reason to believe that Miss Staunton has sailed for Melbourne, in the Old England."

"Did you not go to see if it was really her?" asked Jessie, who felt rather incredulous as to this news.

"The ship had put on steam, and there was no making up to her, but the description satisfied me. The young lady accompanied the Porters, who, you recollect, were Miss Staunton's fellow-passengers in her homeward voyage two years ago. She was reported to be young and pretty by the agent of the Old England."

"But did she give her name?" asked Jessie.

"No, I suppose she feared identification. Her passage was taken out under the name of Seymour, but there was no doubt in my mind that it was she. Lord Darlington and myself are so much satisfied on the subject that we are making no further enquiries. Of course if Miss Staunton prefers Australia to England, it is her own affair, but I have nothing further to do with her. I thought I should call here and set your mind at rest, and also request you to tell your brother that I have not forgotten his insolent language.

I have been hesitating about giving Mr. Copeland a lease of Millmount, for Dixon tells me application has been made, but this affair has determined me. I never could endure to have a family with whom so many unpleasant associations have arisen, settled close to Stanmore for nineteen years. I am sorry for the sake of old tenants whom I have great respect for to come to such a determination, but your conduct, and that of your husband, and especially that of your brother, have put it out of my power to act otherwise. I wish you a very good morning, Mrs. George," and the squire bowed stiffly, and drove away, leaving Jessie with nothing but bad news for old and young.

Old Mr. and Mrs. Copeland took the intelligence better than she had expected, but Jessie was very sorry that her brother had done so much mischief, and all for no good, for if Amy had gone to Australia she was sure to find her way to Branxholm, and it would have been better for Allan to have been at home.

Still it was very remarkable that Amy should have gone away with the Porters without dropping the slightest hint of it to Jessie. She had never spoken of the Porters at all after the first arrival, except to say that her brother would not let her visit them. But Anthony's story was

told as if he believed in it, and the cessation of all enquiry looked as if they were satisfied. It was very perverse that Allan and Amy should be making the complete circuit of the globe after each other, but yet things often do happen very perversely, Jessie thought.

When Allan Lindsay returned from making further enquiries in houses where he was not at all civilly received, without finding the least clue to the fugitive, Jessie told him Mr. Derrick's news very softly and kindly.

"If she has gone, Allan, it is to go to you."

"Then I don't think she has gone. I'd have liked to have heard Mr. Derrick tell it, for I think I could have found out if he was speaking the truth. But if she has gone, there is no doubt you will get a letter explaining about it after all fear of pursuit is over. If you get no letter I will be satisfied that the young lady with the Porters was not Amy. And I am rather tired of making enquiries from people who think I have no business in the matter, so I think that this is the place to wait at. Amy is sure to write to you sooner or later. But I am very sorry that Mr. Copeland is to lose his farm through me. I never thought of such a result as that, Jessie, but when I thought of my darling being driven away by that heartless brother

and that hypocritical old man, I could not keep my temper."

Many were the surmises as to the disappearance of Amy Staunton from her brother's house, and in fashionable circles there was as little charity shown towards the runaway as in humble society. It was not the question whither had she gone? but with whom had she gone? for it seemed impossible for such a step to be taken alone, and each of the possible lovers whom Miss Staunton might have met with was suggested by one friend or another as the companion of her flight. It was hard for Lord Darlington to preserve his usual complacent smile when he met the questioning looks and the rallying remarks of his friends and acquaintances.

If he had been altogether beaten, he thought the task would have been easier, he would have pooh-poohed the thing, and said that the girl was not worth having, that the pleasure was in the pursuit, and that he was too old a bird to be caught with chaff. But he had not given up the game, there were still some moves on the board, and though he was sorry that everybody saw how very nearly he was checkmated, he could only say that he believed the young lady had gone to Australia with some friends,

and had not even the satisfaction of abusing her for doing it.

He trusted to the effects of the situation she was going to take; he said to himself that he would not be surprised if she wrote to him explaining all about it before she wrote to Anthony, because when she was lonely she always missed him, and wearied for his letters, if not for himself. In the meantime, as he could do nothing further in the matter, the earl determined to enjoy himself. The last two days had been extremely fatiguing, and he determined to rest in the first place, and then cross over to the Continent, where he could find people to associate with who had not seen his devotion to Amy Staunton and who would not remind him of her flight.

It was at a later hour than usual that Lord Darlington rose for breakfast on the day after his return to London. He found a letter from Anthony Derrick, marked "immediate," among the heap that awaited his perusal.

"DEAR LORD DARLINGTON,

"After all our trouble and fatigue in going to London and Liverpool, we might have spared ourselves the trouble, for Lucy has had a letter from her mother, saying she found Amy

comfortably established at Mrs. Hammond's when she went to call. Lucy telegraphed to us, but we had left no address when we left London in such haste for Liverpool, and we had all that ridiculous journey there and back again for nothing.

"Mrs. Hammond seemed very fond of Amy, Mrs. Evans says; and you know how very spooney the young man always was about her, so I suppose that is the attraction. But they made no secret of it at all, only that Mrs. Hammond had invited Amy, and that she had gone at once. Mrs. Evans gave the young lady a bit of her mind about the impropriety of which she had been guilty and the state of alarm she had put us all in, and Amy cried a little, but the old woman, Mrs. Hammond I mean, defended her. You may do as you please, but for my part I should advise you to trouble yourself no further. I wash my hands of her completely, and I only write this to prevent you making any absurd enquiries. I tried to stop that young fellow's proceedings by telling them at Millmount that she had gone off in the Old England; but if young Hammond stands to win, he will be none the better for her staying in England. After the way in which Amy has behaved I have nothing whatever to say to any

of her suitors. Believe me, my dear lord, yours very truly,

"A. DERRICK."

"Very clever, Mr. Derrick," said the earl. "You think, and of course Lucy thinks, that after this, you need give no fortune with your sister, but I can tell you that if she marries me, you shall. As for Louis Hammond, Amy does not care for him, and unless he is more interesting as an invalid than he was as a healthy young man, I don't feel afraid of him. It was all Derrick's conduct that drove her away from me. I have a better chance even in that house of Hammonds than at Stanmore. Well, it is rather hard to be obliged to go off again just as I had resolved to take it easy, but I must go off to Belton at once, and see Amy, and learn how the land lies."

CHAPTER XVII.

A REFUGE.

It was not a half welcome that Mrs. Hammond gave to Amy Staunton when the frightened, tired, little traveller, who had never before arranged a railway journey for herself, and who had been apprehensive all the way that she would be pursued and discovered before she came to her journey's end, came to the door of Thornton House. Mrs. Hammond had not expected quite so prompt an acceptance of the invitation, but she judged from it that the girl's need had been great. She took Amy in her arms and let her sob out her thanks on her bosom. Her heart was opened to see the girl's beauty, and to admire her winning ways—she felt that she loved her now.

"The worst of my being here, dear Mrs. Hammond, is that they will so soon find it out unless you could hide me somewhere."

"There is no occasion to hide you, Miss Staunton. You are my guest for the present, you choose to be here, and Mr. Hammond and I choose to keep you. No one can take you away from us against your will."

"Not my brother, not the earl?"

"Certainly not, my dear."

"I am not of age, you know."

"Still it is impossible that your brother can take you away from a safe shelter like this to force you into marriage against your will, and that is all he wishes from you, I believe."

"He certainly threatened to turn me out if I would not marry Lord Darlington, and I had no place to go to till you were so good as to offer me a home."

"I think you are perfectly justified in leaving a protection that you could only keep on such terms—every one must think so."

"And he left me in the house alone with Lord Darlington! and I did not like it."

"Lord Darlington did not presume on that, did he, my dear?"

"No, not exactly; only he said that of course I could not draw back after such a thing. Now I assure you, my dear Mrs. Hammond, that I never, either to himself or to Anthony, said a word that could be interpreted into acceptance."

"It was unjustifiable, it was disgraceful," said Mrs. Hammond. "We have done nothing to be ashamed of, we need use no secrecy."

"I left in the night, because I could not go away unobserved in the day. I hope you do not think it very dreadful, but I could not trust myself to tell anything about it to the earl."

"Of course not."

"Not altogether of course, Mrs. Hammond. I do so wish that I could have told him; but then, he would have persuaded me that I should not do it at all. And Parkes, that is my maid, watched me in his interests, so I was forced to keep my flight from her. I know that for months she has got money and handsome presents from Lord Darlington; and Mrs. Harrison, the housekeeper, got them too, so I could not trust her in the least. I left no note, for I feared it might be found too soon, and I might be pursued. I am sure they are all looking everywhere for me. Should not I write that I am here?"

"Oh! I think there is no occasion to do that till your nerves are quieted down. The Evanses are sure to be here to-day I think, and they will see you, or learn that you are here, and send off the news to Stanmore. Don't fret about letting Mr. Derrick and Lord Darlington know at

once. I think they deserve to be a little put about."

"What I wish to do is to take a situation, because I know that Anthony will never forgive me, or make any terms with me now. If you could help me to get a situation in some quiet family, I should be so grateful to you. You know I taught at Branxholm, and I have improved since."

"The proposal is very proper and very spirited of you, and by-and-by we shall talk it over, but what you want is rest at present."

"I hope I have not been spoiled by having had so much money and living in such luxury; but I mean to try to forget the last two years and a half, and to think of myself as Amy Staunton the governess at Branxholm, and nothing more important."

"Well, dear, get off your wrappings and refresh yourself with a bath. We Australians understand *that* comfort; and I shall give you the old bush refreshment of a cup of tea, and something to eat, for I dare say you have had no breakfast, and no sleep last night either."

Amy felt this kind personal attention from Mrs. Hammond something far beyond her expectations. She really felt exhausted by the excitement and the journey and the want of food;

there was no one near her to tell her to attend to herself, and, singularly enough, though she was flying from Lord Darlington, and rejoicing in her escape, she could not help recollecting several journeys which she had taken with him, in which he had been so attentive and so thoughtful of her comfort; and without ever asking her what she would like, always brought her the very thing that she could eat or drink. She was angry at herself for missing him, and at the same time she could not help it. She recollected too Allan's kind cares for her comfort long ago; the long ride he had taken to Gundabook to procure supper that night when she was so foolish and unreasonable, and his watchfulness and solicitude on the last journey they took together to Adelaide before she sailed for England. Of all the things that she had left at Stanmore, her old riding-habit, which was too bulky to be crammed into her portmanteau, was most regretted; and she was delighted that Hugh Lindsay's watch, which she had wound up every night and kept in her bed-room, had by that means been kept in such good order that she could rely upon it in this strange journey. As she took frequent glances at it to see how time wore away, she recollected the words that had been spoken when she received it, that at the other end of the world there

was an old man and a young man too that would think long till they saw her face again. Why had not Allan written? If it had only been to scold and reproach her, it would have been better —far better—than this indifferent silence.

So her mind had wandered between the old lover who would take no rejection, and the young lover who took it only far too easily, with a troubled, remorseful, regretful recollection during the long hours of her solitary journey.

Now, however, she felt she could breathe freely. The house she was in seemed like a home, and Mrs. Hammond was as kind and thoughtful as possible. After the most delicious cup of tea that was ever offered to a traveller, and a refreshing bath, Mrs. Hammond, saying there was nowhere so good as bed to rest in, made her lie down, closed the shutters, kissed her, and drew the curtains, saying that she hoped she might have some sleep, as she stood in need of it.

Was this the woman who had looked on her so coldly six years ago when her father lay dead in the house at Branxholm? What had wrought such a change on Mrs. Hammond? It was not prosperity; for she had been as cold to Amy when she was Anthony's favourite sister as when she first saw her, and now certainly she was as friendless as ever. But whatever had caused the

change it did not seem like a whim or a caprice; Amy felt that her new friend was to be relied on. She did not sleep, she was too much excited to sleep, but she rested for some hours luxuriously.

When she got up in the evening and joined the family circle she was astonished to find herself so much at home. Louis was quietly happy, but he did not put himself forward at all obtrusively; he was desirous that Amy should find Thornton House a place of refuge, and she did. Clara and her sister sang their prettiest songs, Mr. Hammond got into his favourite vein of Australian talk, and Mrs. Hammond looked like a benevolent genius rejoicing over the happiness she had created.

It was not till the following day that the Evanses called. It had been somewhat difficult for Mrs. Hammond to be civil to Mrs. Evans lately, but when she broke forth with violent invectives against her niece for leaving her home in the clandestine manner she did, and alarming the family and the neighbourhood, recapitulating the benefits which Mr. Derrick had conferred on her, and the affection which Lucy had bestowed on her, Mrs. Hammond could not help interrupting her visitor by saying,

"I invited Miss Staunton to visit me, and she

came at once. Some of the benefits with which Mr. Derrick favoured her were rather questionable. He told her that if she did not marry Lord Darlington she must seek another home for herself, and Miss Staunton under these circumstances was right to accept the first offer of a refuge that she received."

"But why go off at night, Mrs. Hammond, and alarm everybody?"

"My young friend left Stanmore at the only time when she could do so unobserved. When a girl's natural protectors leave her for their own pleasure, and she is surrounded by spies, she must not stand upon the manner of her going, but go at once. I can only say that she was welcome here when she did arrive, and she means to stay here until she can meet with a situation."

"But consider what people will say," said Mrs. Evans.

"I do not care for what people will say who do not know the circumstances, Mrs. Evans. Those who are aware of them will do justice to your niece's conduct."

"Have you written to your brother, Amy?" said Mrs. Evans, turning to the culprit herself.

"Not yet. I meant to do so to-day."

"I think you may save yourself the trouble,

for I shall inform him by telegram and write the particulars to Lucy. I only want to stop all further enquiry, for they have been working the telegraphs in all directions to discover you. I don't suppose you have anything to say in your own justification."

"I have a great deal to say, if you would only listen," said Amy.

But Mrs. Evans showed no disposition to listen, and hurried off to relieve herself by dispatching a telegram in the first place, and by sitting down to write a long letter to Lucy, explaining the position which Amy held at Thornton House, and supposing that Lord Darlington would be cured now, for no doubt Amy was throwing herself fairly into Louis Hammond's arms.

Amy thought it due to herself to write a justification of her conduct to her brother; nay, she would have wished to do the same to Lord Darlington, only it would have been misinterpreted. On the following day she saw Miss Pennithorne, who called at Thornton House as soon as she heard that Amy's arrival there must reach Mr. Derrick and the earl through other channels. Miss Pennithorne rejoiced in the result of her persevering appeals to Mrs. Hammond, and although she would have been better pleased to hear of a marriage than a situation as being con-

templated, she had little doubt that Louis would be successful. Olivia sent her dearest love and hoped Amy would come to see her, and she would try to forgive her from her heart for disappointing her papa.

It was not till Miss Pennithorne had called that Amy recollected that she ought to write to Jessie Copeland. She would hear what everybody said, and Anthony would never take the trouble to let Jessie see her justification.

So, while Jessie and Allan were debating the chances as to her having gone to Melbourne with the Porters, they received a letter explaining that she had gone to Mrs. Hammond's, and that everyone there was very kind to her; that she meant to take a situation, for she knew her brother would never receive her again; and that Mrs. Hammond had written to her, offering her assistance and advice in that direction, at a time when she was sorely beset. In the meantime she escaped importunities that were very painful to her, for although Lord Darlington had many good qualities and had been very kind to her, she never could feel to him as she ought to do to the man she meant to marry, and it would not be right to allow him to persuade her contrary to her own judgment and feelings. "So you see, Jessie, through God's providence and Mrs. Ham-

mond's kindness," concluded Amy, "I have got a safe refuge, and have not brought you or Mr. Copeland into any trouble with Anthony."

"I have got you into trouble, notwithstanding all her care, poor dear girl," said Allan. "It is enough to make one's blood boil to hear how people speak of her as they do, and she so entangled and beset and spied on. They never think of what a hard fate she fled from, and can only think of an elopement with some one or other. And it was a lie that Mr. Derrick told you about Amy sailing for Australia. I always thought it was."

"But Allan, what do you think of Mrs. Hammond now?" said Jessie.

"It is most astonishing, but then, what will not a mother do for the sake of her son? Think of our mother sending me away on such a mere chance, because she thought it *was* a chance, and that it would ease my mind if I got it. And Mrs. Hammond, though very high and mighty with strangers, had a very warm heart to all her children, and to Mr. Louis in particular."

"And the old lord said that Mr. Louis was farther gone than any one he ever saw in his life. To be sure you don't count him as any authority, but Amy never downright denied it," said Jessie.

"Oh! I know that is true, for his sister wrote

about it to Mrs. Lufton, but, be that as it may, I must have a few words with Amy, wherever she is. She may like Louis as she has gone to his mother's, but, to be sure, the poor dear girl was desperate. But I'd far sooner give her up to Louis Hammond, that I have known him from a boy to be honest and true, than to that smiling old hypocrite, with his *settled* day and his *positive* engagement and his *castle* that Amy thought so much of. Now I have been poking myself into houses that I have not been welcome at, and here, where I have been welcome, I have only done mischief; but I must lose no time in going to see Amy at Mrs. Hammond's, although I may have that lady's black looks for my pains. Amy says she has written to her brother, and that the Evanses saw her there at Thornton House, as they call the place; but Mr. Derrick does not take the trouble to ride round and contradict the account he gave that she had sailed for Australia."

"I dare say, Allan, he thought as that was all that had brought you here you would take ship at once and go back. He must think you have some chance surely."

"Well, I would not say much about my chance, for this letter I keep of hers seems very true and very natural, only that old man said it

was with his knowledge and concurrence that she wrote it, and everything that he had a hand in I feel suspicious of. Mr. Louis may be a lover, and he may be more welcome to Amy in her distress, but it was his mother that wrote to Amy and her protection that she offered, and I shall thank Mrs. Hammond for that kindness as long as I live. So, Jessie, I am off again; I suppose I had better do as she did and take London first. It is an extraordinary country for railways, this England, but I have made no mistake yet with what Amy called in her letters to me that bewildering book 'Bradshaw.'"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS STAUNTON'S VISITORS.

ALTHOUGH it was a relief to Lord Darlington that Anthony did not accompany him in his endeavour to reclaim Amy, in one sense it was a disadvantage, for he had not her brother's authority, and this he seriously pondered as he drove up to Thornton House.

Amy was sitting in the drawing-room with Mrs. Hammond when she saw the hansom cab drive up to the door and Lord Darlington alight.

"Anthony is sure to be with him. Oh! Mrs. Hammond, what shall I do?"

"Do nothing, my dear; leave it all to me, there is nothing to be afraid of, your brother is not with the earl—he is alone."

Lord Darlington was quite familiar with the house, and, instead of asking for any one in particular, said only, "The ladies are in the drawing-room, I suppose." And, as James had had no

directions to the contrary, he announced, "The Earl of Darlington," as he had done several times before.

Mrs. Hammond rose from her seat with dignity, coming between the earl and Amy, whom he was just about to greet.

"May I ask your lordship what gives us the honour of this visit at this time?"

"I have come, Mrs. Hammond, to call on you and on Miss Staunton, who has given us all a great deal of anxiety lately. Mr. Derrick deputes me to make some enquiries as to his sister's very singular conduct. Of course we can allow for persons from the antipodes not doing exactly like other people, but it is certainly not *en règle* that a young lady should take a solitary midnight journey without telling her friends of it, thus exposing herself to the most injurious imputations. I am sure that you did not know what you were doing, Amy, or what cruel anxiety you have made me (and your brother also) suffer. I have not slept since I heard of it until now a little in the railway carriage, when my mind was comparatively at rest, for fatigue and drowsiness came over me. But, in spite of all this," and the earl lowered his voice, "you are still the same to me, Amy. I do not think it is possible for you to offend me. Why did you not tell me

of this invitation to Thornton House? You know I felt that Mr. Derrick had behaved badly to you in going away. If you had only told me, I could have arranged that you should go from Stanmore comfortably and respectably. I thought you had more confidence in me, Amy."

Amy trembled with agitation. She had thought that if she were only out of her brother's house she would have courage to stand up against Lord Darlington, and to speak boldly and uncompromisingly to him, but here, in Mrs. Hammond's drawing-room, was this pertinacious lover, who would ignore the fact that she had fled from him, who would look on her as if she was his, and as if she had not power to control her own actions. But Mrs. Hammond helped her in her difficulty.

"I think, my Lord Darlington," said she, "that you altogether mistake, or at least misrepresent the ground on which you stand with this young lady. She left her brother's house at my urgent entreaty, because she feared she would be forced into a marriage with you. She travelled by night because she could not escape unobserved by day; and when the whole truth comes to be known, as it must be ere long, it will be most discreditable to you and Mr. Derrick, that she was forced into such a flight."

"Amy," said Lord Darlington, "I am sure you never said that I would have forced you into a marriage against your will. I can scarcely be accountable for Mr. Derrick's temper."

Amy's lips moved as if to speak, but she could say nothing. It was true that, although her lover had been unscrupulous in some things, he had been gentle and forbearing. She was so sorry for him that she half forgot to be sorry for herself.

"This is the house of an independent English gentleman, whose wife I have the honour to be," said Mrs. Hammond. "Here I have promised Miss Staunton a refuge from solicitations that have made her miserable; and, however you and Mr. Derrick may divide the blame and the disgrace of the affair between you, my duty is clear. You have not the shadow of a claim on Miss Staunton, and you have no right to be in my house without my consent. You will please to leave this house and not to enter it again."

"Amy," said Lord Darlington, "I do not take my dismissal from this woman. Have you really thought what you were doing when you put yourself under the protection of one who can insult the dearest friend you have?—for we *have* been friends—we *are* friends still, are we

not?" He looked strangely sad as he turned from Mrs. Hammond to Amy. "It was your brother that made you leave Stanmore so rashly; but *I* did not offend you, *I* did not terrify you. Mrs. Hammond, I must have five minutes' conversation with the girl I have looked on as my promised wife. You may at least grant me that. Think how I have loved her, how I have all but won her, and then fancy how I can bear to be ordered out of her presence by another than herself. Amy—Amy—just ten minutes!"

Mrs. Hammond left the room with a warning glance to Amy. She was disappointed at seeing so much agitation and so little anger. But then, it was not Mrs. Hammond whom Lord Darlington loved.

"You have not said a word yet to me, Amy, you have not even shaken hands with me."

Amy stretched out her hand, which was taken and not relinquished.

"You are going, I suppose, to try to take a situation?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hammond has promised to help me to one."

"If you tire of it, Amy, will you recollect me?"

"I shall never forget you, never; only I shall

never recollect you in the way you wish. Once for all, my lord, I never can be your wife. You did not think it would be good for Allan if I married him upon so little love, and I feel far less for you."

"But then *I* feel far more. Are you sorry for me, Amy?"

"Yes; but I cannot help it," said Amy, with a torrent of tears. "I wish you did not feel what I must say so painful."

"I do not threaten to shoot myself, Amy, that is an idiotic proceeding; but there are other ways of going to the devil than that."

"Oh! my lord, live;—live well for the sake of your children."

"My children! an idiot and a cripple! Oh! yes; become virtuous, and devote myself to them. Why, I never cared about Olivia till you taught me, and now I can never bear to see her; and as for Boulton, he is a more painful subject still, and, what is more, he cannot live for many months. No, dearest Amy; think of the emptiness of the heart which you have filled, think of what a good man you might make me, think of the good you can do in the world in the position I can give you. I don't speak of wealth, rank, indulgence for yourself, but where and how could you do as much good?"

"My lord, it cannot be; I could do no good if I began by doing evil."

"That is nonsense, and besides there is no evil in it at all. Amy, you have talked to that woman till she has blinded your excellent judgment. Why, even if it were a little of a sacrifice, are you not capable of making a sacrifice for a good object, and in return for a love which I think you believe in. I can only say that no one can love you as I do; no one would forgive your wild escapade as I have done, for I forgive you everything, and take you by the hand as my wife, and then no one will dare to breathe a word against you. Would any other forgive you thus? Do you know what your brother, and what everyone else thinks of it, that it was an invitation from the son and not from the mother; but I do not believe anything but what you choose to tell. Am I not an old fool?' said the earl, bitterly.

"My lord," said Amy, "you are giving me a great deal of pain, a cruel amount of pain. If I could blot this last year from your memory, as well as from my own, I would thankfully and gladly do it. But though you grieve me, and though you frighten me, and though you mortify me, you do not make me love you by what you say. Do not think so meanly of yourself, and of your

great love (which I know is far beyond my deserts) as to try to win me over by such arguments. I do so want to think kindly of you, to forget all that would offend me, and to recollect all for which I ought to be grateful. How much I have liked you, how much I have confided in you, you know as well as I do, but that is all over now. I wish you well for your own sake, and for that of poor Olivia, whom I have lost too, and whom I may never see again. Cannot you bear disappointment more bravely? You might have known from the first that it could not be."

"I never knew it, and I do not know it now," said the earl, resolutely.

"We have had our ten minutes' talk, my lord; and I have said all I can honestly say to you, and it only distresses us both. Farewell, my lord; may God bless you, and guide you, but let me never see your face again."

He took the little hand, kissed it, and drew the tearful face close to his. "It is for the last time, Amy," he muttered, as he kissed her cheek. He took no farewell of the other members of the household, but got into his carriage and drove rapidly to the station, without looking in at Thrush Grove, although Miss Pennithorne and Olivia were expecting him and watching at the window.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Hammond to Amy, who was crying very sadly when she returned to the room. "This is very painful work for you, but I suppose it is over now."

"I suppose so; but he did like me so much, and it seems most ungrateful in me not to return it, but I cannot. I wish I had something to do to drive this out of my head, for it appears that people are all talking about me. If I had only left a note behind me, or written as soon as I arrived here, it might have justified my conduct in the eyes of the world; but I did so want to be able to breathe free, and to delay this last terrible interview."

"No one here believes any harm of you," said Mrs. Hammond, gravely. "If Lord Darlington himself believed anything of the kind, he would not have followed you here. As for your brother and his wife——"

"They are both irrevocably offended, I know that. I have known that Anthony's love has been lost for a long time. After his engagement to Lucy he never seemed to need me, and, although I must say that Lord Darlington shielded me from much unkindness, I am sure that he only separated us more widely. Anthony chooses to put his own construction on my flight, and I think I shall never see him more."

"Mr. Derrick of course looks down on us. I could perceive that when he visited here last summer."

"A little of that, no doubt; but his deep offence will be taken at your interfering with his plans for me. But it is sad to think that I shall not see Anthony again, I hoped so much when I came back to England, and for a long time afterwards, from my brother's love. I have taken away none of his costly presents, because, when I feel that his love is dead, I cannot bear to keep the gifts. But do you think that what people say of me will hinder me from getting a situation? for Lord Darlington implied that it would. I have no one to recommend me but you, Mrs. Hammond. I fear I may give you some trouble."

"Not at all, not at all," said Mrs. Hammond; "we shall get you comfortably placed ere long, I do not doubt. Little would your mother have thought of your being reduced to take a situation when you have such a wealthy brother."

"Mamma never depended on my brother, but then mamma did not know how ill papa was when she died. I have been as friendless before, and did not apply to Anthony. Now I am older and more capable of earning my livelihood; but people are so much more fastidious here than

they were at Branxholm, and if my own brother believes and spreads unkind reports against me it will be difficult for me to be admitted into a respectable family. Don't think that I regret what I have done," said Amy eagerly, seeing a cloud on Mrs. Hammond's face. "Only I don't like giving you trouble."

"I wish, my dear, you could give me three times the trouble I am likely to have with you. I wish to atone for the way in which I steeled my heart to you when you were desolate in a far land. It ought to cost me something to obtain your forgiveness;" and the woman whom Amy Staunton had thought so hard wound her arms round her neck, and two tears dropped from her eyes.

"Don't speak of it, Mrs. Hammond; it was all wisely ordered I have no doubt. Those were very happy years at Branxholm," and Amy sighed, "and perhaps dear mamma would feel more grateful to you for the timely help you give me now than for any help then. You know, perhaps Miss Pennithorne told you, that my poor mother was persuaded into a reluctant marriage when she was very young."

"And when she liked another better than Mr. Derrick's father. I know the story."

"Yes, that made it all the worse. But she

had no friend to stand by her, and help her as you and Miss Pennithorne have helped me. I recollect so well her warning to me before she died that I should not marry any one unless I felt such love as she felt for papa, but without your help I am sure that I should have given way. Oh! Mrs. Hammond, don't regret what is past, for no service you could have ever done me is equal to what you have done now."

"And there was no one to help your mamma in that way; no, of course not," said Mrs. Hammond, thoughtfully.

"You know she was very young — much younger than I am, and she had not seen so much, and had never tried to do anything for herself, and she wished to please everybody; and, indeed, that has been the rock I nearly split upon myself. It is impossible to please everybody, and, through trying after the unattainable, I have been only a cause of trouble and vexation to all my friends, and I fear I may be the same to you, Mrs. Hammond; but if you find any sort of satisfaction in it I ought to be glad."

How the girl won upon Mrs. Hammond with her simplicity and her desire to please. Like her mother! no, she was ten times handsomer, and a great deal better than even the softened

recollection of Lady Eveline which Mrs. Hammond now entertained. It was nothing now to the mother's heart that she would be a portionless bride; that there would be no advantage whatever to be derived from her wealthy or aristocratic relatives; that the world even spoke falsely or unkindly of the girl. All these things only made her the more precious, and she felt a strange swelling of the heart that Providence had fought against her, and secured such a wife for Louis against her will. She had been graciously dealt with, far beyond her deserts.

A letter arrived by post from Anthony simply casting Amy off, and desiring that he should hear no further from her. She acquainted Mrs. Hammond with its contents, and then tried to busy herself in one of those feminine avocations that only occupy the hands and let the mind wander as it will through the sweet and bitter of life.

"I told you, mother," said Louis, "that her brother would never forgive her; you recollect your promise."

"I do, my boy, I do. She is none the less welcome to me on that account, indeed, I think she is all the dearer. I don't think you could find any one who is in more utter need of your love; but don't be too precipitate, Louis. Let her feel that this is a haven of rest."

"Mother, trust me for that. It is enough happiness for me to feel her so near me, and so safe as she is with you."

There was but short space for poor Louis to feel so happy and so hopeful, or for Amy to feel at rest, for on the following day Allan Lindsay found his way to Thornton House, and asked for Miss Staunton.

James was a little puzzled about Miss Staunton's visitors, for he had received orders from his mistress to the effect that if Lord Darlington called again neither Miss Staunton nor herself would be at home to him, and he asked for the name of this caller. Allan had provided himself with a written card, and sent it in, awaiting Miss Staunton's decision as to seeing him.

Amy looked on the card with astonishment, she knew the name and handwriting very well, but she could not conceive how it had come.

"Please, Miss, the young man—the young gentleman, I mean—is at the door, he wants to see you," said James.

"Who is it, Amy?" asked Clara Hammond.

"It seems to be Allan Lindsay," said Amy; "but how can he possibly be in England now, and none of us know anything about it? I must go to speak to him, Mrs. Hammond; if you have no objection I will see him in the

library," said Amy, recollecting how stiff and haughty her hostess used to be to the Lindsays.

"Oh! yes, the library, certainly," said Mrs. Hammond, and she looked at her son, who looked very pale.

"We are very old friends, you know." said Amy. "I daresay he could recommend me to a situation, for I taught his sisters, you know," and she went out of the room.

"And Allan himself, too," said Louis, burying his face in his hands.

"Don't take this so much to heart, my boy," said his mother, fondly, in a low voice. "She never could prefer a clown like young Lindsay, to you, now that she has seen the world and knows what a gentleman is."

"Allan Lindsay is no clown, mother, he never was, even before Amy taught him so much. He was the best rider and the best shot of his age in the colony; he was the cleverest fellow with both hands and head in the district. Mr. Lufton says he might have made his fortune as an engineer, if he had been bred to it, but he chose to help his father, and to help him well. And then he was so kind to Amy when I could do nothing for her; and even you cannot say but that he is good-looking and good-tempered.

But who was to think of his coming all this way for her, just when I had some chance?"

"My dear Louis, how can you give up hope at the mere name of Allan Lindsay," said Mrs. Hammond. "Your fever has weakened you strangely, or you ought surely to know that a fine, good, dear fellow, like yourself, with better education, better connections, and better prospects than Lindsay, is far more likely to win Amy Staunton than he is. As for riding and shooting, you are his equal there, and in other respects I feel quite hurt at your comparing him to yourself," and she looked on her son with real maternal pride.

"Perhaps so; but think of all the kind things Allan has done for her in old times. It seems but yesterday that he made her a netting-needle in place of one I broke."

"Pooh! pooh! what is making a netting-needle? You are getting quite morbid, Louis, my boy. Come, let us play a game of chess, I have not played with you for a long time, and I think you have improved."

It was a long game, but Amy did not return to the pleasant morning-room where Louis awaited her with feverish impatience. He got up and paced restlessly round the room, then he threw up the game unfinished, and walked

out into the garden, and his mother followed him with an anxious, solicitous glance. "It is impossible," she said to herself, over and over again, "that the girl can make such a choice. There is no comparison between the two young men."

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION.

"AMY," said Allan, taking her hand when she entered the library into which James had shown the visitor, "when Jessie got your letter I determined to come here at once, because I have come all this way from Australia just to get speech with you. I went first to your brother's, and there I found only your great friend Lord Darlington, and he would fain have put me off by saying that you were bound to him, as all the world gave out; but I told him I would stay at Stanmore Hall till I saw you, and as it turned out, you were gone—more to his disappointment than to mine. Your brother and his wife came home just as your disappearance was found out, and I think I never saw greater anger on a man's face than there was on Mr. Derrick's at the sight of mine. He wanted his flunkeys to turn me off the grounds; but for all his anger I could see

that your going away put him terribly out. I have been looking for you until Jessie got your letter, and now you see I am here."

"I am very glad to see you, Allan, but it is very wonderful."

"Not so very wonderful when you recollect everything. Now, Amy, my dearest, it is likely enough that this letter (and he took it out of his pocket) is what you mean to stand by, because now that I have seen the splendour that you are accustomed to, you may think it presumptuous and selfish in me to ask you to share my humble home in Australia; but I heard at the same time from Mrs. Lufton that you were being led on to marry that old man, your great cousin, the earl, and I felt it was not right that you should do that. If it had been all over, and you had been married to him, I would never have come near you, you should never have heard what it cost me to lose you. No, your cup was likely to be bitter enough without my pressing one drop out of the gall of mine into it. But now I know that it was out of terror of this marriage that you fled from your brother's house, and I am glad and proud that you had the courage to do it, and I thank Mrs. Hammond from my heart for giving you a refuge when you were a second time in extremity. I scarcely expected it of her, be-

cause I heard she thought you were selling yourself."

"When she knew me better she was very kind to me. Oh! Allan, it is such a relief to be with her here after all I have had to go through."

"Lord Darlington told me that this letter was written with his knowledge and concurrence, Amy. Did he speak the truth in that?"

"Yes; I asked his advice, for I thought he was the best friend I had."

"You *asked* advice," said Allan, thoughtfully. "You know, Amy, that I do not mean to bind you by what you said to me before you sailed from Australia. You never felt as I did, and you have been in such different scenes that even what you felt then may have changed. If you like this lad Hammond better than me—and I hear nothing but good of him—you have only to say so, Amy, and I will not trouble you more. But if you don't—if you think you could go back to the old life—if you could trust yourself to me now—Amy—Amy, my life—my life, is it indeed so?" and he drew her in his arms and let her head fall on his shoulder.

"I believe I love you, Allan, I *know* I do; I think you are the truest gentleman I ever saw—the noblest man of God's making who has ever crossed my path. How shall I thank God

enough for allowing me to win such a heart as yours? Tell me again, tell me over and over again, that you love me as much as you did when we parted. Oh! Allan, I have hungered for a love that would not sting me, for that calm, resolute, truthful nature of yours to depend on. I don't think I knew what I was doing when I sent you that letter, but after I wrote it I was sure I was wrong, and when you did not answer it I thought you did not care. Give me the letter and let me destroy it."

"Don't, dear Amy, for it brought me to you."

"You see I don't ask why you came. It seems so natural that now when I need you you should come to me."

"And you won't mind going back to Australia with me?"

"I shall be glad to go. I have no home and no friends to give up for you. I only stay here till I can get a situation as governess through Mrs. Hammond's good offices."

"She will be saved that trouble," said Allan.

"Yes, she will, but I don't think she would have felt it a trouble. She has been so very good to me. So you see, though Stanmore is so magnificent, I don't give it up for you, I am no fine lady now. Anthony has given me up on

account of what he calls my disreputable flight. You don't think it disreputable, Allan?"

"I think it was the grandest thing you ever did," said Allan, who took the accepted lover's view of Amy's conduct.

"Say that over again, Allan, for Lord Darlington says nobody could forgive me that but him."

"Then you have seen Lord Darlington here?"

"Yesterday I saw him; but you must not look so gloomy about it, for I am never to see him more. And though he did torment me so, there was a great deal in him that I liked very much, and I want to be able to talk about him to you at all times, and tell you the clever things he said, and the pleasant things he did, and all about Lady Olivia, and that beautiful Darlington Castle, and the woods there. There was a great deal very pleasant about my English life, and you must not draw down your brows when I speak of it, as Anthony used to do when I said anything about Branxholm and Australia."

"How can I when you give them all up for me?" said Allan.

"I did not quite think you would do it, but that was one of Lord Darlington's ideas."

"Perhaps he judged me by himself."

"No, not exactly. He did not shrink from speaking about you, and he always used to know

when I was thinking about you. He is very clever."

"Do you know, Amy, that I seem to be in a dream, I can scarcely believe my own eyes and ears. That I should be making love to you with your full permission, and having my love frankly returned by you, the admired of the greatest circles in England, is astonishing, but that I should be doing this under Mrs. Hammond's roof is the most surprising thing of all."

"It is certainly strange, but nevertheless quite true, Allan. And now tell me how you came to travel all this way to speak to me."

Allan narrated the news he had heard from Mrs. Lufton with a few interrupting comments on Amy's part.

"Mrs. Hammond thought I was selling myself —that is the reason why she disliked me, and Mr. Louis thought I was being sold and he pitied me; I am sure I wish somebody had spoken to me then, for I know I was behaving absurdly under the impression that the earl was my uncle, or grandfather, or something of the kind. But go on, Allan."

Allan went on to tell of his mother's determination, and his father's kindness, and all the family rather urging him to go than otherwise, and then they went on to speak of the household

at Branxholm, and the improvements made and contemplated, and the garden, and the horses; they then returned to the personal talk which is especially lovers' talk, and time ran on and the dressing-bell for dinner rung before they had finished half of what they had to say.

"Oh! Allan, you must go, I suppose. What a time we have been! What will Mrs. Hammond think?"

"I shall only go to Belton, and you must drop me a note to let me know how the good people here are affected towards me, for I must not come to visit you in this house if it is unpleasant to them. But, be that as it may, it can make no difference to us in the end, and the end is not far off now. Good-by, my dearest, good-by."

As Allan passed out of the library door through the hall he met Mrs. Hammond. She read her son's fate in his eyes and in Amy's flushed face and downcast look. It was very hard for her to be civil.

"Will you not stay and dine with us, Mr. Lindsay?" said she.

"I am much obliged to you, Mrs. Hammond, but I hope you will excuse me for to-day. I'm just off a long journey, and it would be better that I took dinner at my inn at Belton." It

was rather awkwardly done, but anything was less awkward than staying.

Amy went to dress for dinner in a sort of dream. Her life was marked out for her now and she rejoiced in it. If she had been long in discovering the state of her heart she was now very sure about it, and felt that Allan might safely trust his happiness in her care.

It was a quiet dinner party at Thornton House. Mrs. Hammond and Louis were very silent.

"Surely I saw some one like a bushman meet me as I returned from Thrush Grove just in time for dinner," said Madeline Hammond.

"It is very likely you did," said her mother; "it was Mr. Allan Lindsay."

"Oh! Indeed, I thought I had seen him before, but it is many years ago. I suppose he came to see you, Amy?"

"We are very old friends, you know."

"He would not stay to dinner although your mamma asked him," said Mr. Hammond, with some satisfaction in his tone. "Something about his dress, he said—"

"Oh! No one cares about a bushman's dress," said Clara; "I'd have liked to talk with him about dear Aralewin."

"I have no doubt you will have several opportunities of doing that," said Louis.

"He seems to me to have grown," said Mrs. Hammond. "Do you think him changed at all, Miss Staunton?"

"Not at all changed."

"And they are all well at Branxholm?"

"All well when Allan left."

"What years they have had there, and I must say the management has deserved them. What with their tanks and the green feed for the ewes and young lambs, and the stations working into each other, I hear that they are making money hand over hand. I dare say Allan Lindsay deserves a holiday, but I cannot think how they spare him," said Mr. Hammond, praising his son's rival rather against his will.

When dinner was over, and the family had gone into the drawing-room, Louis got Amy for a few minutes to himself in a quiet corner.

"Am I to congratulate you and Allan?" said he, in a low agitated voice.

"I should be very happy indeed if you would congratulate us."

"It is rather hard to do, but I will try to do it."

"You know what dear friends we were in Australia, and he has never forgotten me nor I him. I am sure that I should have given in to Anthony and Lord Darlington but for the recollection of Allan."

"It is very natural and right that you should like him; but I thought, I hoped, when you came here that things would have been different."

"It seems that I only give trouble and vexation wherever I go. Mrs. Hammond looks grieved, too. I had better go away somewhere."

"Oh! mamma is sorry for my sake—poor mamma—but I must bear up as well as I can, and not cloud your happiness any more than I can help. But I think it would be comfortable and respectable for you to be married from our house, as you have not got your brother's to go to. If I cannot bear it I can go away for a while. I dare say a little change will do me good."

"Oh! Mr. Louis, you are too good, far too good. I wish I could do anything for you to show how much I feel your generosity."

"I suppose, under the circumstances, the courtship will not be long?" said Louis, biting his lip and looking very, very pale.

"I don't know; we have said nothing about that. But you know that Mrs. Hammond never liked the Branxholm family. I really think that we should arrange for ourselves."

"I shall speak to mamma about it. I think she will agree with me that you should stay here, and that my father should give you away. No one will be able to say that we offered you a

home for our own ends. Tell Allan that I don't hate him, and that is a great deal for me to say."

The mother and son decided that this was the best arrangement, and Louis started early on the following morning for a long journey. He was going to cross over to Ireland and have a tour through the most picturesque part of it; while Allan and Amy, relieved of his presence, conducted the rest of their courtship under Mrs. Hammond's roof, and with her approval. Her repentance cost Mrs. Hammond something, but she paid the price heroically.

Mrs. Hammond did not see anything less to regret in her son's disappointment during the time that Amy was an inmate at Thornton House. There was nothing of the egotism and self-absorption which Lucy Evans had shown during her engagement in Allan Lindsay's betrothed bride. She showed a delicate perception of Mrs. Hammond's feelings, and made no parade of the happiness she felt in Allan's devotion; but yet on one occasion she spoke to her generous hostess of the momentous step she was about to take with a simplicity and confidence, and, at the same time, with a religious earnestness, which made the mother feel what a daughter she might have found in her. Nor could she have the satisfaction of feeling that Amy was throwing herself away.

Mrs. Hammond was now capable of seeing that though Allan's manners were not polished, he was a gentleman in mind and feeling, and that there was nothing small or mean about him.

When the marriage was over, and Allan and Amy had left Thornton House to go to see the world together, Louis returned looking jaded and ill. His mother's watchful tenderness was on the alert.

"It was not to be, Louis; it was never to be. I reproach myself the less for the coldness I showed and the concealment I used, for nothing that I could have done would have changed the result, and in your disappointment I fully share."

"No; it was not to be," said Louis. "Of course, if Amy had been brought up in our house as she was at Branxholm, and had learned to come to me in all her troubles as she went to Allan, things would have been different. How she would have turned to me when she was persecuted by Lord Darlington and her brother!"

"And that was my fault," said Mrs. Hammond. "She might have been taken to Aralewin, and ought to have been taken there when her father died. You cannot reproach me more for my conduct than I reproach myself. But I have talked it over with your father, and explained some things that justified me at the time; and I

can only hope that you will put the kindest construction on the mistake I made. I would not have her in the house because I felt that I disliked and suspected her; and I now am punished by seeing her carried away when I loved her, and would have trusted her with my dear boy's happiness." Mrs. Hammond spoke so sadly that Louis was sorry he had said so much.

"I shall never speak of it again, mother, and I suppose in time I shall get over it. What do you think is the proper time to recover such a disappointment?"

"I have had experience, Louis, and I can only say that I am glad now that I was disappointed. It should not take you very long, because you have nothing to reproach yourself with or to feel mortified about. But I think the less you speak of it, even to me, the better."

Allan and Amy took their marriage jaunt through Scotland, and looked in upon old humble friends of Hugh Lindsay's whom they had been desired to see. The newly-married pair enjoyed their tour all the more because of the degree of constraint which necessarily pressed upon them at Thornton House, in spite of Mrs. Hammond's great forbearance and the good-nature of all the rest of the family. Amy rejoiced in the absolute liberty of speech and thought which she felt with

Allan—she certainly felt that she would never be misunderstood or give any offence to him. The old brother-and-sister attachment which she had thought far too slight and common-place a thing to dignify with the name of love—that wonderful unknown irresistible passion which could never be mistaken for anything else—she found was an excellent foundation for building love upon. How many pleasant memories were associated with Allan; how many old scenes did they recall as they looked upon new ones. And the freshness and originality of his impressions and opinions were delightful to the young girl, who had had no better companions than her dull brother and the worn-out man of the world, Lord Darlington, for so long a time. Her spirit regained its elasticity; she seemed to breathe a new and invigorating atmosphere as she rode or walked by her husband's side, and felt that he admired what she admired, and loved what she loved. She had not believed that he could be so poetical, or so enthusiastic as he showed himself now to be; but such a nature as his is slow in developing, and perhaps the loveliest features in it took their rise in the deep love which Amy had awakened in the long years of absence and lessening hope which had now been crowned with happiness almost despaired of, and in the sunshine of the perfect confidence which

subsisted between them. They paid a very quiet visit at Millmount; but quiet as it was Mr. and Mrs. Derrick were aware of it, and greatly annoyed about it; but they could not order the Copelands off the farm till the year was out. Amy was surprised to find that her sister Edith and Miss Derrick were at Stanmore on a visit at the Hall when she was staying at the farmhouse. The quarrel with Amy had led to a reconciliation between Anthony and his other relatives; and although Edith was rather provoking in the way of reminding her brother that she had always said he was polishing a wife for a Goth of a Lindsay in the Australian bush, there was otherwise such unanimity of opinion respecting Amy Staunton amongst them that the four got on much better than could be expected.

It was disadvantageous to all of them to keep up the family quarrel, and Lucy had sense enough to perceive that the Derrick family ought to be propitiated. Lord Darlington and Lady Gower blamed their management for the failure of the great marriage for Amy, and were disposed to be very cool; and the Beresfords had used rather strong language with regard to the pressure that had been put upon Amy, which, being unsuccessful, could not altogether escape censure. On the other hand, Miss Derrick and her niece wished

for a renewal of friendly relations with Stanmore; and even although Anthony had made a fool of himself by his marriage, there were many advantages to be derived from him still. Lucy improved upon their acquaintance, and although there were a few jealousies and heartburnings between the ladies, they managed to exchange visits, and to go out together without coming to any quarrel.

In order to avoid Mr. and Mrs. Allan Lindsay, the Derricks took refuge in London, and Lucy had the supreme enjoyment of going through a very gay season, and of acquitting herself to Anthony's perfect satisfaction. Amy and her husband went also to town shortly after. She delighted in seeing as much as she could in his company, and thus having a common recollection of English life. They visited Mr. Hubbard, and were introduced by him to a number of authors, artists, and actors, some of them famous and successful, others struggling hard for bread and cheese. Some of their brightest days were spent in that untidy studio, where Allan was always willing to stand for anything that the artist thought he would suit, at the same time confessing that the hardest work in the harvest field or at the plough was easy compared to sitting or standing still.

Then they often went to the theatres, and there Amy sometimes saw old friends in conspicuous places; but no one recognised her—she had gone down in the world. Lady Gower's eyeglass once scanned her over, but she did not acknowledge any acquaintance. Anthony and his wife once caught a sight of her, and they studiously averted their eyes till the close of the performance. Lord Darlington was said to be in Paris, so they did not meet with him till one night when to Amy's astonishment she saw him sitting very near her in the stalls at Covent Garden, where she had taken Allan for one sight of the Italian Opera. He looked ill, and had a somewhat wild and confused expression and manner; but whether he had been drinking harder than usual, or was really ill, Amy could not tell. He saw her, and his lips moved as if to speak; but she could not hear the words, and she crept closer to her husband with a sense of safety and protection in her heart. At the end of the performances, which had been very much marred to her by the appearance of her old friend, as they were going out Lord Darlington came close to her, and the strange look appeared more strange and terrible than before. "Amy," said he, and he took her hand. His hand was as cold as lead.

"You are not well, my lord. Let us get him

out of this crowd, Allan, I don't think he is able to make his way. Let us get him into the fresh air."

Allan's strong arms were making a pathway for the earl, and he was helping him out, when suddenly he fell down in a fit.

"Clear the way," said Allan, lifting the insensible body in his arms; "let me get him into the fresh air. Amy, keep close behind me; don't lose nerve in the crowd."

It is no easy matter to get space to work in, when public curiosity is excited in a crowd; but Allan pressed on, and at last got out to the entrance. "Now, Amy, what directions?" said he.

"Call for the Earl of Darlington's carriage and attendants, and send for Dr. James, of —— street, at once, and loosen his cravat, and let me chafe his hands; but I wish we had a doctor nearer."

A young surgeon made his way through the crowd, and pronounced the words "Paralysis; a very likely subject."

"Can he be taken home?" said Amy.

"In a little while. You have done well to convey him through the crowd as you have done. We will take him home when he shows some sign of consciousness."

He applied the lancet, and procured ice to lay

on the head, and in a few minutes a groan told of returning life.

"Now gently into the carriage; we can take him home." And Allan and Amy drove to Darlington House with its master.

The earl's own medical adviser was soon on the spot. "At the opera!" said he; "what madness took him there? He came from Paris yesterday in very poor health, and I told him that nothing but quiet and regular living could save him. But it was the restlessness of the coming disease that was in his veins, I suppose."

"Do you think he will die?" said Amy. She stood at the earl's head, keeping fresh ice-cloths on it.

"No, I think not. This is only a first attack, but he will never recover this, I am sure. There is an end of his gay life of fashion now, I think. I have often warned him, and I think he was at one time pretty strongly impressed with the necessity of care; but these three months at Paris have played the mischief with him altogether. We should have his relatives here, but, poor man, he is very solitary. His daughter is so helpless, as you know, Mrs. ——. I forget your present name, although I saw you here as Miss Staunton."

"Lindsay," said Amy.

"But there's Miss Pennithorne; she is rather nervous and fussy, but she might do some good, and perhaps you will be good enough to stay till she can come. I am sure there is no one so likely to recall him to consciousness and to memory. I cannot help thinking that he recognises you a little."

"Allan, may I stay, and you with me? I wish to do all I can do for him, if you do not object."

"Certainly, I do not object, Amy," said Allan.

"It is a painful duty; but on the care taken now a great deal may depend. I should like to get as much of him out of this as I can; but I fear there will be a sad change. I think you may be very glad that you had your own way, and was not persuaded or threatened into his," said Dr. James, who was fully cognizant of the earl's persevering suit, and of his bitter disappointment when Amy married Allan Lindsay.

It was a long and weary watching before consciousness and recollection partially returned; and though there were several physicians in the room the only persons he seemed to see were Amy and her husband. "My dear little girl" were the first words that he uttered that could be understood at all. He followed her slowly and painfully with his dulled eyes; he tried to hear if she spoke, but his faculties were be-

numbed, and the gay and brilliant Lord Darlington was no more, although a feeble invalid still lives that goes by his name and wears his clothes.

It was like watching by a death-bed without its sublime hopes to sit as Amy did, day after day; to see the intelligence departed from the shrewd eye, the readiness from the fluent tongue, and all the promptitude and diplomacy and tact which had so distinguished her poor friend in society, exchanged for the slow movements and the inaccurate apprehension of one whose brain had received a blow, and who could never more think out a subject logically, or put two and two together.

Although Miss Pennithorne and Olivia hastened to the sick room with all possible speed (Olivia, indeed, could not have believed she was capable of such exertion as she made), Dr. James would not let Amy go, because he hoped more from her nursing and presence than from anything else.

Anthony Derrick heard the news from popular rumour; and although a little shocked, he comforted himself with the idea that the earl was going to die, and what a position Amy had lost for herself by her obstinacy.

In some vague time of half recollection the

earl asked for Mr. Derrick; and the doctor, thinking that every whim of the patient ought to be gratified, sent an urgent message for him to come speedily. He did not hesitate a moment, but only thought it right and proper that the head of the house should wish to see him at such a moment.

But although Anthony had heard that Amy and her husband had been with the earl at the time of his seizure, he had no idea that they had remained with him, and he felt rather embarrassed at the rencontre.

"You here still?" said he. "You are the last person I should have thought of keeping by this poor creature."

"This was the place you destined for me, Anthony," said Amy, who was bathing the head of her old lover; "and I am the only person whom he recognizes rightly, so the doctor asked me to stay, and Allan allows it."

"I suppose he is dying fast," said Anthony, softly.

"Oh, no, he is a great deal better now; he may live for many years; the body is wonderfully strong yet; it is only the head that is affected."

"Yes, it is the head," said the earl; "don't leave off, Amy. Don't leave off bathing my—my—my—to speak to that idiot there." In

spite of the slow and thickened articulation there was no mistaking the imperiousness of the command.

"We must get a nurse, but he cannot bear the sight of one, or of Miss Pennithorne either. We have tried it over and over again, but he cannot bear me out of his sight. He suffers dreadfully, I know, to think he cannot make me understand what he means. He does not seem to recollect you."

"Not a bit; and if I had not been told I could scarcely have recognised him either. How terribly changed he is."

"The earl does not know you, then," said Dr. James, who came in to see the effect of this visitor, and who drew Mr. Derrick aside to speak to him.

"No, not at all. I suppose he took my sister's conduct very much to heart, doctor, and that brought on the illness," said Anthony.

"Probably it hastened it, Mr. Derrick. I have little doubt that if Lord Darlington had married, and settled down quietly, and taken very good care of himself, this might have been staved off for a little while. But an old man marrying a young wife rarely will take as much care as is needed. It is an unnatural alliance, and both parties suffer from it. I am very certain that

he would have wished to display what he had won, and excitement of all kinds was trying to him. Upon the whole, Mr. Derrick, you ought to be very glad that Miss Staunton chose a husband for herself," continued the physician, looking at the individual spoken of with very undisguised admiration. "You must have known what a hard life Lord Darlington has led. The year he was taken so much up with his present nurse was certainly beneficial to him, but he broke out pretty strong in Paris."

Anthony was touched as he had never been before by the pitiful spectacle, and he felt something like remorse for the fate which he had intended for his young sister—this chaining of the living to the dead. It vexed him to see the cares which she bestowed, and which the old man exacted, and when he found that on being recognised slightly, it was only to be sent away because he was a fool and a blunderer, and had always come between him and Amy, he turned to take leave:—

"I assure you, Amy, I had no idea of anything like this. Shake hands, and forget some things that are past; and I'll try to forget some things that are present. I'll even shake hands with your husband, if you wish it."

Allan offered his hand frankly. He was glad

that there was some grace in Anthony Derrick.

"And Amy, why did you leave all your things behind?—all your jewels, and trinkets, and clothes? If I send them to you, will you take them back?"

"If you really wish to give me them again; but I thought I might leave them for Lucy."

"Lucy! No, I can get new things for Lucy. They are lumber in my house, and vexatious lumber too. You'll take them back then?"

"But there is something that I would rather ask than these gifts, which are perhaps not very fit for my position in life now. You are turning the Copelands away from Millmount on account of me and Allan."

"Now don't ask that, Amy. I'd do anything rather than that. I'll make money compensation, for I daresay I was rather hard as I was angry at the time; but I cannot have the Copelands at my elbow at Stanmore. Tell me what is fair to give them, but I won't have them at Millmount after the crops are off the ground; and what is more, another man has got the lease of the farm. But why should not they realise all they have got, and go to your paradise of Australia? That would suit me and all of you. Could not you go all together?"

"We must go very soon, for Allan's father wants him at home, and our passage is taken out for next month."

"I shall see you before you go, Amy. Good-bye for the present."

Amy drew a long breath when he had gone. "Thank God, Allan, that Anthony begins to see he was wrong, even though he does not see that I was right. But then poor Anthony does not know you," and she looked proudly on her husband.

By degrees Lord Darlington grew accustomed to Miss Pennithorne, whom Amy associated with her cares. He recovered his speech in a great measure, and his intellect partially. He could scarcely be made to understand that his son Lord Boulton died during the time he was ill, and he had great objections to seeing the distant relative who was now the heir to his title and property.

Amy rejoiced in the fact that Miss Pennithorne and Olivia were always to be with him, and that the earl took some notice of his daughter. Olivia felt her own afflictions were light compared to those of her father, and found that in some things she could be of a little service to him. He grew fond of hearing her talk and read, although he forgot all he heard immediately; and she was glad that even in her horizontal

position she could give her poor father a transient gratification.

When Mr. and Mrs. Allan Lindsay left England for Australia, Lady Olivia and Miss Pennithorne promised to write often, but Amy did not expect ever to hear from the earl again. However, it was his left side that had received the stroke, and his right arm was still fit for use, and about two months after Amy had sailed, when Miss Pennithorne was writing, Lord Darlington insisted on writing to his dear little girl himself. What a contrast were the letters which he sent to Australia, full of unmeaning phrases and idle repetitions, to those brilliant notes which Amy had been so angry at herself for being pleased to receive. There seemed to be no spite or anger at her for her rejection of him left in what remained of Lord Darlington's mind; he never alluded either by word of mouth or in his letters to Amy's husband, and always addressed to Miss Staunton. But he seemed to have an idea that she would be sent for from Australia, as she had been once before; and that then she would come to Darlington Castle as its mistress, and take possession of the picture Mr. Hubbard had painted which be always called Amy's picture. Miss Pennithorne managed, however, to get Mr. Hubbard to copy "The Author's Daughter" for

Darlington Castle, and gave Amy the original painting to take with her to Australia.

It would have been a relief to Anthony Derrick's mind if the earl had died at once; but although several years have passed since, Lord Darlington continues in the same state, his general health being good, although his speech and memory and powers of moving about are so seriously impaired. Now that Miss Pennithorne is no longer afraid of him, she manages the earl exceedingly well, and she and Lady Olivia are constantly with him. He spends a few weeks in the year at Thrush Grove, and has been admitted into Mrs. Hammond's house under his altered circumstances. The Hammonds, as a family, are still resident at Thornton House; but Clara has married, and gone to India; and Louis went out to manage matters at Aralewin for his father about a year after Amy Staunton's marriage. Anthony bade his sister good-bye in a tolerably friendly manner, but Lucy did not see her.

Mr. and Mrs. Hammond speculated upon the probabilities of Anthony giving his sister a suitable dowry when they heard of the partial reconciliation; but Lucy's influence was exerted in the contrary direction, as she considered that anything given to Amy was lost to her. Anthony, however, sent to his sister every

article of personal property that had been left at Stanmore, and felt happier that she had accepted it. So that Hugh Lindsay's scheme that Amy should go to England to ingratiate herself with her brother and then bring Allan a handsome fortune was not so successful as the shrewd old Scotchman's schemes usually were; for all that Amy brought were clothes and jewels far too fine for Branxholm, but yet no one would have been more indignant at the idea of selling them than her father-in-law. They showed what Mrs. Allan *had been;* it was for Allan himself, by his own efforts, to show what Mrs. Allan *might be.*

The Copelands did not think the squire's advice very palatable at first, but a little persuasion from George and Jessie and from Allan and Amy made them yield, and make up their minds to go to Australia. The old people are rather of opinion that such times as Hugh Lindsay had had are over in the colony, and they are not able to rough it as the young and vigorous Scottish emigrants had done so many years ago. But George is employing the family capital wisely, so that there is no doubt that they can make a comfortable living of it if they never make a fortune; and his father and mother confess that they might have come to worse places than South Australia.

Mrs. Evans has not had another marriage in her family since the great affair with Mr. Derrick. She cannot bear to blame Lucy, but yet she feels she has not been so useful to her sisters as she ought to have been. Anthony writes to his sister on great occasions—such as the birth of a son or a daughter—and receives her congratulations civilly; so that Hugh Lindsay fancies that something may be coming to Amy yet from that brother whom everybody calls so rich.

It was with some feelings of honest triumph that Allan Lindsay brought back his dear little wife to Branxholm, and even Mrs. Lindsay confessed that she was the very same Amy that had gone away, and that she was wonderfully little spoiled considering. As for the girls, their admiration of her and all her belongings were unbounded.

Mrs. Lufton always took great credit with Allan for the part she had played, for, as she said, nothing but the thorough fright she had given him about Lord Darlington could have made him go to England, and nothing less than Allan's appearance in person could have prevented Amy from marrying Louis Hammond after her flight to Thornton House. Amy's declaration that a letter from Allan would have had the same effect as his visit Mrs.

Lufton never believed in, for she had a greater contempt for the powers of the pen than even Mrs. Lindsay had. Her own powers in that way were little cultivated, for though she had talked of Clara Hammond's delightful letter to every one who would listen to her, she did not think of answering it till Amy brought her an indignant message for her remissness from the young lady, and then she half filled her short letter with apologies for not writing before; and made next to nothing of the splendid materials she had for a good letter in the welcome of Amy to Branxholm.

"Well!" said Mr. Lindsay to his daughter-in-law, shortly after her arrival, "little did I think when I herded for Mr. Elliott, in Teviotdale—ye saw the very place, Amy—that I should come to such prosperity as the Almighty has blessed me with in this distant land, or that a son of mine should pick up a real lady from an Earl's very nose. But Amy, my woman, all things are well ordered, and though you are no Countess I am sure you have no cause to repine; for though I say it that should not say it, Allan is worth his weight in gold; and I'm no sure that there's many of your grand houses that will beat Branxholm now, take it overhead; and in time

as ye need it ye'll have the cottage, as ye call it, no that far behind Branxholm."

It was one of the old man's cherished beliefs that Branxholm was the best house in the colony, and that there were few better in Britain. The Queen's Palace might be finer and the Duke of Buccleugh's residence at Bowhill; but not many more. He never would take in the accounts he heard from Allan of the magnificence of the houses Amy had been in, or of which she might have been the mistress.

"It's a gude house," said Mrs. Lindsay, who only partially acquiesced in her husband's overweening opinion of Branxholm. "It's a far better house than Aralewin, that poor Mr. Louis is so keen to come back to. It is the queerest thing I ever heard tell of that my son Allan should have married his wife frae Mrs. Hammond's house in England, when they werena thocht fit to enter her house in Australia. But I maun keep up nae grudges against that poor woman, for I'm thinking that it gied her a sair heart at the end to part wi' Hugh Lindsay's guest to Hugh Lindsay's son."

THE END.

BILLING, PRINTER, GUILDFORD.